



**The South African
Military History Society**

Die Suid-Afrikaanse Krygshistoriese Vereniging

**Military History Journal
Vol 11 No 3/4 - October 1999**

The Brandwater Basin and Golden Gate surrenders, 1900

by H W Kinsey

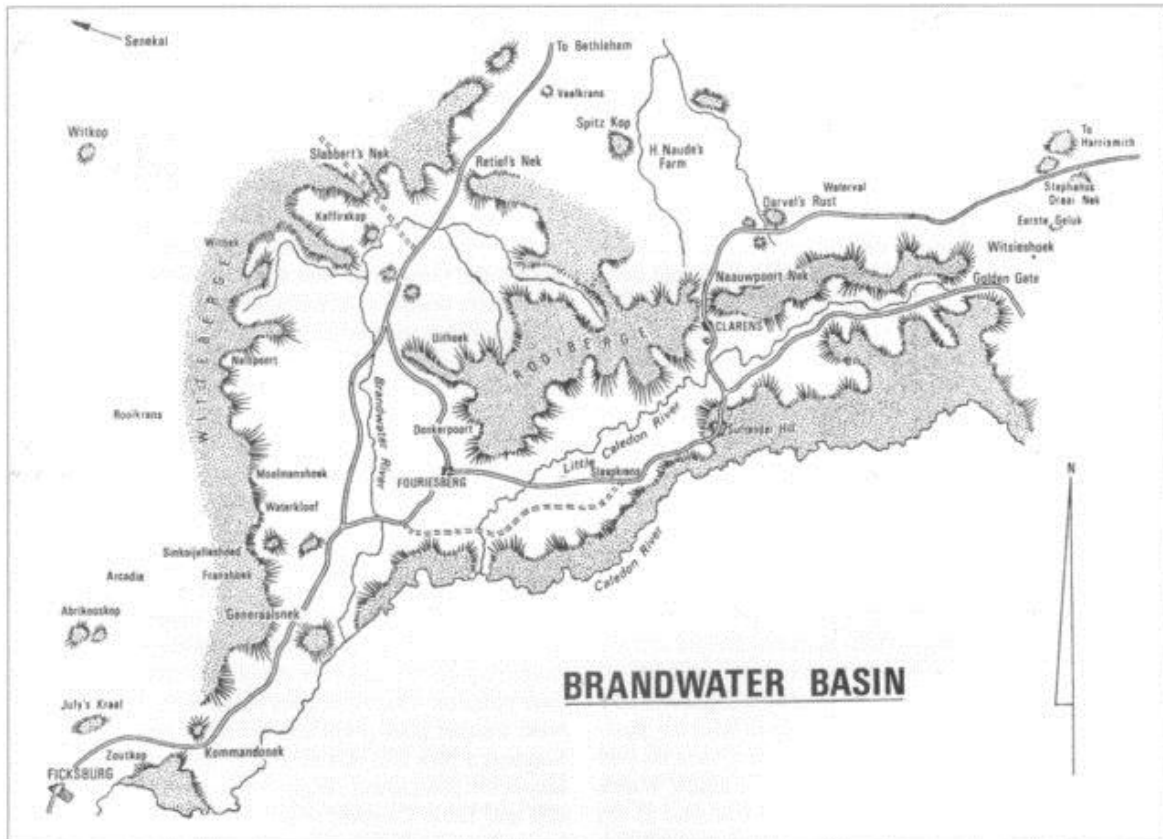
Nick Kinsey is a former editor of the Military History Journal and a member of the Johannesburg Branch of the SA Military History Society

In order to appreciate more fully the operations which culminated in the surrender of General Martinus Prinsloo at Surrender Hill in the Brandwater Basin on 30 July 1900, and the surrender of a number of Boer commandos at the Golden Gate shortly thereafter, it is necessary to deal in some detail with the British troop movements which coincided with the retirement of the Boer forces into the Brandwater Basin and their entrapment there. This retreat of the Boers had followed upon the successful advance from Lindley of Major-Generals RAP Clements and AH Paget with the 12th and 20th brigades.

