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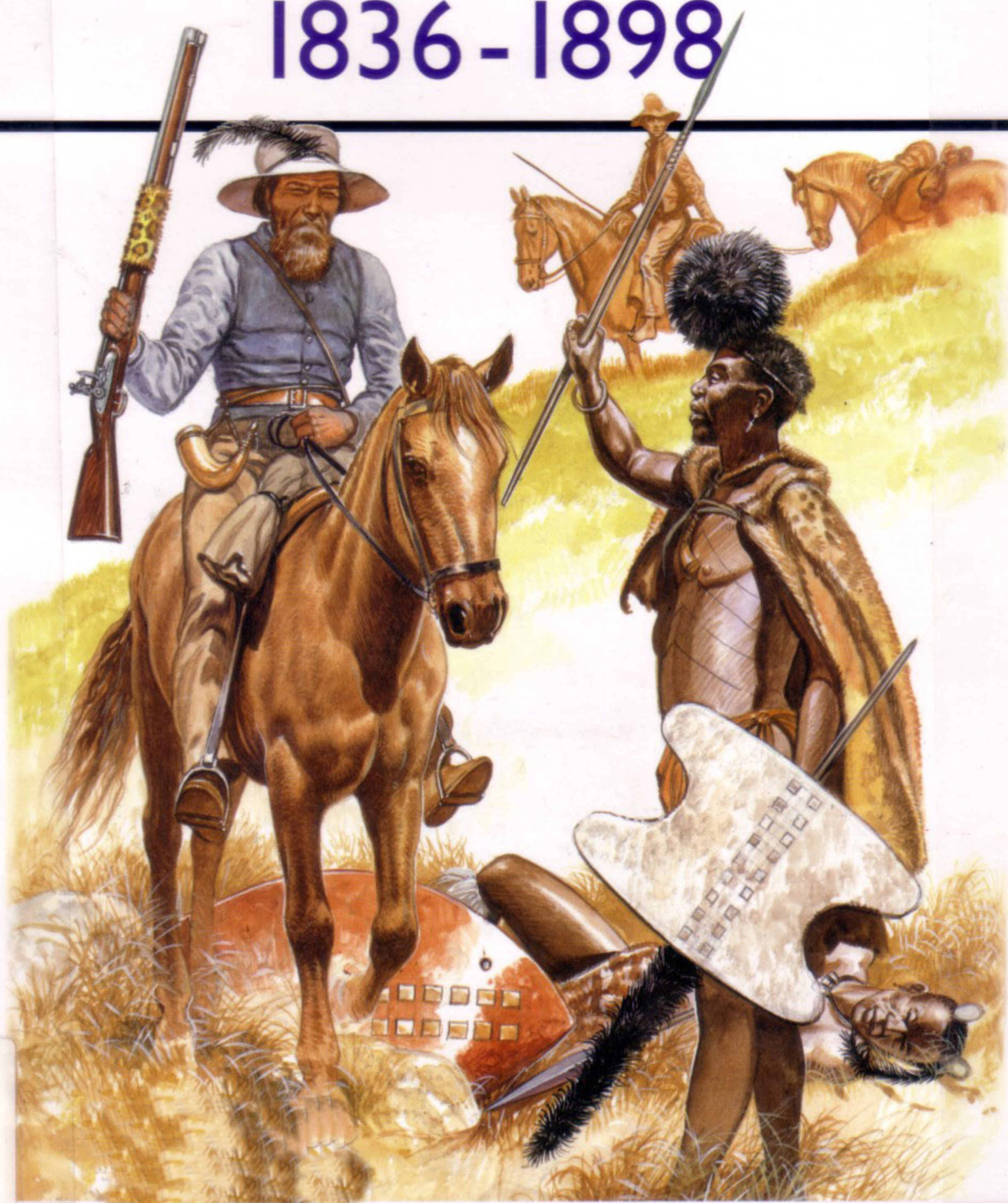
BOER WARS (1) 1836-1898



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THE BOER WARS (1) 1836-1898

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THE BOER WARS (1) 1836-1898

INTRODUCTION

Although the first European settlement at the Cape of Good Hope on the extreme southern tip of Africa was established by the Dutch East India Company in 1652, the African hinterland remained largely unknown to the outside world for a further two centuries.

The Dutch had come to Africa to establish a way-station to service their fleet on the long haul to the more profitable imperial adventures in the Indies. Although they easily displaced the fragile culture of the indigenous African Khoi and San groups they found there, they determinedly set their face against colonial expansion further into southern Africa. Nevertheless, over the space of two centuries, the original Dutch settlers, augmented by a trickle of refugees from a succession of religious wars in France and Germany, grew into a hardy breed who constantly risked official disapproval by crossing the Company's boundaries in search of hunting or grazing lands in the interior. In time, these people came to think of themselves as Afrikaners – white Africans – though they were generally known to one another, and outsiders, as *Boers* – farmers.

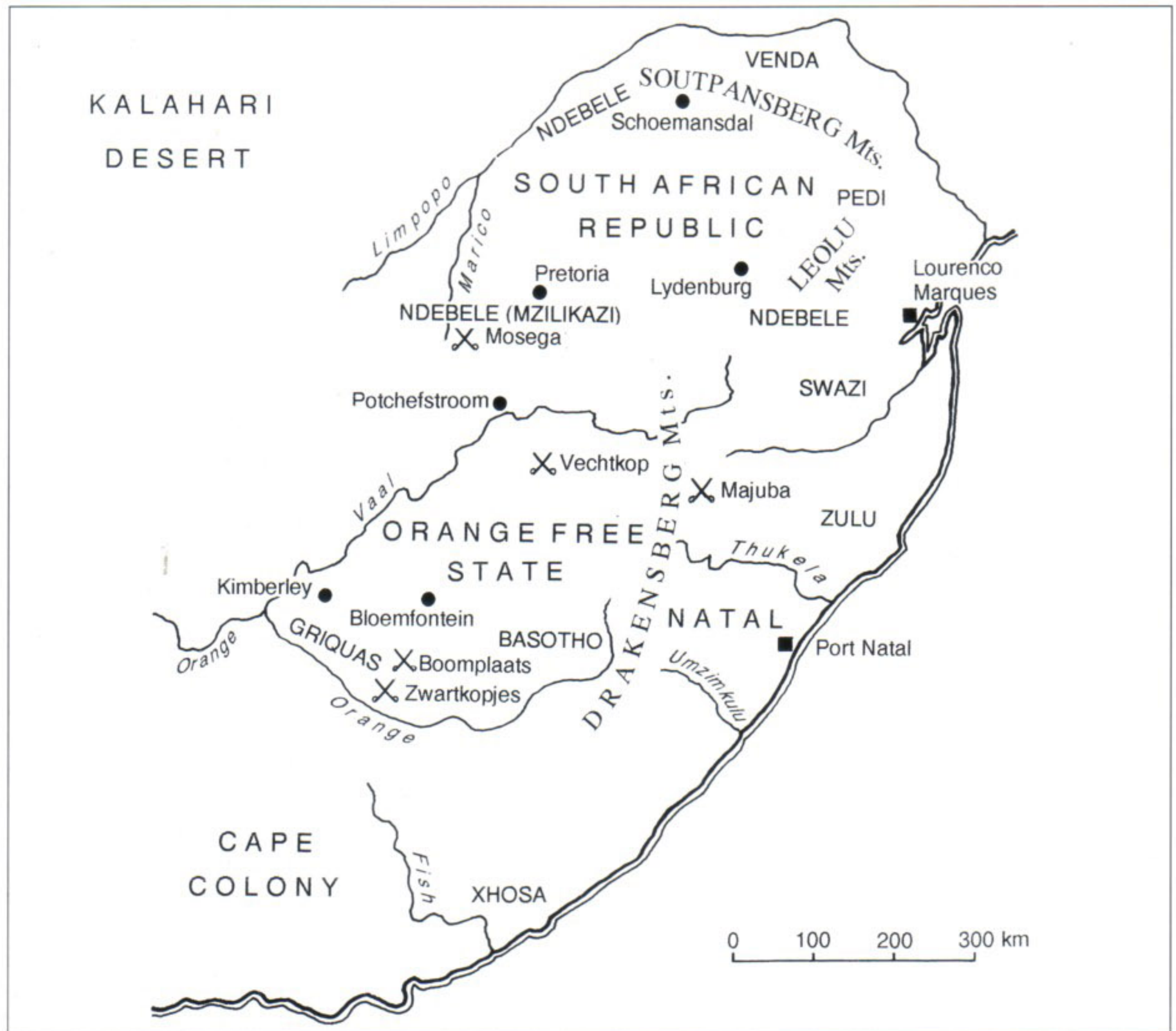
The Great Trek

By the beginning of the 19th century, European settlement had crept steadily along the fertile eastern seaboard of the Cape, and had come up against the vanguard of the more robust African societies who populated the interior. In particular, competition for the rolling downland of the eastern Cape was so severe that it led to a century of conflict – no less than nine separate wars – between white settlers and the Xhosa people.[1] Furthermore, in 1806 history had introduced another element to complicate an already tangled situation; as one of the side-effects of the shifts in political allegiances which characterised the Napoleonic Wars in Europe, the British had taken over control of the Cape.

Many Afrikaner farmers on the frontier felt that the British administration was decidedly unsympathetic to their needs. British moves in the 1820s and 1830s to outlaw slavery in its dominions struck at the basis of the rural Afrikaner economy; many Boers suffered severe financial losses in the 6th Cape Frontier War of 1834-5, and blamed the British for not protecting them more effectively from the Xhosa. Although European penetration of the coastal belt beyond the frontier was limited,

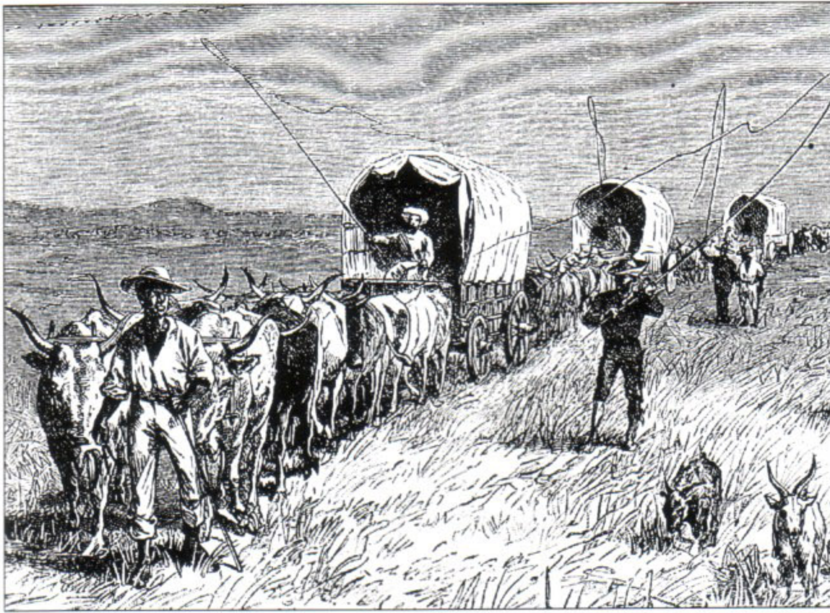
A skirmish between Boer commandos and Xhosa warriors during the Cape Frontier War of 1835. Boer disillusion with the British handling of this campaign was a contributory factor in the Trek movement. This costume is typical of the Trek period: short jackets, flintlock muskets, and powder-horns attached to waist belts.

[1] For an account of the Cape Frontier Wars see MAA 212, *Queen Victoria's Enemies (1) Southern Africa.*



The struggle for the interior of South Africa, 1836-1890.

adventurous hunters and traders had regularly crossed into the interior since the 18th century. In 1835 the frontier farmers commissioned reconnaissance parties to travel beyond the boundaries of the Cape Colony in search of lands which might be opened up for white settlement, away from British influence. Between 1836 and 1840 some 6,000 Boers – known as *Voortrekkers*, those who 'trek to the fore' – packed their belongings into their ox-wagons and simply migrated into the interior. They went not in a single wagon-train, but in groups linked by family or local ties, and led by highly individualistic, and often mutually antagonistic, leaders. Their passing provoked decades of warfare with the African groups they encountered along the way, and frequent military intervention by the British authorities. These conflicts were often the result of local circumstances and apparently unconnected with one another, but they were linked by a common thread, the struggle to establish the republics of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, so they have been considered here under the broad title 'the Boer Wars'. The story of the Voortrekkers is, nevertheless, a remarkable tale of determination and endurance, comparable in many respects with the saga of the American frontier.



A Boer party 'on trek'. The ox-drawn wagons were both mobile homes and a method of defence; experienced drivers could form a laager within a few minutes. Typically, the ox teams were controlled by an African *voorlooper* leading them at the front, and by drivers with long whips.

The African Response

The Great Trek took place in the aftermath of a period of intense disruption among the African groups of central and eastern South Africa. The exact causes of this upheaval – known to the coastal groups as the *mfecane*, the 'crushing', and the interior peoples by a variation of the same word, *difaqane* – are still the matter of scholarly debate, but may have had much to do with population pressure in the east, combined with shifts in economic and political power resulting from changes in the pattern of trade generated by the Portuguese enclave in Mozambique. Whatever the cause, the effects were dramatic enough: a fierce upsurge in violence which, between about 1816 and 1830, changed the nature of African political power across the region. Most obviously, the Zulu kingdom emerged in the country between the Drakensberg Mountains and the sea, while inland, a number of coastal groups antagonistic to the Zulu and fleeing their influence, attacked, disrupted, and in some cases came to dominate the peoples of the interior.

The peoples of the interior who bore the brunt of both the coastal groups and Afrikaner expansion were mostly Sotho speakers, or members of the western branch of the Sotho, the Tswana. In about 1821, a former ally of the Zulu king Shaka, Mzilikazi kaMashobane, crossed the Drakensberg at the head of a small band of followers armed and trained in Zulu fighting techniques. After a brief stay in the western foothills of the Drakensberg, Mzilikazi moved west, and established a new kingdom in the north-central Transvaal, in the area of modern Pretoria. He conquered the local Tswana groups, and demanded tribute from those on his borders. His followers were known to the Sotho and Tswana as *Matabele*, 'strangers from the east', and in due course came to refer to themselves by their own version of this word, *Ndebele*. Indeed, the Tswana, whose country was more open than that of the Sotho, and offered little in the way of natural strongholds, suffered particularly badly during the *difaqane*; many groups were driven away from their crops, and forced to subsist as marauding refugees. In areas to the north-east and south-east, however, the mountain spurs of the Drakensberg offered more secure refuges for Sotho groups, notably the followers of Chief Moshoeshoe, who built up a new following, called simply *BaSotho* – the 'Sotho' – from the dislocated remains of a number of defeated Sotho groups. Moshoeshoe's territory offered a number of impregnable mountain strongholds, interspersed among fertile valleys.

Although the ravages of the *difaqane* have been exaggerated in the past, to justify white claims to the land, there can be little doubt that when the Trek movement first crossed the Orange (Senqu) River in 1836

they found an uneven pattern of African population. In some places formidable new power-blocks had emerged, while in others the owners had either been forced to abandon their territory temporarily, or had been largely wiped out. Although most of the Boers who joined the Trek came from the Cape Frontier, the movement did not attempt to penetrate further up the coast, but moved inland, crossing the Orange – the boundary of British influence – and passing west of the new BaSotho kingdom until it came to the next great natural barrier, the Vaal River. Many less adventurous Trekker groups chose to remain south of the Vaal, whilst the more restless souls crossed over, and the Trek began to fragment. In August 1836 one of the Transvaal groups crossed unsuspectingly into Ndebele territory, and was attacked and all but wiped out.

A Voortrekker commando. The Trekkers were highly individualistic, and their commandos had little uniform about them; they were, however, masters of the gun and horse.

THE TREKKER-NDEBELE WAR, 1836

Ever since his break with the Zulu kingdom, Mzilikazi had been acutely sensitive to incursions along his southern and eastern borders. He had been attacked several times by *Griqua* (mixed-race descendants of the Khoi people of the Cape, who had adopted European guns and horses, and lived in a cultural half-world on the fringes of white settlement) and lived in fear of a Zulu raid. Taken aback by the unexpected arrival of the Trekkers, he attacked first and asked questions later. When the news reached the scattered Boer groups on the Ndebele borders, the redoubtable Hendrik Potgeiter organised a defensive position on the Rhenoster River. Mzilikazi pondered his options for two months, and then attacked.

The subsequent fighting demonstrated the superiority of weapons technology enjoyed by the Boers. The Ndebele military system was similar to the Zulu model upon which it was based; it consisted of a number of *amabutho*, regiments recruited according to the common age of their members, who were armed with Zulu-style cow-hide shields and spears designed for close-quarter stabbing. Each *ibutho* (singular of *amabutho*) had a sophisticated internal formation: companies were grouped together into wings, and each company, wing and ibutho had appointed officers. Mzilikazi's original followers formed the core of his command, and some Sotho and Tswana groups had been incorporated to the extent that their young men were drafted into the amabutho and were indistinguishable from them. Tribute chiefdoms on the fringes of Ndebele authority contributed contingents who were probably armed and dressed in the Sotho manner.

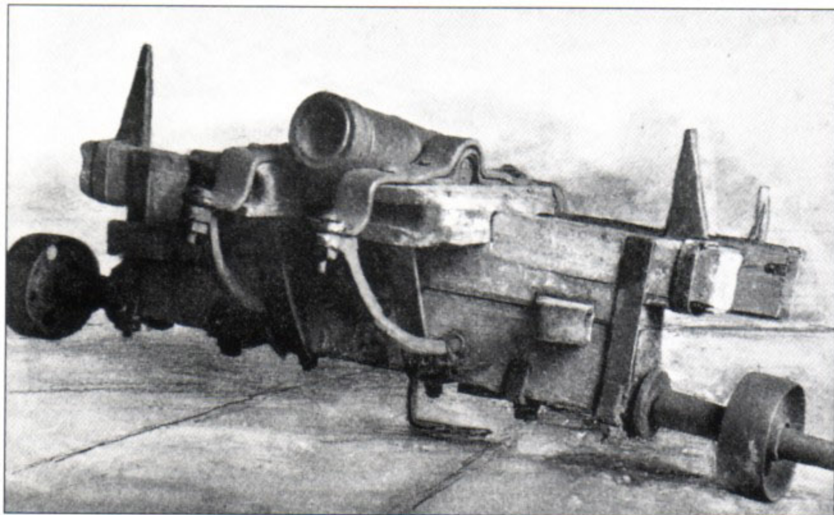
The Boers, meanwhile, possessed no formal military institution. During the 18th century a method of local defence had emerged on the Cape Frontier, which characterised the Boer approach to military activity until the 20th century. This system placed an obligation on all men between the ages of 16 and 60 to turn out to join an armed militia – the 'commando' (Afrikaans: *kommando*) – when called upon to do so, although exemptions were allowed with a good enough excuse. Each man

brought with him his own horse and gun, and a limited amount of ammunition and provisions. If the expedition was a major one, he might be supplied with further ammunition and provisions at the government's expense; many men also brought their own ox-drawn transport with them. The commandos were locally based, and were subject to the authority of the civilian district administrative officials, the veld-cornets. Over-all commanders – commandants – were elected by popular vote, a decision often affected by family affiliations or by ties of patronage. Nevertheless, the authority of the commandant was almost entirely based on the strength of his personality, since he had no means of enforcing discipline, and the frontier farmers were notoriously individualistic. Members were free to obey his commands or ignore them if they chose, or to simply pack up and go home if they lost faith in his decisions.

The strength of the commando system was that it provided a core of motivated men who fought together as members of a community, using weapons and field-craft skills which they were accustomed to using in their daily lives. These weapons consisted of all manner of civilian guns, including heavy-calibre double-barrelled hunting weapons, and the Boers were famous for their marksmanship, which had been honed by the practical necessity of obtaining meat for the pot without wasting ammunition. Throughout the Great Trek period, these weapons were flintlock muskets, but these gave way to percussion models in the 1840s, and to rifles in the late 1850s. Throughout the Trek the Boers had access to a number of small ships' cannon, which had been privately purchased, and which were mounted on improvised wooden carriages.

The battle of Vechtkop, 16 October 1836. Despite heavy numerical superiority, the Ndebele were unable to penetrate the Boer laager, and were at the mercy of close-range musketry. Note the women loading firearms for the men.

The disadvantages of the commando system were that the Boers looked upon warfare as a practical necessity; they fought to achieve limited objectives, and, since being on commando inevitably meant leaving their families to survive without them on the veld, they felt no allegiance to a concept of military glory. They were, therefore, unwilling to take unnecessary risks, and the local nature of the commandos, coupled with the quarrelsome nature of some of their leaders, meant that there was often a reluctance to fight in districts away from home, or even in support of commandos led by rival commandants. Although the nature of the Trek dislocated local ties, the various Trekker groups were often linked by family connections or former associations, and each Trekker group therefore tended to muster its own commando.



The Trekkers had a number of small ships' guns, mounted on improvised carriages; this gun is *Ou Grietje* – 'old Margaret' – and was apparently used against the Zulus at Blood River in 1838, at Port Natal in 1842, and may still have been pressed into service in the 1881 Transvaal War.

Potgeiter's party on the Rhenoster River consisted of 50 wagons, with just 35 Boer men, a number of women and children, and a number of African retainers. The contribution of the latter is often overlooked in accounts of Boer battles, but was significant; African servants, known as *agterryers* ('after-riders'), accompanied commandos in the field, leading spare horses, hunting and cooking, and as often as not fighting alongside them in the field. Indeed, in many campaigns, the Boers exploited divisions within local African communities, and were often supported by quite large African armies; in one way or another, the subjugation of black Africans to white rule could not have been achieved without African support, or at least complicity.

Potgeiter had been expecting an attack, and had carefully drawn the wagons into a characteristic defence known as a *laager*. The wagons were run into a circle, chained together, and the gaps between them sealed with thorn bush. Usually, it was necessary to protect the livestock – the draft oxen and horses – within the laager, but in this case there was insufficient room, and they had to be abandoned to the enemy. A small inner shelter for the wounded and children had been covered with ox-hides, to protect it from thrown spears. The Ndebele army, about 4,000 strong, attacked on 15 October 1836. Boer horsemen sortied out to harry the advance, firing from the saddle as they retreated in front of the advancing warriors. The Ndebele then repeatedly attacked the laager, but failed to force an entry, and were exposed at close range to a heavy Boer fire from within. Many Boers fired *loopers* – small bags of shot which burst on leaving the muzzle, like a giant shot-gun, and which had a devastating effect in the closely-packed Ndebele ranks – while the women re-loaded to speed up the rate of fire. After several hours fighting, the Ndebele withdrew, leaving perhaps 500 men dead on the field, for the loss of only two Trekkers.

The battle of Congella, 23 May 1842. Boer riflemen line the mangroves as Smith's troops pass by on the beach beyond. (Killie Campbell Africana Library)

Both sides had fought to a stand-still. The Trekkers were immobilised by the loss of their cattle without which they could not move their wagons, and the repulse was the most serious setback inflicted up to that time on an Ndebele army. The Trekkers, reinforced by fresh parties hurrying up from the south, were the first to recover. In January 1837 a commando, commanded by Potgeiter and another of the famous Trek leaders, Gert Maritz, and supported by several hundred Tswana, who were keen to see the overthrow of the Ndebele, approached Mzilikazi's domain from the west, and struck at his settlements at Mosega. The attack took the Ndebele by surprise, and the Trekkers destroyed a large number of homesteads and withdrew with several thousand head of cattle. For the Ndebele, this fresh disaster was followed immediately by another, since the Zulu king Dingane despatched an army to catch the Ndebele off-guard, and this army ravaged outlying Ndebele settlements in mid-1837.

Maj. Smith's camp at Port Natal, 1842. Both the tents inside the earthwork, and the wagons outside, are riddled with Boer shot. The soldiers of the 27th Regiment in the foreground are wearing forage caps and shell-jackets; several soldiers had brought their wives with them on the expedition, and a number can be seen sheltering in the trench, right. (Killie Campbell Africana Library)

The schooner *Conch* enters Port Natal Bay on 26 June 1842, towing long-boats loaded with troops. (Local History Museum, Durban)

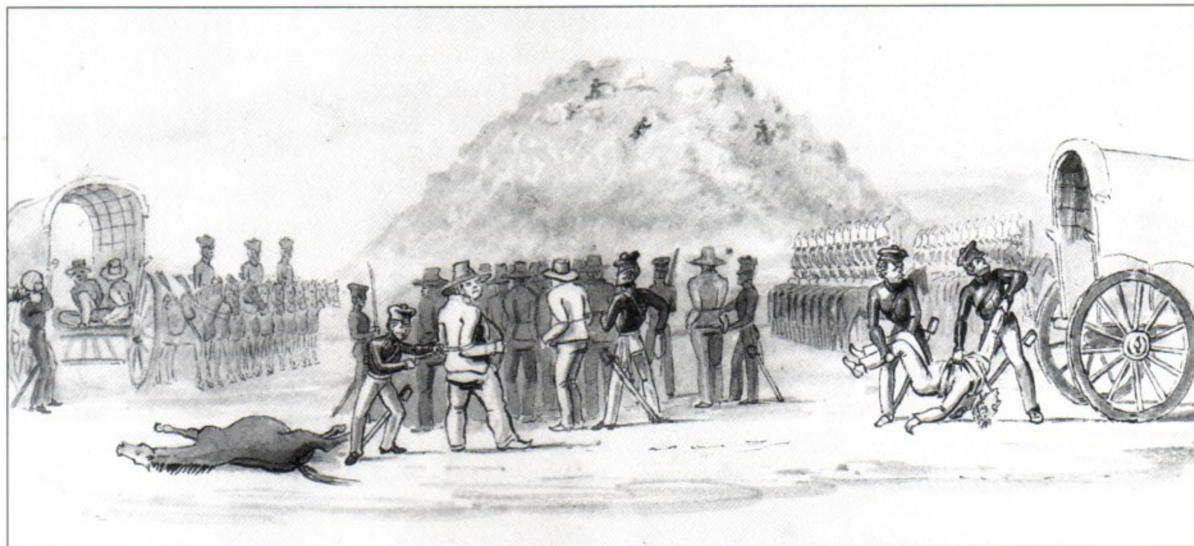
These twin blows may well have encouraged Mzilikazi to abandon the Transvaal for safer territory north of the Limpopo River. The Boers also gave him a final push: in October 1837, a fresh commando – some 360 men, with several hundred African auxiliaries – struck straight at the heart of Mzilikazi's kingdom in the Marico Valley. A running fight began on 4 November, and lasted several days; the Boers, fighting from horseback, skirmished in front of the Ndebele impis (armies), refusing to be drawn to close-quarters, and breaking up their formations by concentrating their fire on the tips of their encircling formations. Eventually the Ndebele collapsed, and Mzilikazi's followers began to stream away to the north, harried by the Boers, who continually broke up any attempt to regroup, and stripped them of their cattle.