In view of the advance of General Hunter southwards towards Bethlehem mentioned below, General CR de Wet had decided to abandon that town and to fall back on the mountain strongholds surrounding the Brandwater Basin, whither the bulk of the burgher forces of the Orange Free State had already retired. Also, in order to understand the situation better, it is necessary to comment on the magnificent selling of the Brandwater Basin, and here the author makes no apology for quoting extensively from that monumental work *The Times History of the War*, Vol IV, edited by Leo Amery, which is, in fact, the Anglo-Boer War researcher's 'bible':

'The country to which the Boers had now retired may be described as a huge horse-shoe formed by the Wittebergen range, which extends round from Commando Nek opposite Ficksburg, by Moolman's Hoek, Nelspoort, and Witnek to Slabbert's and Retief's Neks on the north, and then by the Roodebergen range, which continues from Retief's Nek in a south-easterly direction through Naauwpoort Nek and Golden Gate to Generaal's Kop, a magnificent mountain mass which connects the main Drakensberg ridge with the Roodebergen; the circumference of the horse-shoe measured this way is roughly seventy-five miles [120 km]. The baseline of the horse-shoe, about forty miles in length [64 km], is formed by the Caledon River, separating the Free State from Basutoland. The principal gates of this great citadel are four - Commando, Slabbert, Retief and Naauwpoort Neks; but there are also a few posterns, such as Witnek and Nelspoort, Bamboeshoek and the Golden Gate, by which at need scouts could steal out or an enemy could creep in. Inside this well-guarded enclosure the land is again cut up into deep chines and valleys by the fantastic cleavings of the plateau and by the three rivers - the Brandwater, the Little Caledon, and the Caledon - which generously water this fa-

voured country, named after the river which runs through the central valley, the Brandwater Basin.'



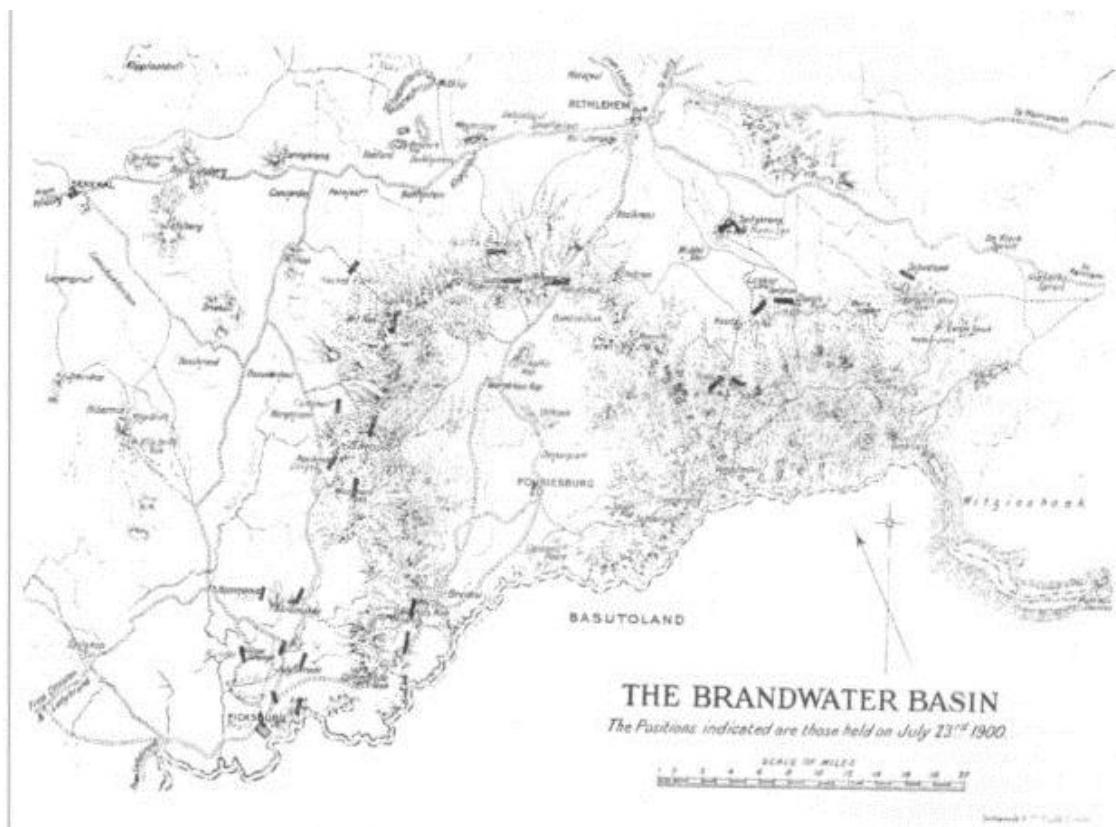
Map of the Brandwater basin, prepared by the South African National Museum of Military History for a Military History society trip in May 1976.