The fighting in the Marico Valley broke Ndebele power in the Transvaal; Mzilikazi eventually crossed the Limpopo and established a new kingdom in modern Zimbabwe, which survived until the advent of British imperialism, in the shape of Cecil Rhodes, in the 1890s.

The Trekker-Ndebele War had demonstrated that the power of the Boers rested not so much in their guns, but in the combined use of the gun and the horse, or the gun and the wagon. Ndebele tactics – like those of the Zulus after them – depended for their success on their ability to move large numbers of men rapidly to close-quarter contact. With the horse, the Trekkers could stay out of reach, even of the notoriously quick Ndebele, while the wagon-laager provided a solid barrier which the Ndebele had no means of overcoming, and which effectively trapped them in a close-range killing zone. This pattern of fighting would characterise many battles across the 19th century, though it took other groups, notably of Sotho or Tswana origin, to realise that the key to countering Boer tactics lay not in attack, but in defence.

The defeat of the Ndebele opened up the central Transvaal to Boer settlement, and the Boers declared it a new republic, separate from the area between the Orange and the Vaal (the Orange Free State).

The battle at Zwartkopjes, May 1845; 7th Dragoons (left), resplendent in brass helmets, exchange fire with Boers on the *kopje* (hill), centre. (Museum Africa).



Members of the Cape Mounted Rifles securing prisoners and removing the dead after the action at Zwartkopjes. The CMR troopers are clearly shown wearing swords; this was unusual, because they were cumbersome and unpopular, and usually only carried in the regimental transports. (Museum Africa)

Although the Boers laid claim to most of the Transvaal as far as the Limpopo, in fact they neither occupied it entirely, nor controlled it effectively throughout the 19th century. The area settled by the Ndebele was actually comparatively small, and the Trekkers soon found themselves competing with the original Tswana inhabitants, who returned now from their refuges to reclaim it. Furthermore, the Transvaal Boers were not united among themselves, and groups repeatedly split off to establish new, semi-independent settlements away from the central areas. Thus the Transvaal, from 1836 until perhaps the 1870s, consisted of a patchwork quilt of various black and white groups, many claiming jurisdiction over others who themselves denied it. In the gradual, piecemeal extension of Boer authority lay the causes of the coming conflict.

THE NATAL ADVENTURE 1837-42

In 1837, one Trekker group, led by Piet Retief, crossed the Drakensberg Mountains and looked down upon the rolling hills of Natal and the Zulu country. Parts of this, too, had been temporarily depopulated by the *mfecane*, and although the Zulu king, Dingane, exercised control over much of the area south of the Thukela River, he had in fact abandoned it and moved the centres of his government north, into Zululand proper. At that time, the only whites in Natal were a small group of piratical hunters and traders, mostly British, who had received a Zulu concession to operate out of Natal. Retief hoped to secure permission to settle his followers in Natal, but bungled his negotiations with the Zulu king, and he and his followers were massacred on a visit to the Zulu court. The incident provoked the bloodiest fighting of the Trek so far, and at the end of it the Boers had defeated Dingane's army, and made huge – and impractical – claims on Zulu territory, as well as claiming all Natal by right of conquest.[2]

[2] For an account of the Trekker-Zulu War, see Elite 21, *The Zulus*.

Events in Natal worried the British, who regarded the Trekkers as wayward subjects, but lacked the resources to stop their exodus. The Port Natal traders had long been trying to pass their concession at Port Natal over to the crown, however, and on the strength of this the British had despatched a garrison to secure the port in 1838, and attempted to mediate in the Boer-Zulu dispute. This had proved quite impossible, and the garrison had been withdrawn, but with the final defeat of the Zulu in 1840, the British became increasingly worried by Boer policy in the region. Confused by the influx of Africans to the region – many were returning to the lands which they had temporarily abandoned in the face of Zulu attacks – the Boer government in Natal planned to relocate them in the south of the country, thereby threatening to destabilise the Eastern Cape Border. Equally worrying, was the fact that the Boers hoped to use Port Natal as a means of opening trade with rival European empires, threatening British dominance in the region. In 1841 the British once more occupied Port Natal.

The force appointed to the task was small – just two companies from the 27th Regiment, an artillery detachment with two 6-pdr. guns, an escort of men from the Cape Mounted Rifles, and some 50 civilian wagon-drivers. They were all under the command of Maj. T.C. Smith of the 27th, a veteran of Waterloo. Smith's troops marched up overland from the garrison on the Cape Frontier – an exotic and arduous journey through semi-tropical vegetation, across flooded rivers and along the beach, which took several weeks – and occupied Port Natal in May 1842. Smith built himself a fort by running his wagons into a circle, and surrounding them with a rampart and trench, and opened a frosty correspondence with the local Boer Commandant, Andries Pretorius. The Boers denied any British jurisdiction over the Port, and tried to dislodge Smith by seizing his grazing cattle. Smith decided vigorous action was called for, and on the night of 23-24 May he took 100 men and the two guns of the 27th out to attack the Boers, who were camped at a

The final moments of the battle of Boomplaats, 29 August 1848. The Rifle Brigade take the last of the ridges held by the Boers, left, who flee towards the river, right. (Museum Africa)

A selection of Boer guns. Notionally Voortrekker weapons, most of these probably post-date the main thrust of the Trek, as percussion weapons did not become widely available until the 1840s. Note the variety of types and calibre, including the impressive hunting weapon second from the right. (Voortrekker Museum, Pietermaritzburg)

spot beside the bay known as Congella. Smith's route took him through the bush, and along the beach at low tide; unfortunately, the Boers discovered his approach, and before he could reach Congella he was ambushed by Boers lying in wait among mangrove trees on the shoreline. One of Smith's guns, which had been rowed in a long boat to supply supporting fire from the bay itself, failed to come into action because the boat had run aground. In the darkness and confusion Smith's force collapsed and fell back on the fort, leaving nearly a third of their number killed or wounded.

The Boers immediately followed up their success, and surrounded Smith's camp. One advanced outpost was captured, but for the most part the Boers were content to fire into the camp from long range, riddling the tents and wagons with bullets. One of the British settlers at the Port, Dick King, managed to slip through the Boer cordon with his servant, Ndongeni, and the two rode for the nearest British outpost, Grahamstown on the Cape Frontier, nearly 500 miles away, to raise the alarm. In the meantime Smith's command could do little but hold on, constantly harassed by the Boers, and with supplies running low. King reached Grahamstown on 4 June, and troops were immediately embarked to sail to Smith's relief. On 26 June – just over a month after Smith's defeat – HMS *Southampton* bombarded Boer positions on the shore, while a sloop ran the gauntlet of Boer fire to enter the bay. Troops were put ashore, and after brief skirmishing, the Boers abandoned the positions around Smith's fort.

Smith's relief marked the true British occupation of Port Natal. In due course, after further negotiations with the Boers, the British decided to annex Natal entirely, and many Boer families abandoned the territory in disgust, returning back the way they had come, over the Drakensberg, to add a new population pressure to the complicated situation in the interior.

THE BRITISH REACTION

The annexation of Natal was indicative of the British response to the Trek. The home government was unwilling to embark on a costly programme of colonial expansion, but local administrators found themselves reluctantly dragged in the wake of the Trek and were forced to secure immediate interests. North of the Orange River, the main thrust of the Trek had passed peacefully to the west of the BaSotho kingdom, but as that thrust ran out of steam, the area gradually filled up with Boer farmers looking for land. This process took place at the same time as Sotho and Tswana inhabitants sought to rebuild their lives in the aftermath of the *difaqane*. Initially, Moshoeshoe was content to allow Boers to graze on the fringes of his territory, but in due course Boer pressure to settle this land became intense, and was in direct competition of the needs of African refugee groups who continued to seek Moshoeshoe's protection. Moshoeshoe appealed to the British to intervene, and in 1843 the Governor of the Cape, Sir George Napier, entered into a treaty with several of the African groups north of the Orange. The treaty offered protection from Boer incursions, but the terms were vague and the mutual responsibilities ill-defined. Boer frustration was directed at one of these groups, the Griqua, and for the first

Orange Free State forces attacking Moshoeshoe's stronghold at Thaba Bosiu in August 1865. Although this picture has some anachronisms - notably breech-loading rifles of a type not introduced until the 1870s - it does give a good impression of the difficulties faced by Boer troops when storming the mountain strongholds of the interior.

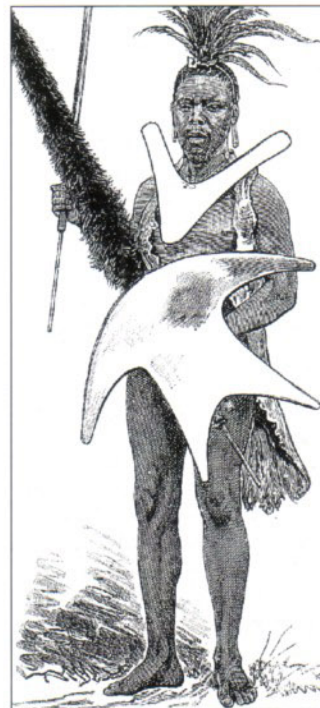
time British troops were sent north of the Orange River in support of the treaty. In April 1843 a sharp skirmish took place between British troops – chiefly the 7th Dragoons and Cape Mounted Rifles – and Free State commandos at Zwartkopjes, and the Boers were defeated.

After Zwartkopjes, the British moved a garrison into the Free State capital, Bloemfontein, but it was far too small to control either the Boers or the African groups. The situation remained tense until a new British governor, the flamboyant and eccentric Sir Harry Smith, rashly decided to annex the entire area between the Orange and Vaal Rivers. In February 1848 it became the Orange River Sovereignty. The *Harde Emigranten* – the die-hards of the Trek – were appalled, and Andries Pretorius, the victor of Congella, travelled up from Natal to muster a large commando. Pretorius swept through the Sovereignty, driving the British residents out of Bloemfontein as he went. Sir Harry Smith, issuing proclamations of an almost Biblical severity, crossed the Orange to intercept him. Smith's command consisted of 800 British regulars – mostly from the 45th and 91st Regiments and the Rifle Brigade – supported by three field guns, four companies of the Cape Mounted Rifles (CMR), and 250 mounted Griquas. Pretorius attempted to block his advance at a deserted farm called Boomplaats. The position was a good one: an undulating plain, crossed with ridges, and surrounded by hills. Pretorius' force was divided, however, and only some 300 men were prepared to stand against the British. They took up a position along the most advanced ridge lying across Smith's road. Smith arrived on 29 August 1848. Premature fire betrayed the Boer position, and Smith reacted smartly, parking his wagons to the rear, and deploying his men across the road. A Boer attempt to envelope his left flank was repulsed, and Smith executed a rapid attack on the ridge ahead of him. The Boers withdrew and reformed on a ridge behind, but Smith directed a sharp artillery barrage at them, then followed up with another brisk attack. When the Boers fell back Smith sent forward the CMR and Griquas to drive them from the field. The battle had been the most dramatic confrontation between British troops and the Boers to that time; it had lasted from 11am to 2pm, and at the end of it Smith had lost 25 men killed and 25 wounded, to Pretorius' 9 dead and 5 wounded. Pretorius retired across the Vaal, and Boer resistance collapsed, leaving the British in possession of the Sovereignty.

This afforded nothing by way of a lasting solution. The British seemed unable to resolve continuing Boer-BaSotho border disputes, and when the British administrator intervened in a purely African dispute he

[3] See MAA 212

alienated Moshoeshoe and provoked the first of a series of clashes with the BaSotho.[3] In the meantime, broader British policy in South Africa had been thrown into sharp relief by the outbreak of a fresh war – the Eighth – on the Cape Frontier, and Smith was largely discredited. In February 1854 Britain rescinded the Orange River Sovereignty, and under the Sand River and Bloemfontein conventions effectively gave control of both the Free State and the Transvaal to the Boers.



A southern Sotho warrior in the traditional dress of pre-colonial times. The distinctive winged shield is made of cow-hide; the gorget is of brass. The long shield stick, decorated with ostrich feathers, was confined to important warriors, and served as a rallying standard in battle. Early BaSotho and Pedi armies looked much like this; Tswana warriors were similar in appearance, but their shields were more square in shape.

THE BOER-BASOTHO WARS

The treaties of 1854 effectively abandoned Britain's African allies north of the Orange River. The Free State, whose government was always more stable than that of the unruly Transvaal, began to adopt an increasingly confrontational policy towards the continuing land disputes with the BaSotho. In March 1858 the first Free State-BaSotho War broke out.

The BaSotho military system was not as highly disciplined as that of the Ndebele, but was no less effective for that. At its heart was the system of enrolling youths into guilds at the time of their initiation into manhood. These guilds underwent the necessary ceremonies together, and this led to profound links between them which lasted throughout life. These guilds could be mobilised in the service of the chief, and in times of war served as regiments. They were usually led by men of royal blood from within their own ranks, but they lacked the highly developed military structure of the Ndebele system. The BaSotho state was a conglomeration of clan groups and individuals who had drawn together for protection during the time of the *difaqane*, but Moshoeshoe – whose greatest skills lay as a diplomat rather than a warrior – did not extend the regimental system and make it an agent of state power, as happened, for example, among the Zulu.