This great valley or retreat seemed to many of the commandos to be an ideal place where they could rest a while regardless of the enemy without, and here came the bulk of the fighting force of the Orange Free State. There was President Steyn himself, together with General Christiaan de Wet, Piet de Wet, PJ Fourie, Philip Botha, Cmdt JH Olivier, Gen CC Froneman, Steenkamp, Dominee Roux, General Crowther, Cmdt Haasbroek and General Martinus Prinsloo. There was also Vilonel, the former commandant of Senekal, who was awaiting sentence as a traitor to the cause.

On 27 June 1900, Major-General Sir Archibald Hunter had started out from Heidelberg with Lieutenant-General Ian Hamilton's column, which consisted of the 2nd and 3rd Cavalry brigades under Brigadier-General RG Broadwood and Brigadier-General JRP Gordon, Brigadier-General CP Ridley's Mounted Infantry Brigade, the 21st Brigade under Major-General Bruce Hamilton, together with certain Royal Field Artillery and Royal Horse Artillery batteries, two 5-inch guns and six 'Pom-Poms'. The force consisted of 7 728 officers and men, 3 942 horses and 32 guns. Two days later he crossed the Vaal and was joined at Frankfort by Major-General HA Macdonald with three battalions of the Highland Brigade, the 15th Field Battery and a number of mounted units; altogether about 4 008 officers and men, 1 801 horses and six guns. General Hunter reached Reitz on 7 July 1900, where he left General Bruce Hamilton with certain troops. On 9 July, he arrived in Bethlehem, where Maj-General RAP Clements with the 12th Brigade and Major-General AH Paget with the 20th Brigade were already in occupation. On 11 July General Hunter received orders to assume command of the combined forces in the north-east of the

Free State: The 8th Division and the Colonial Division under Lieutenant-General Sir Leslie Rundle; the columns of Generals Clements and Paget; and all the troops which had accompanied him from Heidelberg. He then proposed to close in on the gathered Boers from the west and north simultaneously and to close all the passes into the Brandwater Basin. Like General Rundle, Hunter had been in the Egyptian Army, where in ten years he had risen from the rank of captain to that of major-general, chiefly on account of his personal courage and his skill in dealing with men.

The closing of the net was in itself a complicated and interesting series of military operations. General Rundle, with the 8th Division, moved in through Commando Nek and Generaal's Nek in the south with very little resistance, while Generals Clements and Paget closed in through Slabbert's Nek, where a stiff action took place on 23 and 24 July. This fight involved mainly men from the Royal Munster Fusiliers, the Royal Irish Regiment, the Wiltshire Regiment and Brabant's Horse. The British troops attacked over a wide front of about four miles (6,4 km) as the neck itself and the ridges astride it and to the west of it were heavily manned by the Boers, both on the crests of the ridges and in trenches on the lower ridges opposite the road. Although the Munsters, who were part of the main attack on the neck itself were supported by artillery, both they and the men on the right of the front were unable to make much progress on 23 July owing to the unusually heavy fire from the Boers. However, scouts of Brabant's Horse on the extreme right ascertained that a commanding summit on the western end of the front was unoccupied, and they succeeded in taking this position. The result was that the Boers became outflanked and evacuated the neck on the following morning and retreated towards Fouriesburg. The British losses, all of which occurred on 23 July, were eight killed and 34 wounded. Capt W Gloster and six men of the Royal Irish Regiment were amongst those killed.



Positions held on 23 July, 1900. (Amery, The Times History of the War in South Afri-

ca, Vol IV, p 342.