Clans who gave allegiance to Moshoeshoe continued to raise their own regiments, but were expected to provide a contingent to support the king in time of national crisis. Sotho regiments did not wear distinctive uniforms like their Ndebele and Zulu counterparts; most warriors went into action wearing a knotted waist-hide and perhaps a mop of black ostrich feathers on the head. They carried distinctive winged shields, designed to deflect spears in flight, and were armed with light throwing spears, carried in a quiver, or perhaps an axe. The BaSotho soon learned the advantage of both horses and guns from their contact with the Griqua and the Boers, and even by the 1850s large numbers of Sotho warriors fought from horseback. Tactically, the Sotho did not depend on the close-order massed charges which characterised the Zulu battle formations, but excelled instead in skirmishing, raiding, and in defending their mountain strongholds. In a number of respects, the BaSotho military system was similar to that of most of the African peoples of the interior, and the first war with the Free State established a pattern of conflict which characterised many of the Boer campaigns against Africans in the 19th century.

Free State forces numbered perhaps 1,500 men in 1858, against some 20,000 BaSotho. The Free Staters were, of course, armed with far superior weapons, mostly smoothbore percussion guns, rifles, and a small number of cannon of various makes and sizes. In 1857 the Orange

'Sixteen Boers killed by BaSothos in Hell-Kloof', an incident in the 1st OFS-BaSotho War. This picture captures the appearance of both sides at this time, and in particular of the Sotho warriors, with their cloaks of animal skin and their winged shields. (Museum Africa)

Free State had attempted to establish a regular artillery unit, and imported 12 field pieces from overseas, mostly light 6-pdrs.

The Boers invaded BaSotholand from two points, and Moshoeshoe harried them with constant skirmishing as he fell back on his flat-topped mountain retreat, Thaba Bosiu. Although the BaSotho scored a number of successes – at Hell Kloof, on 3 April, BaSotho warriors trapped and killed 16 Boers – they were, for the most part, out-gunned and unable to press home attacks in the open. On 6 May the Boers reached the outskirts of Thaba Bosiu and formed a defensive laager but, as would happen time and again over the next 50 years, they then proved reluctant to risk the necessary casualties that would result from an assault in the open. Outlying BaSotho responded by raiding into Free State territory, unsettling Boers at the front by threatening their families and farms at home. Eventually the war ground to a halt, and both sides agreed to British arbitration on the question of the disputed boundaries. The peace cobbled together at the end of the first war failed to address the main points of conflict, however, notably that both Boer and BaSotho societies were essentially expansionist, that their populations were growing, and that they remained in competition for the same grazing land. While Moshoeshoe was keen to avoid war, he ruled through compliance rather than coercion, and could not control the actions of some of his peripheral chiefdoms, many of whom bitterly resented Boer encroachment. In the early 1860s there were a number of clashes between individual BaSotho and Boer farmers, and in June 1865 war broke out again.

The second Free State-BaSotho War was more bitter than the first. The Free State forces were reinforced by a large number of volunteers from across white South Africa. The State artillery had been reinforced, and a total of five guns, including a 12-pdr. Armstrong and 6-pdr. Whitworth, were put into the field, earning the campaign the title of the 'War of the Cannon's Boom' among the Sotho. The Boers converged on Thaba Bosiu, attacking and reducing local strongholds along the way. By

the beginning of August they felt confident enough to mount a direct assault on the mountain. The first assault was a failure, but during a second assault on 15 August, the Boers bombarded the summit and then tried to storm the main pass to the top. The BaSotho were driven out of two lines of breastworks, but the attack stalled before a third, and collapsed when a Boer leader was shot dead as he broke cover. This failure damaged Boer morale, but the Free State forces continued to besiege Thaba Bosiu, where Moshoeshoe's followers were suffering increasingly from lack of food. Eventually, the Boers broke up the laager, but tried to prolong the war by raiding BaSotho cattle and crops in an attempt to destroy the material base of their resistance. Fighting spluttered on until early 1868 when Moshoeshoe succeeded in persuading the British to intervene; a small British force crossed the Orange River to restore order, and the Boers, unwilling to risk a direct confrontation with Britain, withdrew their commandos. The final result was that control of the BaSotho kingdom passed to the British.

THE CONQUEST OF THE TRANSVAAL

The pattern of Boer authority in the area north of the Vaal River – the Transvaal, or, as it was officially known, the South African Republic (SAR) – was much less established than in the Orange Free State. Although the SAR claimed all the land as far north as the Limpopo River, large areas of it were still inhabited by powerful autonomous African groups, and Boer settlement was patchy. Furthermore, divisions within the Transvaal Boer community frequently led to groups breaking away to establish new settlements, often declaring them to be independent republics in their own right. This shifting pattern of contact between Africans and Europeans in the Transvaal was exacerbated by the dis-

A poignant photograph which in many ways symbolises the terrible price paid by African groups in their struggle against Boer domination in the interior: the cave occupied by Mmankhopane in 1854 is still littered with skulls (centre) decades later. (Museum Africa)

Typical back-veld Boers of the middle of the century; the man on the right is carrying a percussion rifle, the man on the left a British Martini-Henry of the 1870s.

covery of mineral resources in the interior – diamonds at Kimberley, just north of the Cape Colony, in 1868, and gold in the Transvaal in the 1870s – which led to an influx of wandering prospectors and the rise and fall of the early gold-rush towns.

Although relationships with some African groups were good, this was largely because the Transvaal government pursued a general policy of encouraging internal divisions within the African community, and supporting one party at the expense of another. For the most part, the interests of the white government and the African population were essentially in conflict. Not only did many African groups resist the imposition of white authority *per se*, but they resented the taxation demands which went with it; taxation was not merely a source of government income but a means of forcing African groups to join the cash economy. In practice, taxation meant that African groups had to supply labour for white farmers in order to raise the money to pay the taxes. Although some groups were able to trade profitably with Boer hunters in the frontier zones, they often came to resent their intrusion, and resisted the demand for farmland which came with more permanent settlement. Since contact between black and white naturally encouraged African familiarity with European weapons, it also inevitably led to a fierce African desire to acquire guns, and to a clandestine gun-trade, which became another point of contention with the Transvaal authorities. Furthermore, the Boers did not scruple to use force to satisfy the insatiable demand of their rural economy for labour. In one celebrated incident in 1852, Boer commandos attacked the Tswana chiefdom of Chief Sechele, carrying away children to serve as 'apprentices' and raiding Tswana cattle; in the process they destroyed a mission station belonging to David Livingstone, provoking the latter's loud and persistent condemnation.

African Resistance

The most concentrated centres of African resistance to Boer authority were in the north and east. Here a great arc of mountains – the Soutpansberg, Leolu and Drakensberg – had provided secure places of refuge during the *difaqane*, leaving African groups either secure, or providing an environment in which they could rebuild their authority. The Soutpansberg were settled by the Lemba and Venda, groups of difficult cultural origin who had much in common with both the Sotho and the Shona north of the Limpopo, while in the south-west both the Pedi and, below them, the Swazi kingdoms emerged in the 1850s. Scattered in between were groups known as Ndebele; these were not followers of Mzilikazi, but people who had crossed over from the seaboard generations before, and had been given the same name by the local Sotho inhabitants. Although some Ndebele groups retained their coastal languages, most had absorbed Sotho dress and customs.

The Pedi kingdom, a confederation of northern Sotho clans under the control of the dominant Maroteng lineage, had emerged shortly before the *difaqane*, but had been devastated by groups passing through from the eastern seaboard. In the 1830s, it re-emerged under the chieftainship of Sekwati. Initially, the Pedi saw the Trekkers as potential allies in their efforts to extend their control over neighbouring groups, but this relationship soon turned sour. Thus, in 1847, Sekwati had led his warriors in support of an attack by Potgeiter on the Kgatla of the Soutpansberg, but

retired bitterly disillusioned after being given a derisory share of the cattle captured in the campaign. Over the next few years Sekwati increasingly resisted Boer demands for tribute – mostly in the form of labour – together with his southern ally, the Ndzundza Ndebele of Chief Mabagho ('Mapoch'). In 1852 this rift led to an attack by Boer commandos, supported by African allies, on Sekwati's mountain fortress of Phiring. As usual, however, the Boers were reluctant to attempt a direct attack on the stronghold, leaving the bulk of the fighting to their African allies, who made little progress. In the end, the Boers were content to retire, carrying away with them several thousand head of Pedi cattle.

In 1854, attempts to extend control over another Ndebele group, the followers of Chiefs Mapela and Mmankhopane ('Makapan'), led to a famous campaign in the western Soutpansberg. Hermanus Potgeiter – brother of Hendrik, the victor of Vechtkop – attempted to establish Boer dominance in the region and provoked a rising in which Boer families were attacked and Hermanus himself killed. Transvaal commandos under the command of Piet Potgeiter (Hendrik's son, Hermanus' nephew) converged on the area, and the Ndebele took refuge in a deep cave in the hillside. The Boers were unable to storm the entrance, but laid siege to it for most of November 1854. During the sporadic shooting, Piet Potgeiter was shot through the neck and killed, and a young veld-cornet named Paul Kruger risked Ndebele fire to recover the body. The Ndebele could not escape from the cave, however, and their sufferings were immense as their food and water supplies dwindled. After nearly a month of stalemate, some of the Boers crept into the entrance to find that most of the Ndebele – over 1,500 of them – had died of starvation. Their bones littered the floor of the cave for decades after. In 1858 Kruger led a punitive campaign against the survivors and, with the help of African levies, stormed Mapela's stronghold. Many Ndebele threw themselves off cliffs in their desperation to escape.

In the 1860s internal rivalries between Boer groups in the Transvaal led to the *Burgerkryg* – the Boer civil war. Marthinus Pretorius (Andries' son) advocated close co-operation between the Free State and the Transvaal, but his efforts at union provoked bitter quarrels on both sides of the Vaal. The Transvaal *Volksraad* (parliament) split into bitterly antagonistic factions, led by Commandant Schoeman and Paul Kruger. With passions running high, both sides called out their supporters, and a free-ranging conflict broke out which lasted from October 1862 to January 1864. As both sides sought to outmanoeuvre each other politically, their followers clashed in a number of minor skirmishes, culminating in a fight at Zwartkopjes, outside Pretoria, on 5 January 1864 which ended with the death of seven men and the wounding of nearly 40. The matter was finally resolved after six days of tense negotiations.

The universal Boer; a veteran of the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), photographed at a reunion in the 1920s. He apparently carried this obsolete weapon throughout that campaign, but his appearance is more typical of an earlier period, before flintlock muskets and powder-horns were replaced by breech-loading rifles.

A Boer commando of the period 1875-1885, when single-shot breech-loaders had replaced percussion models, and ammunition was therefore carried in bandoliers rather than pouches or bags.

The 1860s, too, witnessed the collapse of the most northerly settlement in the Transvaal. In 1848 Hendrik Potgeiter had established the settlement of Schoemansdal on the southern face of the Soutpansberg Mountains. It was very much a frontier community, and subsisted largely on the rich hunting grounds offered by the mountains. In this they received some co-operation with the Venda, but by the 1860s much of the game had been driven out of the region, and the Venda – many of whom had learned the use of firearms in Boer service – were keen to regain control of the trade. In 1864 the Boers intervened in a succession dispute among the Venda, with the result that in 1866 one claimant, Makhado, attacked settlements outside Schoemansdal. A commando was raised to restore order, but it was plagued by indecisive leadership, a poor supply of ammunition, and a decided reluctance by many to take part. The Venda were not a strong military nation, consisting instead of a number of loosely confederated clans under the rule of a paramount, but their environment – their villages were built on the upper slopes of the mountains – was well suited to defence. Despite the arrival of Paul Kruger, the Boers failed to capture Venda strongholds, and when disease broke out in the civilian laagers, Kruger ordered the abandonment of Schoemansdal. This move left the Venda in secure possession of the Soutpansberg for 20 years, and resulted in a general curb in Boer expansion along the northern border.

War with the Pedi

By the middle of the 19th century, the Pedi kingdom was one of the most powerful of the African states on the Transvaal periphery, comparable in influence and military might to its southern neighbour, Swaziland, and even to the Zulu kingdom. Sekwati had patiently rebuilt the influence of the dominant Maroteng group, and by the early 1870s the kingdom was benefiting from a more general disillusion with Boer rule among African groups in the eastern Transvaal. Some of these had broken away from the Pedi during the *difaqane*, but now saw the kingdom as a strong focus

of resistance to Boer claims for taxation and tribute, and were prepared to offer it their allegiance once more. In 1861 Sekwati had died and been succeeded by his son, Sekhukhune, who maintained a policy of denial towards Boer claims of suzerainty. Thus, to the SAR, it seemed that Sekhukhune was adopting a hard line, even an expansionist one, at a time when the economic changes within the Transvaal were intensifying Boer demands for labour, land and tribute. At that point the Transvaal was trying to raise a loan to finance a railway to Lorenzo Marques in Mozambique, to provide a link to the outside world that the British had denied them; the route of the proposed line ran perilously close to Pedi territory. The situation was further exacerbated by Sekhukhune's refusal to allow prospectors into his country, and to many whites in the Transvaal it seemed that the Pedi kingdom was a material block on the road to economic stability.

Militarily, the Pedi state was similar to Moshoeshoe's kingdom. The basis of its power was the age-regiment system; like BaSotholand, the Pedi kingdom was a conglomerate of allied groups, each of whom contributed a contingent in time of war. Early accounts suggest that they dressed and fought much like the southern Sotho, with winged shields, spears and axes. In the 1860s, however, the Pedi had been readily drawn into the developing migrant labour system in southern Africa, with large groups of Pedi men making the long journey to Kimberley, or even Natal and the Eastern Cape, to seek work in the diamond mines, or on white farms. Their principal motive was the desire to obtain guns; some were paid directly in firearms, whilst others traded their earnings for guns on the return journey. As was always the case with the African gun trade, the guns obtained were usually obsolete – Brown Bess muskets of Napoleonic vintage were still being dumped on the African market into the 1860s – and often in poor condition. Nevertheless, by the middle of the 1870s warriors belonging to the chiefdoms who answered Sekhukhune's call probably had access to several thousand firearms, including a smattering of good-quality rifled breech-loaders and civilian hunting rifles. Although the Pedi always struggled to obtain reasonable ammunition and powder, and training and maintenance were largely non-existent, their ranks did include a number of trained hunters, and firearms came increasingly to dominate their military outlook. Furthermore, contact with the European economy had influenced many Pedi men to acquire western clothing, and, although traditional costume never completely disappeared, it became an increasingly rare sight in battle.

The SAR declared war on the Pedi in July 1876. Some 2,000 burghers took to the field under the command of President Burgers, Marthinus Pretorius, and N.J. Smit. Like the OFS, the Transvaal had made a concerted effort to acquire an artillery arm. The Battery Dingaan – named in honour of the Boer defeat of the Zulu king Dingane – was raised in 1874, and consisted of

King Sekhukhune of the Pedi, seated centre, photographed after his capture by British forces in late 1879. The Pedi were one of the most powerful African groups of the eastern Transvaal, and repeatedly defied efforts by the SAR to control them. The men standing behind are wearing everyday male costume – a waist-hide knotted over the hips – and are carrying traditional weapons. Their appearance is typical of many Transvaal groups; by the 1860s many Pedi were armed with firearms. (Bryan Maggs Collection)

The arrival of the British; hoisting the flag in Pretoria on the Queen's birthday, 24 May 1877. The troops on parade are men of the 13th Light Infantry.

four 4-pdr. Krupp RBL (Rifled Breech Loader) guns and a *mitrailleuse*, a multi-barrelled machine-gun presented to President Burgers by the French government. The *mitrailleuse* was left behind in Pretoria, but the Krupp guns were taken into the field, together with a rocket tube. During the gradual settlement of the Transvaal, and the creation of new towns, the commando system re-emerged in the pattern established on the Cape Frontier, with the commandos again being locally based. They were supported by 600 Transvaal Africans and 2,500 warriors contributed by the Swazi kingdom. The Swazi also had a history of disputes with the Pedi, and the Transvaal had cultivated an alliance with them; in 1869 the Swazi had launched an attack on the Pedi heartland which had suffered a disastrous defeat, and they were eager to revenge that defeat. The SAR's strategy was to mount an attack on the Pedi capital, a fortified hill known as Tsate, from two directions, reducing the outlying chiefdoms along the way. On 4 July Burgers attacked the stronghold of Chief Mathebi with 1,000 Boers and a force of African auxiliaries. Typically, Mathebi's stronghold consisted of a steep hill thickly strewn with boulders, which the Pedi had reinforced with stone breastworks. As usual, the Boers were reluctant to rush the barricades, but for two days skirmished around the base, picking off the defenders where they could. In the event the hill was carried by the African auxiliaries, and about 300 Pedi huts were burned. On 13 July a major attack was mounted on Mafolofolo, the stronghold of Sekhukhune's Christian brother Dinkwanyane. Although the Boers softened up the target with artillery and long-range rifle fire, they refused to join the assault, and left the bulk of the fighting to the Swazi. The Swazi, accustomed to suffering heavy

A montage of commandants who served in the Transvaal War of 1881, with Commandant-General Piet Joubert centre, hatless.

Sgt. Bradley, 94th Regiment, who received the DCM for gallantry at the battle of Bronkhorstspruit, 20 December 1880. The majority of the British troops who fought in the Transvaal War were wearing the same uniforms they had during the Zulu War in 1879; Bradley is wearing the dress tunic here, but the undress frock (five buttons, no piping down the front) was more popular in the field. Helmet plates were seldom worn, and the helmets themselves were usually dulled down with tea or coffee. (Royal Archives)

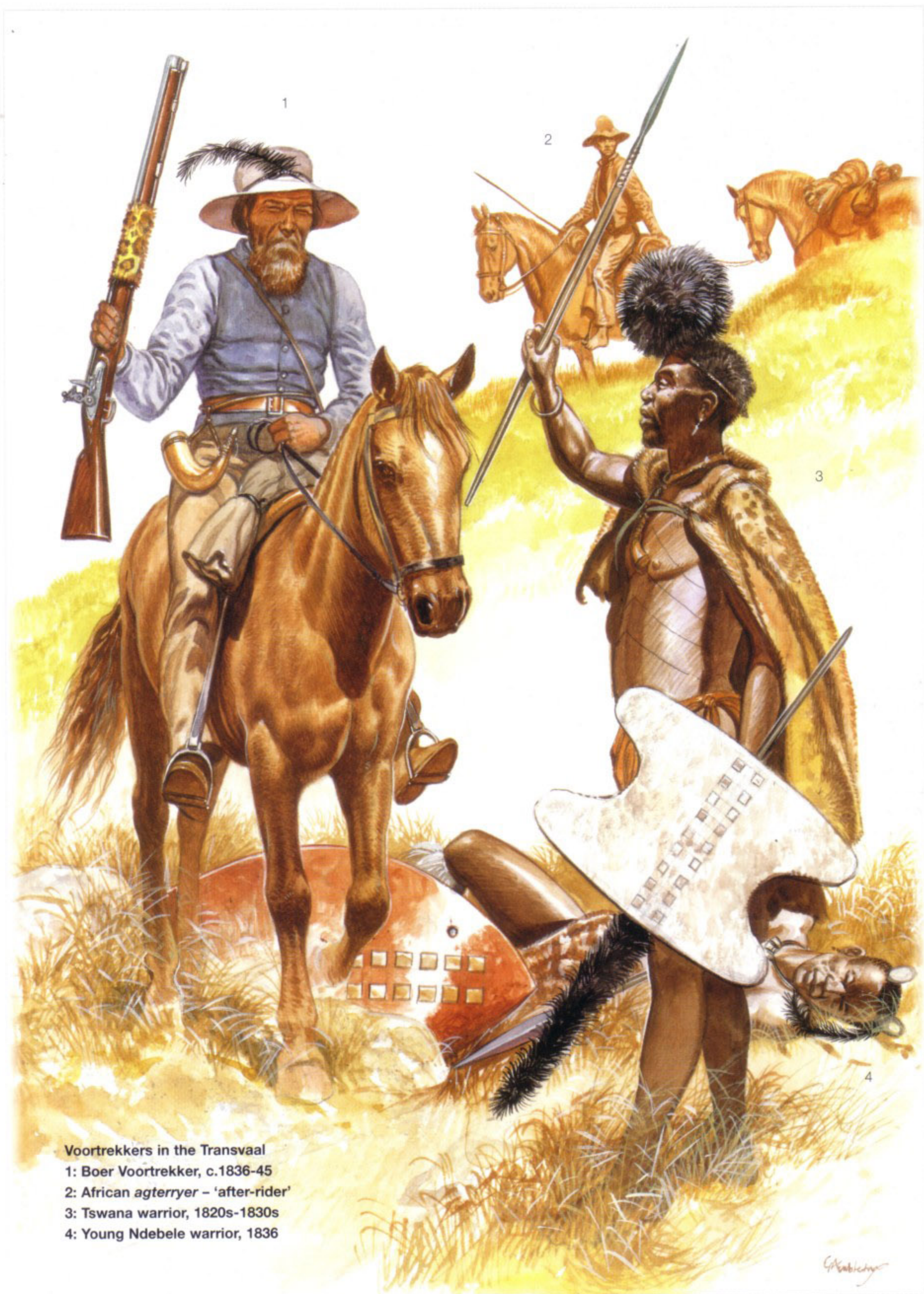
casualties in their attacks, successfully stormed the stronghold, killing Dinkwanyane and many of his followers. The lesson of the fight was not lost on them, however, and once the battle was over they refused to serve with the Boers again, and went home.

Burgers tried to continue his advance on Thaba Mosega, but the Boers were increasingly unwilling to serve without African auxiliaries to bear the brunt of the attack. Indeed, they were increasingly unsettled when Sekhukhune, as Moshoeshoe had done before him, ordered raids into Boer farms behind the lines. With his support ebbing away, Burgers decided to abandon the campaign. Two forts were built on the SAR-Pedi borders, and manned by volunteers, mostly foreign adventurers, who were directed not only to prevent Pedi incursions into the Transvaal, but to try to reduce the Pedi by raiding their cattle and destroying their crops. Intermittent skirmishing continued until fate introduced another factor.

The British Intervention

Throughout the first half of the 19th century, the British had been reluctant to entertain a wholehearted programme of colonisation in South Africa. Strategically, the area offered the British little more than it had the Dutch — command of the sea routes to India. The endemic conflict between white settlers and Africans was expensive in money and blood, and offered little in return. Yet by 1870, this had begun to change; the discovery first of diamonds, and then of gold, offered the prospect of some return on the investment, and British policy began to look towards long-term solutions to the region's deep-seated conflicts, with a view to establishing a broad infrastructure for future capitalist development. The solution of the 1870s was Confederation – a bringing together of the various disparate states under British control. Despite serious reservations, the British colonies – the Cape and Natal – were persuaded to join the scheme. The Transvaal, which seemed to outsiders to be anarchic, bankrupt, and in the aftermath of the Pedi campaign, close to collapse, was nonetheless a desirable acquisition not only because of its mineral reserves, but because it commanded the road to the potential riches of the as-yet still independent African kingdoms to the north. In January 1877, after a hasty and highly selective canvassing of Boer opinion, British troops marched into Pretoria, hoisted the Union flag, dissolved the SAR and formally annexed the Transvaal to the British Crown. Within three years the true reaction of the Boers would become painfully apparent.

With the annexation of the Transvaal, the British inherited long-standing territorial disputes with both the Pedi and the Zulu kingdom below the Drakensberg. The reduction of African powers was inherent in the Confederation concept – which was, after all, designed for the long-term benefit of the white economy – and Britain decided to demonstrate the advantages of the scheme by confronting both groups. In October 1878 Col. Hugh Rowlands attempted to invade the Pedi kingdom with just 139 infantry and 338 mounted men. The British had grossly underestimated Pedi strength, as Rowlands quickly realised in the face of Pedi harassment, water shortages, and horse-sickness. Rowlands fell back on the established forts on the Pedi borders. In the meantime, a much



Voortrekkers in the Transvaal
1: Boer Voortrekker, c.1836-45
2: African *agterryer* – 'after-rider'
3: Tswana warrior, 1820s-1830s
4: Young Ndebele warrior, 1836

A

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British Forces across the Orange River, 1845-48
1: Private, 7th Dragoon Guards, Battle of Zwartkopjes, 1845
2: Officer, Cape Mounted Rifles
3: Trooper, Cape Mounted Rifles, field service uniform, 1845
4: Private, Rifle Brigade, Zwartkopjes, c.1845

B

The Battle of Congella, Port Natal, 1842
1: Officer, 27th Regiment
2: Gunner, Royal Artillery
3: Private, 27th Regiment

C

Campaigns in the Interior, 1860s
1: Boer, Free State commando, Basotho Wars, 1860s
2: Basotho warrior, 1820s/60s
3: Transvaal warrior, 1850s-70s

The Skirmish at Elandsfontein, Pretoria, 16 January 1881
1: Volunteer
2: Private, 94th Regiment
3: Lieutenant, 21st Regiment

E

The Battle of Ingogo, 8 February 1881
1: Mounted infantryman, 58th Regiment
2: General Sir George Colley
3: Private, 3/60th Rifles

The Aftermath of Majuba, 27 February 1881
1: Seaman, Royal Naval Brigade
2: Boer commandant
3: Private, 92nd Highlanders
4: Officer, 92nd Highlanders

G

The Final Conquest of the Transvaal
1: Transvaal African, 1870s-1890s
2: Swazi warrior, 1870s
3: Gunner, Transvaal Staat Artillerie, 1890s

H

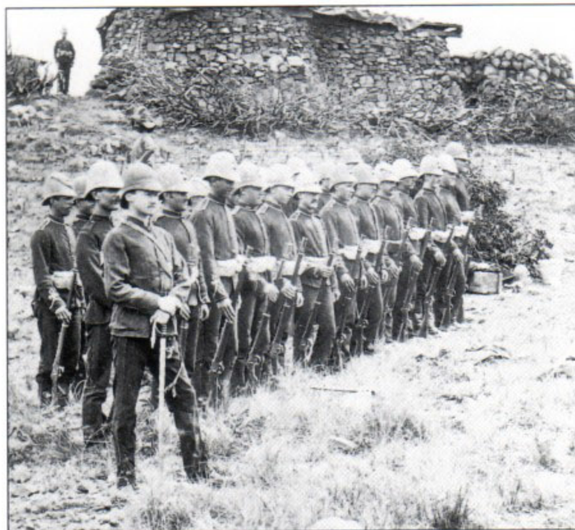
larger force was assembled to attack the Zulu kingdom; this, too, faltered badly when the Zulu over-ran the British camp at Isandlwana in January 1879. It took more than six months for the British, heavily reinforced from home, to defeat the Zulu and break up their military system. The long-term consequences of this for the Pedi were serious, however, for in November 1879 General Sir Garnet Wolseley assembled the largest force yet sent against the Pedi – 3,500 British troops, 3,000 Transvaal Africans, and 8,500 Swazi warriors – and finally stormed the Pedi capital, Tsate. Sekhukhune himself was captured.