On 22 July 1900, General Hunter, with the three battalions of General Macdonald's Highland Brigade (namely, the Black Watch, the Seaforths and the Highland Light infantry), together with men from Rimington's Guides and Lovat's Scouts and a number of guns, moved out from Bethlehem on the Naauwpoort Nek road in a ruse to deceive the Boers. He then turned sharply westwards towards Retief's Nek and was joined en route by the Sussex Regiment and another artillery battery. The neck, which he proposed to attack on the morning of 23 July, is very narrow between the cliffs on either side and seemed an almost impregnable position. The Boers under the command of General Martinus Prinsloo were well concealed both in the natural crevices on the cliffs and in trenches across the neck itself but they had been weakened by having a party sent towards Spitzkrans as a result of Hunter's ploy. General Hunter attacked with a heavy artillery bombardment while the Highland regiments, Rimington's Guides and Lovat's Scouts moved forward on the left flank and the Sussex Regiment on the right of the neck towards the steep conical hill, called Tuifelberg or Spitzkop. Although the infantry managed to gain footholds on the ridges below the cliffs they were unable in some cases to hold these positions by virtue of the heavy fire from the Boers. However, the Black Watch managed to capture the main ridge on the extreme left of the advance. That night some men of Lovat's Scouts discovered that one of the high hills between the neck and the ridge captured by the Black Watch was unoccupied. They guided one company of the Highland Light Infantry on to it. However, as they were unable to hold the position, General Hunter concentrated all his efforts on that sector of the front, with the result that the Black Watch and the Seaforths were unable to advance around to the rear of the Boer positions. By 15:00 on 24 July the Boers were in full flight towards Fouriesburg and did not offer any further resistance as General Prinsloo had heard of the capture of Slabbert's Nek and did not wish to be caught between the two British forces. The two days' fighting had cost the British twelve killed and 81 wounded. Most of these losses had been sustained on the first day.

Major-General Bruce Hamilton, with the 21st Brigade and supporting artillery, and Major-General H A Macdonald with battalions of the Highland Brigade, together with supporting artillery and mounted units, had been charged with closing and holding Naauwpoort Nek to the north of the Braudwater Basin and the Golden Gate exit from the basin to the north-east, and this was successfully completed by 24 July. This movement is examined in more detail later. The ring was completed and by 24 July 1900 the Boers were hemmed in on all sides. Unfortunately for the British, however, General C R de Wet and President Steyn, with about 2 600 men, four guns and 460 wagons, had managed to escape over Slabbert's Nek on the night of 15 July. Meanwhile, the Boers were not entirely happy in their mountain fortress. Dissensions, which had been latent for some time, broke out and there was considerable trouble over the problem of the election of officers and particularly that of assistant commandant-in-chief. There were three main contenders for the post, namely, Martinus Prinsloo, Piet de Wet and Paul Roux, but the choice ultimately fell between Prinsloo and Roux. At about the same time, General de Wet and President Steyn began to have grave doubts as to the wisdom of remaining in their mountain fortress, particularly as the exits from the basin were being closed. The mountainous terrain of the whole Basin favoured the attacking British and was not suited to the Boer mode of tactics. Their chief strength, the mobility which they enjoyed on open plains and in low hills, was lost in the cramped position in which they now found them-

selves. In addition, the holdings of the basin with all the exits closed would not be of any strategic value to them.

Here it might be useful to explain the problem more fully by considering the road system within the Brandwater Basin. In the centre of the basin is the village of Fouriesburg from which all the roads and tracks in use at that time radiated. One road goes south-west to Commando Nek; another goes north and branches into two roads to Slabbert's Nek and Retief's Nek; and a third goes east across the Slaap-kranz range - the watershed of the Caledon and Little Caledon rivers - for about ten miles (16 km) after which it forms two branches. The one road turns north to Naauwpoort Nek, while the other goes east to the Golden Gate. Another road, a by-path, joins the latter road some miles further on towards the Golden Gate. To settle the differences amongst the Boers in the basin, a secret council of war or *krijgsraad*, consisting of all the senior burgher officers, was held. The meeting was presided over by President Steyn and a decision was taken that the Boer forces would be divided into three columns and that each should attempt to break out of the basin. The first column, under General de Wet, accompanied by President Steyn and Generals P Botha and Piet de Wet and about 2 600 men, was to start on 15 May[July?]. The second, under Paul Roux with Generals PJ Fourie and Froneman and about 2 000 men, was to start a day later, and the third one was to follow later under General Crowther with about 500 men. The remaining men under General Martinus Prinsloo were to hold the passes against the British. The plan, which had not been made known to the rank and file, had considerable merit and had it been carried out completely, the British forces would have been kept fully occupied by the escaping Boers and held back by Prinsloo's men.

In the event, however, only the first column under General de Wet managed to escape on the night of 15 July. His laager, which had been in position at Kaffir Kop between Retief's Nek and Slabbert's Nek, moved through Slabbert's Nek in a convoy of about 400 wagons and carts. This escape is described in the *Times History* as follows:

'Just after sunset on 15th July De Wet broke out with Steyn and his column and a convoy of 400 wagons and carts from Slabbert's Nek. There was no English force at the nek, and though English camp fires could be seen on the Senekal road further north, this huge column, extending over 5 000 yards [4 572 m] of road, passed within a mile of them so silently as not to attract attention. De Wet, indeed, had drilled those under his own immediate command to a most unwanted discipline on the march. The column was formed like a regular army, with an advance guard of the scouts and a few burghers followed by the President and his staff with their wagons, and De Wet's and General Botha's wagons; next followed the artillery - four guns and a Maxim - the convoy of wagons and Cape carts with the burghers riding on each side; and lastly a burgher rear-guard.'

This escape must also be seen in the light of the fact that the Slabbert's Nek exit had not yet been closed. Nevertheless, it was a bold move well executed.

There was much criticism of De Wet and President Steyn for abandoning the remaining burghers in the basin and, owing mainly to the lack of an appointed commandant-in-chief, the rest of the plan was not carried out. It soon became evident that, as long as the different commandos were holding the passes which had been assigned to them, the difficulties of a divided command were not serious. However, once the British troops had moved into the basin both from the south and from the

north and all the exits, other than that at Golden Gate, had been closed, it became virtually impossible to organize an orderly retreat in the chaos that then arose. As the reader is no doubt aware, the Boer military system did not provide for a regular or proper route of promotion, and any hoof commandant in an area at any time could assume command. Since both Prinsloo and Roux - men of equal authority - were left in the basin, a problem existed. Therefore it had become necessary, imperative, for the Boers to appoint a new commandant-in-chief or hoof commandant and, after much debate and discussion about the two main contenders, Prinsloo was elected at a *krijgsraad* at Slaapkranz on 27 July. By this time, valuable time had been lost and the escape plan had not been completed. It should be borne in mind that an enormous question of logistics had to be resolved in successfully organizing the escape of such a large force.

Paul Roux, who was a minister at Senekal, was much younger than Prinsloo and had drawn attention to himself and his commando in Natal by making useful suggestions about the organization of the forces and by his devotion to the wounded. After General PH de Villiers had become disabled at Biddulphsberg, Roux had been appointed *veg-generaal* in spite of some jealousy from other commandants. He was a man of great courage, but though a stout fighter and a good general, he is said to have never carried a weapon in his hands.

Martinus Prinsloo had distinguished himself in the Basuto War of 1866 and was a man of much importance in his district of Wepener. He was wealthy, an elder of the church and, at the beginning of the Boer War, he had been in command of the Free State contingent in Natal. At Lindley, he and Piet de Wet had been rivals for the command. He had been made a hoof-commandant by President Steyn in the Brandwater Basin. However, although he was brave and patriotic, he was past his prime.

In the meantime, the British generals Bruce Hamilton and Hector Macdonald had been charged with closing and holding Naauwpoort Nek to the north of the Brandwater Basin and the Golden Gate exit in the north-east. The movement of these generals and their troops is quite an interesting tale in itself. On 20 July 1900, Bruce Hamilton proceeded with the 1st Battalion Cameron Highlanders of the 21st Brigade (consisting of the Derbyshire and Sussex Regiments, the Cameron Highlanders, and the infantry and mounted infantry of the City Imperial Volunteers), the 7th Mounted Infantry and the 82nd Battery Royal Field Artillery, to occupy Spitzkop, about nine miles (14,5 km) to the south-east of Bethlehem. The kop was taken and secured by the following day with the loss of three men of the Cameron Highlanders killed, and three officers and sixteen men wounded. The dead lie buried slightly to the east of Spitzkrans - one of the heights of the Spitzkop complex - on the boundary fence between the farms of Spitzkrans and Mara and may be seen a few yards east of the road between Spitzkrans and Darvel's Rust. The graves of the three Cameron men are surmounted by a granite monument erected in 1934 by the Bethlehem MOths at the instance of the Rev R F Strathern, Rector of St Augustine's Church, Bethlehem, and with the help and advice of Mr J S Viljoen of the farm Spitzkrans. General Hector Macdonald was despatched to Naauwpoort Nek on 25 July to join up with Bruce Hamilton and the combined forces bivouacked at Middelvlei. Macdonald established himself at David Naude's farm and had effectively closed Naauwpoort Nek by 26 July, after meeting with considerable resistance there.