THE 1881 TRANSVAAL WAR

The defeat of the Zulu and Pedi were insufficient, however, to convince the Transvaal Boers of the advantages of British rule. Although the British administration had established itself at Pretoria, with garrisons in the important outlying towns, its work had been hampered by a profound lack of understanding of Boer attitudes and needs, and by a wilful lack of co-operation on the part of many of the Boers. Indeed, rather than being reconciled to British rule by the defeat of the Zulu, many Boers felt that, now that particular threat had been removed, they would be able to manage their own affairs more successfully, and they wished to be free of the British. The Republican movement crystallised around the figure of Paul Kruger, and tension mounted throughout 1878. A massed rally in December 1878 voted to restore the Republic and demand British withdrawal. Commandos were called out to enforce this if necessary. When a commando confronted the British garrison at Potchefstroom, south of Pretoria, on 16 December, the anniversary of the Boer victory over the Zulus at Blood River in 1838, shots were fired, and the Transvaal War – often referred to as the First Boer War – began.

On the eve of the rebellion, the British garrisons in the Transvaal amounted to scarcely two battalions of infantry and a battery of artillery.[4] They were stationed unevenly in seven towns: Pretoria (four companies from the 2/21st, mounted infantry, two 9-pdr. guns of N/5 Battery RA and detachments of RE, ASC and AHC); Rustenburg (one company from the 21st Regiment); Lydenburg (HQ and two companies from the 94th Regiment); Marabastad (two companies from the 94th Regiment); Wakkerstroom (one company from the 94th Regiment and Mounted Infantry); Standerton (one company from the 94th Regiment); and Potchefstroom (two companies from the 21st Regiment, two 9-pdr. of N/5 Battery and Mounted Infantry). Most of these troops had served in the Zulu War, but garrison duty in the dull frontier towns was unpopular, and as a result morale was low. This, coupled with a contempt for Boer fighting abilities, was largely to blame for the poor

Men of the 2/21st Regiment garrisoning Fort Commeline, one of a number of small stone forts built on the outskirts of Pretoria, and defended during the Transvaal War. The officer in the foreground is Lt. Commeline, RE; all the men, Commeline included, are wearing undress frocks, and have tea-stained helmets. The 21st were unusual in that they retained their distinctive grenade helmet badge in the field. (Ron Sheeley Collection)



[4] Most of these troops were armed, uniformed and organised as they had been in the Zulu War; for a full description see Elite 32, *British Forces in Zululand*.

standards displayed by many British units with previously unblemished service records.

To meet the growing crisis, some of the troops in the outlying garrisons were ordered to concentrate in Pretoria. On 5 December the HQ and two companies of the 94th at Lydenburg, under Lt.Col. P. Anstruther, set out for the capital. On the 20th, in open country near the Bronkhorstspruit stream, they encountered Boer representatives who asked them to halt on pain of attack. Anstruther replied politely that his orders were to march to Pretoria. Some 150 Boers had taken up a position on the surrounding slopes, and when Anstruther's command began to move off, they opened fire. The 94th struggled to deploy and return the fire, but after 15 minutes of concentrated firing they were forced to surrender. One hundred and fifty seven British troops had been hit, and 77 of them were dead. Anstruther himself had been hit five times, and died shortly after. The Boers had lost just two dead and four wounded. With the action at Bronkhorspruit, the Boers immediately invested the British garrisons around the country.

Members of the Pretoria garrison with a 4-pdr. Krupp RBL gun; the gun is manned by volunteers. The men in the background and the officer (second from right) are from the 94th and the officer on the extreme right is from the 2/21st. (Bryan Maggs Collection)

The Natal Campaign

While the situation in the Transvaal dissolved into stalemate, the British rushed troops from outside to relieve the beleaguered garrisons. The nearest British concentrations were in Natal, where the 58th Regiment and 3/60th Rifles had remained on garrison duty after the Zulu War (two companies of the 58th were on their way to Pretoria at the time of Bronkhorstspruit; they reinforced the garrisons at Standerton and Wakkerstroom instead). The senior British commander, General Sir George Colley, prepared to march through the Drakensberg passes into the Transvaal, but the Boers had foreseen this, and had occupied the pass at Laing's Nek, blocking the road. Colley moved into northern Natal, and established a camp at Mount Prospect, below Laing's Nek. Colley's command, small even by the standards of British colonial wars, consisted of the HQ and five companies of the 58th; HQ and five companies of the 3/60th; 80 men of the 2/21st; a Naval detachment of 120 men with two Gatlings and three rocket tubes; a mounted detachment (some 70 men, mostly Mounted Infantry of the 58th with a smattering of 1st Dragoon Guards and ASC (Army Service Corps) personnel); four 9-pdrs. from N/5 and 10/7 Batteries; and two 7-pdr. guns manned by scratch crews from the 60th. Colley also had the services of a colonial unit, the Natal Mounted Police, but was reluctant to use them in action for fear of poisoning the relationship between British and Boer settlers after the war. The Boers, under Commandant-General Joubert and Commandant Nicholas Smit, numbered about 2,000 altogether.

Colley's first move was to try a frontal assault on the Boer line across Laing's Nek. On 28 January 1881 he softened up the Boer positions with an artillery and rocket barrage, and then sent the 58th forward to attack, supported on their right by the mounted contingent. The mounted men struggled up a steep hillock known as Brownlow's Kop, but as they crested the top were met by fierce and accurate fire from Boers posted in trenches behind the summit. The 58th advanced rapidly in column with their Colours flying. The men soon became exhausted as they struggled up the slope, however, and they had not deployed into line – the standard attack formation – when they were met by a heavy Boer fire. Some elements pressed forward to within 100 yards of the Boer trenches, but their officers were shot down, and the attack collapsed into chaos. The Colour party were an obvious target, and the Colour-bearers were shot down in quick succession; the Colours were carried off the field by a sergeant. This was the last time Colours were carried into action by a British regiment. The 58th were ordered to retire, and the 60th were sent forward to cover their retreat. The attack had been a complete failure, and Colley suffered over 190 killed and wounded; perhaps 400 Boers had actually been involved in the action, of whom 24 were killed or wounded.

The defeat at Laing's Nek proved something of a shock to Colley, who fell back on his camp to consider his position. Encouraged, parties of Boers began to foray into Natal, by-passing Mount Prospect, and threatening Colley's line of communication with the nearest town, Newcastle. At dawn on 8 February Colley took a force out from Mount Prospect to counter this threat – five under-strength companies of the 60th (about 273 all ranks), two 9-pdrs. and two 7-pdrs., plus 38 mounted men. Dropping one company of the 60th and the two 7-pdrs. to guard the road, Colley had reached a stony rise, known as Schuinshoogte, overlooking the Ingogo River, when he encountered some 200 Boers who were effectively blocking the road ahead. The Boers opened fire, and

Members of the Army Service Corps (blue uniforms with white facings) during the siege of Pretoria, 1881. (Bryan Maggs Collection)

Colley deployed in a semi-circle across the road whilst the Boers began to skirmish towards him, flitting between the protection afforded by the numerous boulders. Colley's men were well-placed and making good use of the cover, but the gunners were exposed, and soon picked off, as were the mounted men. Volunteers from the 60th helped to serve the guns as long as they were able. Seeing the Boers attempting to encircle his left flank, Colley ordered one company to advance in that direction, but the men were quickly shot down. In some places, the Boers crept forward to within 40 yards of the British, and a gruelling fire-fight continued at close range throughout the day. In the late afternoon there was a sudden thunderstorm, but the battle continued until darkness fell, when Colley extricated what remained of his command. The Ingogo River had risen in flood following the storm, and several men were swept away and drowned during the retreat. Once again, British casualties were disproportionately high – over 140 men killed or wounded, while the Boers lost 14 killed or wounded.

The defeat at Shuinshoogte was undoubtedly serious for Colley. In the Transvaal, the plight of the beleaguered garrisons was becoming serious. Although Pretoria remained secure – on a number of occasions the British had been confident enough to mount sorties to drive the Boers away from commanding features around the town – conditions in some of the outlying garrisons were cramped and uncomfortable, and food was running low. As usual, the Boers were unwilling to mount frontal assaults on defended positions, and they lacked the artillery support to break down the defences, as the British had taken over Battery Dingane's guns during the annexation. The Boers were forced to rely on a hotchpotch of guns, including some of the Trekkers' cannon, and two scratch-built guns made by a Rustenburg blacksmith, Mathinus Ras. Furthermore, all the time Colley was unable to break through, the rebellion gained moral momentum. Although reinforcements were on

Members of the Pretoria Rifles, a unit formed from civilian volunteers sympathetic to the British cause during the Transvaal War. Apart from the regular officer, right, they are wearing civilian costume. (Bryan Maggs Collection)

Members of the Pretoria Carbineers – a volunteer unit raised during the siege. The Carbineers apparently wore distinguishing red puggrees around their helmets. (Bryan Maggs Collection)

their way to him – the 92nd Highlanders, fresh from recent successes in the 2nd Afghan War, arrived in the middle of February, together with a troop of the 15th Hussars and a further 50 Naval men – there was also a growing movement towards a negotiated settlement in London. Indeed, Colley wrote to Kruger offering to suspend hostilities pending negotiations, but whilst Kruger was still considering his response, Colley undertook a move which would have a devastating effect on the outcome of the war.

To the right of the Boer line, their position was overlooked by a hill ironically known to the Zulus as *amaJuba* – 'the hill of doves'. The summit of Majuba was some 2,000 feet above Laing's Nek, and it overlooked both the Boer trenches straddling the road, and their laagers behind. Although both sides had access to the mountain, neither had occupied it, although the Boers had occasionally placed patrols upon it. Late on the evening of 26 February, Colley moved out of Mount Prospect to occupy the summit of Majuba. His force consisted of two companies of the 58th, two of the 60th, three of the 92nd, and 64 sailors – a total of 554 men. The approach march, along a ridge flanking the mountain, was a difficult one, and the 60th and one company of the 92nd were left to guards points along the way. By the time the remainder scrambled up onto the summit just before dawn the next morning, Colley's command had shrunk to perhaps 375 men.

Quite what he expected to do with them remains unclear. Certainly, it was not an offensive operation, as the time allotted for a reply to his letter to Kruger had not yet expired. Furthermore, although the position of Majuba was a commanding one, most of the Boer positions were out of rifle-range, and Colley had made no attempt to take guns or rockets up the hill with him. Nor was any attempt made to take up a proper defensive position on the summit; the men were simply allowed to relax after their exertions. It seems that Colley expected the occupation of Majuba to unsettle the Boers, and give him a winning hand in any peace negotiations. Since his men made no efforts to conceal themselves on the summit, they were soon spotted by the Boers below, and the outcome was to prove very different to Colley's hopes.

Members of the Pretoria garrison with Boers captured in the foray on Zwartkopjes, 5 January 1881.

The summit of Majuba is slightly dished, with a raised rim around the edge, broken here and there by gullies and projecting spurs. Colley deployed just over half his men around the perimeter – a concentration of one man for every eight or nine yards – whilst the rest were posted as a reserve in the depression in the centre. They were initially delighted to see that their presence caused some commotion in the Boer camps, and were not worried when between 300 and 400 Boers, commanded by Nicholas Smit, rode to the foot of the hill, dismounted, and began to climb the lower slopes. The ascent is less steep on the Boer side of the mountain, which is broken by a number of terraces. The Boers ran forward from cover to cover, making good use of the dead ground afforded by the terraces, and picking off any defenders who showed themselves on the skyline. They were able to press forward to within 20 yards of the crest, driving the defenders back to the cover of a low ridge which masked the central reserve. Throughout the battle, Colley gave no very clear directions, and seemed unconcerned by the attack. On several occasions he refused the suggestion of his officers that he order a charge with the bayonet, but he did at last order the reserve forward to reinforce the ridge. At this point, however, a party of Boers emerged over a different part of the crest, having moved unseen around the lower slopes. They opened a heavy fire on the flank and rear of the men lining the ridge, and after a few moments, the line collapsed, the men running back across the summit towards the route by which they had ascended. The Boers rose up and walked after them, shooting them down as they ran. Although the officers tried to stem the flow, it had become a rout, and the men streamed down the mountain in the greatest confusion. Colley himself was seen walking towards the Boer position – perhaps in an attempt to rally his men – when a Boer shot him clean through the head. The Boers followed up the attack by moving round the mountain to attack a company of the 92nd which had been left to guard the route the night before. Although this company gave a good account of themselves, they were ordered to withdraw in the light of the general British collapse.

Majuba cost the British 92 dead, 134 wounded – some mortally – and 59 prisoners. The Boers lost just one man killed and five wounded, one

mortally. The battle had demonstrated Boer fighting techniques at their best; what they lacked in discipline they more than made up for in field-craft, initiative, and good shooting. Although the apparent folly of fighting such an enemy whilst wearing scarlet uniforms was widely commented upon at the time, the real reasons for Colley's defeat went deeper; he had not only been guilty of underestimating his enemy, but had embarked on an expedition with no very clear objectives in view, and had failed to impose a sense of common purpose and direction on the mixed force under his command.

The defeat at Majuba effectively ended the Transvaal War. The besieged garrisons were still holding out, although Potchefstroom was beginning to run low on provisions. Nevertheless, Sir Evelyn Wood took command of the remnants of Colley's Natal Field Force, and on 6 March met Boer representatives in O'Neill's Farmhouse, on the lower slopes of Majuba. They agreed an armistice pending peace negotiations. It was some time before this news reached the besieged garrisons, and the commander at Potchefstroom agreed to surrender before it broke. The local Boer commandant refused to pass on news of the armistice until after the Potchefstroom garrison surrendered, an act which caused some bitterness in the British forces, where it was felt that the surrender had been obtained dishonourably. In the subsequent peace negotiations the British effectively abandoned the Transvaal to the Boers, retaining only an imprecise right to sovereignty. The decision delighted the Boers, but was greeted with disgust by English-speaking settlers in the Transvaal who had supported British intervention. This bitterness, coupled with the imprecise nature of the remaining British authority, soured the relationship between the two parties over the next 20 years, and provided the backdrop for the greater conflict of 1899-1902.

The Transvaal War achieved none of Britain's aims, either militarily or politically, and it was the only consistently unsuccessful campaign waged by the British army during the Victorian era.

The HQ and men of the 2nd Company, RE, who were at Pretoria throughout the 1881 siege, with Lt. Littledale centre left, Maj. Le Messurier centre, and Lt. Commeline centre right. Both officers and men are wearing undress frocks (scarlet with blue facings and gold or yellow braid) and stained helmets. (Ron Sheeley Collection)

THE FINAL SUBJUGATION OF THE TRANSVAAL

Sir George Colley, who commanded the Natal Field Force during the Transvaal War, and was killed at Majuba. This photograph was taken during the Asante campaign in West Africa, 1873-74. (Royal Archives)

The British withdrawal opened the door to a period of consolidation for the South African Republic. Bolstered by tax revenues from the growing mining industry – especially after 1886 when gold was discovered in undreamed-of quantities on the Witwatersrand, spawning the noisy boom-town of Johannesburg – the government sought to consolidate their hold on the African population on their fringes, and to explore the possibility of expanding north, or building the long-dreamed-of railway to Mozambique. This was intensified by growing rivalry with the British, who attempted to isolate the Transvaal by securing control of the African kingdoms on its borders. The republican government also used some of its revenues to bolster its military forces; although these remained based on the commando system, large numbers of firearms were imported centrally and distributed for each campaign, notably the efficient British single-shot Martini-Henry rifle. The Battery Dingaan was reconstituted as the Staats Artillerie in 1882, although they remained armed with obsolete Krupp guns until 1897, when four 6-in. Creusot guns and eight Krupp quick-firing guns were introduced. In 1894, a move was made towards establishing a uniformed, semi-permanent force, and two volunteer units – the Pretoria and Johannesburg Vrywillige Corps – were formed.

The Pedi and their former tribute chiefdom, Mabogho's Ndzundza Ndebele, fell early victims to this new spirit of determination. Sekhukhune, after his defeat by the British, had been kept a prisoner in Pretoria, but after the retrocession he was released, and allowed to return to Pedi territory, where his brother Mampuru had ruled in his absence. For several months Sekhukhune and Mampuru jockeyed for position, until in August 1882 Mampuru assassinated Sekhukhune. The SAR intervened, and Mampuru fled to sanctuary among Mabogho's Ndzundza Ndebele, now ruled by Nyabela. Recruiting a large army of Pedi followers from among factions opposed to Mampuru, Commandant-General Joubert led a commando into Ndebele territory in October. The Ndebele retreated to their mountain strongholds, and once again the Boers were faced with the prospect of winkling them out. Several months of skirmishing followed, with the Boers employing their usual tactics of besieging the strongholds and destroying African crops and huts. On this occasion they also made extensive use of dynamite to blow up the entrances to the caves in which the Ndebele sheltered, trapping the defenders within. Six months of these attacks gradually reduced the Ndebele will to resist, and in July 1883 the Ndebele chief Nyabela surrendered with 8,000 of his people, bringing Mampuru with him. Mampuru was later tried and hanged for his part in the death of Sekhukhune and, significantly, the Ndebele were broken up and distributed as labourers on Boer farms.

South of the Pedi lands, the power of the Swazi was steadily reduced without resort to military means. Since the 1860s, following the death of their great leader Mswati, the Swazi had enjoyed an ambivalent relationship with the Transvaal, remaining autonomous in return for

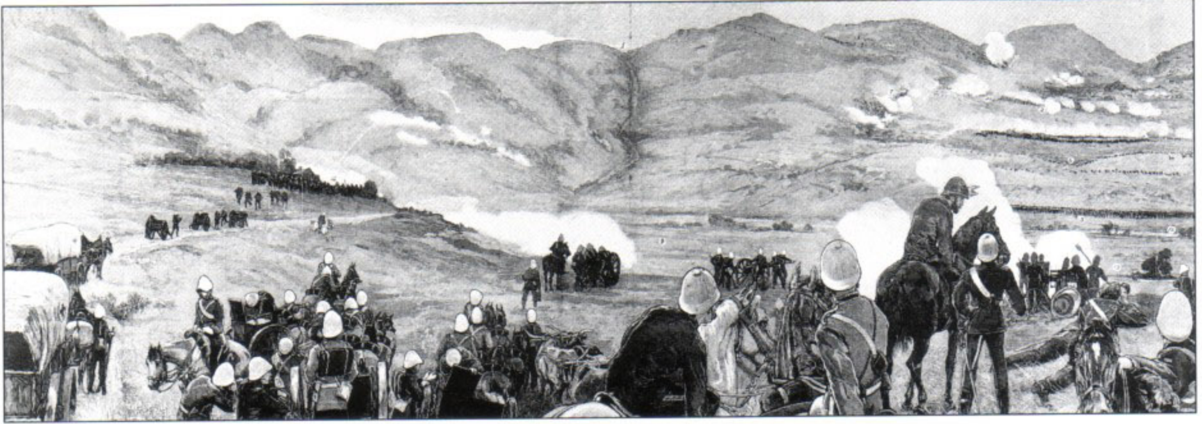
Members of the 3/60th Rifles, photographed in Egypt in 1882; these men had fought in Zululand in 1879 and in the Transvaal War in the same uniform of very dark green cloth with scarlet braid and black leather equipment. (Royal Archives)

lending support in occasional and mutually beneficial military expeditions. By the 1880s, however, the pressure on Swaziland was immense, as rival European groups sought to acquire rights to exploit Swaziland's resources, and the Swazi king, under the influence of white advisers, granted monopolies to white consortia in everything from mineral rights to photography. This process led to an inevitable erosion of Swazi independence, and a process of 'annexation by concession'.

The northern Transvaal, by contrast, had remained largely independent since Paul Kruger had abandoned the Schoemansdal settlement in 1867. With the free-ranging activities of prospectors in the 1880s, however, there was a pressure within the European community in the Transvaal to reduce African influence in the area, and this was stimulated by an intensifying competition for black labour between farmers and mine-owners. In 1888, a short-lived gold rush on the borders of the territory of the Tlou Chief Makgoba led to friction, and encouraged attempts to force the Tlou to pay taxes; the tax issue was not just to raise revenue, but a means of forcing African groups to join the cash economy. This, coupled with a personal determination on the part of Commandant-General Joubert, led to a wave of campaigns in the 1890s, which finally reduced the last African resistance to white rule.

Makgoba's dissatisfaction broke into open violence in early 1894 when the Tlou attacked outlying white settlements, and then retreated to the densely-forested valleys along the headwaters of the Letlhaba River. Makgoba's forces were small – perhaps 500 warriors – and armed primarily with spears and antiquated guns, but they waged a skilful guerrilla war which soon disheartened the Boer commandos. Typically, Joubert raised a band of Swazi and Shangane auxiliaries, and sent them into the valleys whilst the Boers built a string of small forts to contain the Tlou. These forts were garrisoned by volunteers whilst the commandos dispersed to avoid campaigning in the unhealthy summer months. The campaign was not resumed until June 1895, when the Boers located and stormed Makgoba's capital in the forest. Makgoba fled

Unidentified private of the 58th Regiment, serving with the Mounted Infantry, Natal campaign, 1881. The MI retained the tunics or frocks of their parent units, with brown cord riding breeches and bandoliers. The splendid brass helmet fittings, worn for the photograph, would have proved fatal in action in 1881. (Ron Sheeley Collection)



The battle of Laing's Nek, 28 January 1881. Colley (right) directs his artillery to support the attack of the 58th, which is taking place in the right distance. (Rai England Collection)

further into the bush, but was tracked down by some of the 7,000 African auxiliaries raised by the Republic. Makgoba was killed, and the Swazis brought his severed head as proof of his death. His people were dispersed among Boer farmers.

A more serious conflict occurred at the western end of the Soutpansberg Mountains, where an isolated spur of the main range, the Blouberg, rises nearly 7,000 feet out of the undulating bush. This was the stronghold of the Ganawa, a Sotho group whose chief, Mmalebogo, had steadfastly refused to acknowledge European authority. Mmalebogo had been arrested by the British during their occupation for refusing to pay taxes; he had been released, and had not been called upon to do so since. In April 1894 Mmalebogo was ordered to submit to the SAR's authority, and pay taxes. He refused, and retired with his followers to the Blouberg. Many of his people moved north to escape the impending crisis. Since it was believed the Mmalebogo commanded over 2,000 warriors, well armed with European rifles, the SAR assembled nearly 2,000 troops, including the Staats Artillerie, to confront him. Many of these were commandos from the northern districts, but others were *uitlanders* ('foreigners') from Pretoria, who had flooded into the Transvaal in the wake of the gold rush, and who now discovered to their chagrin that they were liable to call-up under the commando laws. The commando reached the vicinity of the Blouberg in late May, and there was some desultory skirmishing with the Ganawa as the Boers destroyed their huts. The campaign was under the personal command of Joubert, who called upon Mmalebogo to surrender, but refused to guarantee his safe treatment. Mmalebogo had erected a number of defences on the lower slopes of the mountain, while his capital nestled securely among the rocky outcrops on the top. The Boers successfully carried some of the lower slopes, but the Ganawa retired further up the mountain. The Boers shied away from a direct frontal assault, and Joubert resorted instead to dynamite, trying to blast the Ganawa out of their stronghold. This was unsuccessful, and for more than a month the Boers besieged the mountain, whilst the Ganawa became increasingly desperate for food and

The aftermath of Schuinshoogte, with the bones of dead artillery teams in the foreground, and the peak of Majuba just visible on the skyline. (Bryan Maggs Collection)

water. The Ganawa were forced to run the gauntlet of Boer outposts to reach a nearby stream each night. On 28 July the Boers intercepted one such foray, and Mmalebogo called out in a loud voice which spoke for generations of Africans dispossessed by white settlement: 'You have taken from me my women and children, my cattle and my corn; my villages you have burned. Now you will not let me even have a drink of water; wait till tomorrow and you shall have me; what do you seek in fighting tonight?'

Majuba, photographed from O'Neill's Farm on the British side. (Bryan Maggs Collection)

Over 400 of Mmalebogo's followers had surrendered during the fighting, most of them women and children. On 31 July the chief himself was finally starved into submission, and came out with the last of his people, 19 of them, including 12 women. The Boers waited expectantly for the rest of his warriors to appear, but there were none; Mmalebogo's grand army proved to be no more than 500 strong, the vast majority of them non-combatants. Mmalebogo was arrested, and his people distributed among Boer farms.

The Venda were finally defeated in 1898. The great Makhado had died, and the SAR had intervened in the subsequent succession dispute before the Venda paramountcy passed to Makhado's son, Mphephu. Mphephu, despite once having been a migrant worker in Kimberley, maintained his father's resistance to Transvaal authority. In October 1898 Joubert assembled 4,000 men – the largest commando yet raised by the SAR, including artillery and volunteer units – and entered the Soutpansberg. The Boers erected a number of forts close to the Venda stronghold of Swunguzwi Mountain, and one of the first clashes took place on 21 October. A party of Venda concealed themselves in the bush and approached close to the men building a fort at a place called Rietvlei without being spotted. They fired a volley from close range, but their guns were of such poor quality that they had little effect. The Boers replied with artillery fire, and chased the Venda from the field. On 16 November Joubert attacked Swunguzwi, storming it from three sides at once. The Venda put up token resistance, and slipped away under cover of a dense mist, leaving their capital for the Boers to burn. Upwards of 10,000 Venda, including Mphephu, evaded Joubert, and slipped across the Limpopo River to take refuge in what was then Rhodesia.

The destruction of the Venda marked the final subjugation of the African peoples of the interior of South Africa. The SAR had little opportunity to enjoy the fruits of its victory, however, for already far more serious conflicts were brewing. Within a year, South Africa's white communities would fall out among themselves, posing a far greater threat to the Boer way of life than anything which had gone before.

The battlefield of Majuba today, photographed from the Boer side. There was no growth of trees in 1881; this photograph shows some of the terraces which masked the Boer approach to the summit.

ABOVE **The climax of the battle of Majuba; men of the 58th and 92nd defending the crest-line. Although this picture gives a dramatic impression of the overall scene, it exaggerates the strength of Colley's command. In fact, his men were far more dispersed.**

THE PLATES

A: THE VOORTREKKERS IN THE TRANSVAAL

A1: Boer Voortrekker, c.1836-45 The Boer commandos were essentially a civilian militia who provided their own guns and horses, and fought in their everyday clothes. This man is a frontier farmer or hunter in the typical short jacket of the 1830s; his heavy-calibre double-barrelled flintlock musket is of the type favoured by hunters. Typically, the early Boers carried their powderhorns attached to a waistbelt.

A2: African *agterryer* – 'after-rider' Boer commandos were dependent on the support of large numbers of African servants, who led spare horses, performed chores in camp, and on occasion fought alongside their masters.

A3: Tswana warrior, 1820s-1830s The traditional warrior costume of the African peoples of the interior was broadly similar among both the Tswana and Sotho – a hide knotted around the waist, a cloak of animal skin – leopard, for important men – and a shield. This man, a Tswana fighting with the Voortrekkers, is carrying the squared-off shield typical of his people; Sotho warriors carried shields with more pronounced wings. The tall shield stick, decorated with ostrich feathers, was the sign of a person of rank, and served as a rallying point in battle.

A4: Young Ndebele warrior, 1836 The Ndebele were an offshoot of the Zulu kingdom, and their warriors maintained something of the Zulu appearance, although they began to evolve a distinct Ndebele look during Mzilikazi's stay in the Transvaal. The headdress shown here, depicted in contemporary sketches, consisted of inflated animal bladders tied in the hair, with a single black ostrich feather over the side of the face, and was probably the distinguishing uniform of a particular *ibutho*.

B: BRITISH FORCES ACROSS THE ORANGE RIVER, 1845-48

B1: Private, 7th Dragoon Guards, battle of Zwartkopjes, 1845 The 7th went into action on this occasion wearing their full dress helmets, which must have been extremely uncomfortable in the heat. They also carried Brunswick rifles, temporarily on loan from the 60th Rifles; when the regiment subsequently moved to the Cape Frontier, both items were abandoned, and they fought in forage caps and with cavalry carbines.

B2: Officer, Cape Mounted Rifles The CMR was raised as a British army unit, recruited within the Cape Colony. Officers were white, and although whites were recruited into the other ranks, the majority of these were of Khoi ('Hottentot') or mixed race descent. The first CMR uniform was based on British Light Dragoon patterns, but in the 1830s it was changed to a Rifle regiment style. The differences were largely apparent in the regiment's dress uniform; the undress uniform of forage cap and stable-jacket was worn with little modification until black facings were introduced in 1848.

B3: Trooper, Cape Mounted Rifles, field service uniform, c.1846 The leather overalls, known as 'crackers' because of the noise they made when walking, were popular, being both comfortable and hard wearing; some men carefully embroidered the seams. The CMR were extensively used in the various campaigns of the 1830s, 40s and 50s, and the other ranks enjoyed a good reputation for their skill and determination in bush-fighting.

ABOVE **The Boer assault on Majuba. The artist has telescoped several incidents from the campaign, including the mounted charge at Laing's Nek (right), and has included portraits of Paul Kruger (left) and Piet Joubert (pointing), but the picture does give a good impression of the way the Boers skirmished up the slope. (Museum Africa)**

B4: Private, Rifle Brigade, Zwartkopjes, 1845
The Cape Frontier saw the first gradual moves towards a more practical field dress among British troops; shakos were generally replaced by forage caps, and worn and torn items of uniform were made good with local replacements. The Rifle Brigade seem to have retained their dress coatees, but this man is wearing locally procured civilian trousers and comfortable Boer *veld-shoen* shoes. He is armed with the Brunswick rifle.

C: THE BATTLE OF CONGELLA, PORT NATAL, 1842

C1: Officer, 27th Regiment The 27th formed the bulk of Major Smith's command at Port Natal; contemporary sketches show officers wearing blue frock coats and both officers and men in coatees and shakos – nevertheless, the order of dress shown here, shell jacket and forage cap, was the most practical and comfortable dress for officers.

C2: Gunner, Royal Artillery Like the infantry, the RA preferred to wear undress in the field in South Africa – the forage cap and shell jacket shown here. Sketches of gunners on the Cape Frontier suggest that civilian trousers and hats were adopted as issued items wore out; this may also have been the case during the Port Natal expedition.

C3: Private, 27th Regiment This figure demonstrates some of the practical adaptations which were permitted in the field in South Africa; the addition of a home-made leather peak to the forage cap, a civilian-style waist belt and cartouche belt, and locally procured trousers. Percussion muskets were issued in the British army from 1838, although it is possible that flintlocks remained in service in some colonial postings for some years afterwards.

D: CAMPAIGNS IN THE INTERIOR, 1860s

D1: Boer, Free State commando, Basotho Wars, 1860s
With the introduction of percussion weapons in the 1840s, most Boers abandoned the old powder-horns in favour of cartouche pouches and belts with cap-pouches. Clothing styles remained similar, although jackets with full-skirts began to replace the old short jackets of the Voortrekkers. Uniformity was negligible, although some district commandos distinguished themselves with coloured puggrees, orange being a popular colour among Free Staters.

D2: Basotho warrior, 1820s/60s This senior warrior is wearing traditional Sotho war dress. Largely similar to Tswana styles, the more angular shape of the shield marks him down as a Sotho. The flat metal, worn from a thong around the neck, is also characteristic of the southern Sotho. By the 1850s, large numbers of Moshoeshoe's Basotho fought from horseback.

D3: Transvaal warrior, 1850s-70s Despite Boer attempts to control the gun trade, Africans of the interior soon became familiar with European firearms as contact between the races increased. Some groups, such as the Pedi, made determined efforts to obtain large numbers of firearms from the 1850s on. Although these guns were usually obsolete by European standards, they did increase the African capacity to defend mountain strongholds. With the spread of guns, the appearance of the interior peoples became increasingly

BELOW **The final British collapse at Majuba; Boers line the skyline to fire at the remains of Colley's command as they flee down the slopes.**

Boers destroying Mmalebogo's capital, nestled among the rocks on the summit of the Blouberg Mountain, 1894. The 1890s saw the reduction of the last centres of African resistance to the rule of the South African Republic. (Museum Africa)

homogeneous, as characteristic items, such as shields, were carried less frequently into battle.

E: THE SKIRMISH AT ELANDSFONTEIN, PRETORIA, 16 JANUARY 1881

E1: Volunteer During the Transvaal War, the British raised a number of small volunteer units in Pretoria from among the civilian population sympathetic to their cause. Although these gave themselves impressive titles – the Pretoria Carbineers, Pretoria Rifles, Nourse's Horse – they were not uniformed, and wore civilian costume, sometimes with the addition of a coloured puggree. Nourse's Horse – depicted here – wore blue puggrees, while the Pretoria Carbineers wore red ones. These units were issued with Martin-Henry rifles and bandoliers.

E2: Private, 94th Regiment At the start of the Transvaal War, most of the available British troops had been in garrison in the region since the Zulu War, and were wearing the uniforms of that campaign; for infantry, this was the five-buttoned frock with regimental facings, dyed foreign service pattern helmet, blue trousers with a red welt, and Valise pattern equipment. South African service was notoriously hard on uniforms, however, and many troops in the Transvaal garrisons had had to patch their jackets, or replace helmets, trousers and boots with civilian items.

E3: Lieutenant, 21st Regiment Unlike most infantry regiments, the 21st retained their grenade helmet badge in the field, although the white helmets were dyed a neutral brown with tea, coffee or vegetable dyes. The undress frock – shown here – or blue patrol jacket being particularly popular in the field; the officers' undress frock for the 21st seems to have had either a single twist of gold braid on the shoulders or a red shoulder strap with embroidered numerals and white piping. Among troops stationed in South Africa it was still common for officers to carry revolvers on shoulder straps, rather than on the Sam Browne belt, which was popular in India.

F: THE BATTLE OF INGOGO, 8 FEBRUARY 1881

F1: Mounted infantryman, 58th Regiment The Mounted Infantry formed the bulk of Colley's cavalry force; they were drawn from infantry battalions, and retained the frocks of their parent units with buff or brown cord riding breeches and bandoliers, and carried Martini-Henry carbines.

F2: General Sir George Colley Colley's personal uniform, depicted in a number of contemporary engravings, and in a water-colour of Ingogo by the war artist Charles Fripp, seems to have consisted of a patrol jacket and helmet with conspicuous puggree and the spike retained. During the assault on Majuba, Colley wore tennis shoes for comfort during the climb.

F3: Private, 3/60th Rifles The 60th wore rifle green uniforms – the dye at this period was so dark that it appeared almost black – and black equipment. They seem to have retained the black 'Maltese cross' regimental badge on their helmets.

G: THE AFTERMATH OF MAJUBA, 27 FEBRUARY 1881

G1: Seaman, Royal Naval Brigade Colley's assault force included a number of sailors, who wore Navy uniform with infantry-style ammunition belts and accoutrements. Although Navy landings usually wore straw 'sennet' hats, all contemporary sketches of the Majuba action show them wearing infantry-style foreign service helmets.

G2: Boer commandant The appearance of the Boers had not significantly altered since the 1860s, although the advent of metal cartridges meant that looped bandoliers had largely replaced the older cartouche belts. Although the Boers were armed with a number of different types of rifles – from Snider breech-loaders to British Martini-Henrys – the Westley-Richards falling-block rifle was particularly popular at this period.

G3: Private, 92nd Highlanders The 92nd, fresh from Lord Roberts' successful campaign in Afghanistan, wore the khaki-dyed frocks which were popular in India, but not generally worn elsewhere. Their equipment, however, consisted of the old pre-Valise pouch and cartouche-belt.

G4: Officer, 92nd Highlanders Officers of the Indian contingent wore variations of the Sam Browne belt, which had been popular in Afghanistan. After the battle, the Boers were anxious to acquire souvenirs, and the sporrans and officers' broadswords of the 92nd attracted their particular attention.

H: THE FINAL CONQUEST OF THE TRANSVAAL

H1: Transvaal African, 1870s-1890s Although traditional dress continued until the end of the 19th century, most African groups – especially those who had been drawn into the white economy – took to the field in a mixture of European and African clothes. By the 1870s, firearms were common in African armies; the appearance of this man would have been similar to groups as different as the Pedi, Transvaal Ndebele and Venda.

H2: Swazi warrior, 1870s For three of four decades in the middle of the 19th century, the Swazi kingdom allied itself to the SAR, and supplied contingents to support Boer commandos against common enemies, such as the Pedi. Photographs and sketches confirm that the Swazi wore much of their ceremonial costume into action; this was generally similar to Zulu style, but with particular differences,

ABOVE **Chief Mmalebogo of the Ganawa, photographed after his surrender at Blouberg, 1894. He is wearing a brown corduroy suit, indicative of the extent to which European culture had penetrated even groups hostile to white authority by the 1890s. (Museum Africa)**

such as the feather types in the headdress, and the kilt around the waist (this man has a red trade blanket wrapped around him). Swazi weapons were also similar to Zulu types, although their shields tended to be rounder.

H3: Gunner, Transvaal Staat Artillerie, 1890s The Staats Artillerie were one of the few uniformed units raised by the SAR, and they fought in several of the campaigns of the 1880s and 90s. They wore a light coloured uniform with pale blue piping, although many men preferred to wear civilian hats and trousers. The Transvaal imported large numbers of Martini-Henrys in the 1890s, and these were issued to both the regular units, and some commandos.

RIGHT **Members of the short-lived Johannesburg Vrijwillige Corps demobilising at the end of the Venda campaign of 1898. This semi-professional body was part of the SAR's attempts to create a permanent army; the uniforms were of light corduroy with black braiding.**

GLOSSARY

Afrikaner - literally, white African; European settler of South Africa
agterryers - literally, after-riders, African servants who worked for the Boers
amabutho (sing. *ibutho*) - Zulu regiments recruited according to the age of members
BaSotho - Sotho adherents of Chief Moshoeshoe
Boer - literally, farmer
Burgerkryg - Boer civil war, 1862-64
commando - Boer armed militia (Afrikaans: *kommando*)
difaqane - see mfecane
Ganawa - a Sotho group defeated at Blouberg in 1894
Griqua - mixed-race descendants of the Khoi people of the Cape
Harde Emigranten - reactionary Boer survivors of the Great Trek
impi - body of armed men (in some instances, also means 'war')
Kgatla - African group settled in the Soutpansberg Mountains
Khoi - African people of the Cape area
laager - defensive wagon circle
Lemba - African group of the Soutpansberg Mountains
looper - small bag of shot
Matabele - see Ndebele
mfecane - the crushing, the upheaval among African peoples in the early 19th century
Ndebele - name given to groups from the coast who had settled in the interior
Pedi - powerful Sotho kingdom in the eastern Transvaal
Shona - African group north of the Limpopo River
Tswana - The western branch of the Sotho people
Venda - African settlers of the Soutpansberg Mountains
Volksraad - Transvaal parliament
voorlooper - driver of an ox-team

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