As the only exit from the Brandwater Basin then still open to the Boers was the Golden Gate, Generals Macdonald and Bruce Hamilton marched eastwards to Darvel's Rust, about 10 miles (16 km) from Naauwpoort Nek. There they bivouacked

on the night of 27 July. On the next day, 28 July 1900, Bruce Hamilton moved eastwards with the 1st Cameron Highlanders, four guns of 82nd Battery Royal Field Artillery, and one 5-inch gun, Lovat's Scouts, and the 7th Mounted Infantry. (The 7th Corps Mounted Infantry was under the command of Lt-Col F G T Bambridge and included the 7th Battalion Mounted Infantry, made up of Norfolk, Lincoln, Scottish Borderers and Hampshire companies, and also Rimington's Guides). These forces moved the enemy from successive positions and reached Stephanus Draai by nightfall. The Lovat's Scouts returned to Darvel's Rust and Macdonald released two more guns of the 82nd Battery, RFA, together with the 5th Mounted Infantry, Burma Mounted Infantry, and the Royal Sussex Regiment of the 21st Brigade, to join Bruce Hamilton.

Bruce Hamilton, as yet unaware of the reinforcements that were being sent to him, moved forward on 29 July with his small force of the 1st Cameron Highlanders (600 men), four guns of the Royal Field Artillery, and the 7th Mounted Infantry (250 men). The country was difficult and the Boers opposed his advance. However, he was reinforced at midday by the Royal Sussex Regiment and gained a bivouac at Eerste Geluk, some five miles (8 km) north of Solomon Raath's farm at Klerksvlei. He had two stiff fights at two necks near the farm Sebastopol. The mounted infantry under Lt-Col Bambridge showed vigour in clearing the Boers off the hills on the left flank, but the brunt of the fighting fell to the Camerons. It was during these operations that Captain E Q Robertson, 1st King's Own Scottish Borderers, was killed on 29 July 1900. His grave, seen for many years alongside the stream below the farmhouse on the farm Uitkyk, has now been moved to Bethlehem.

It is perhaps interesting to follow the movements of the Royal Sussex Regiment before they joined Bruce Hamilton. The regiment left from the vicinity of Retief's Nek, west of Naauwpoort Nek and one of the northern exits from the Brandwater Basin, on 27 July 1900. They proceeded to Naauwpoort Nek and camped that night at Hebron. The next day, on 28 July, the regiment continued their march, passing Little Spitzkop (today known as Loskop) on their left and camped that night at Groendraai, having covered fifteen miles (24 km). On 29 July, the regiment moved eastwards and joined Bruce Hamilton.

On the same day, 29 July, General Hector Macdonald returned to Naude's farm with his troops and from there reconnoitred Naauwpoort Nek, which he found to have been deserted by the enemy. Accordingly, he occupied the pass with a garrison of the Bedfordshire Regiment, four guns of the 76th Battery Royal Field Artillery, and Prince Alfred's Volunteer Guard and returned with the remainder of his troops to Darvel's Rust. At 17:00 he received a message from Maj-Gen Sir Archibald Hunter instructing him to suspend hostilities unless he was attacked. This was in view of the unconditional surrender of General Martinus Prinsloo, which will be dealt with in more detail later.

Inside the Brandwater Basin, the great majority of burghers were only too glad to be relieved of the intolerable strain of the last month of being harried by the British and surrendered willingly. On the morning of 30 July 1900, General Hunter received the surrender of Generals Prinsloo and Crowther and of the Ficksburg and Ladybrand commandos. The surrender took place on what would become known as 'Surrender Hill', a long and high, almost flat-topped hill on what is today the farm Coerland, which adjoins Damascus Farm and Verliesfontein (ironically meaning 'loss fountain'). A more magnificent or dramatic setting for a formal surrender could hardly be imagined and it was there that General Hunter had established his headquarters. The Scots Guards, the Munster Fusiliers and the Royal Irish were formed up as a

guard of honour to receive the Boers. General Paget was also present with mounted troops and a few of Brabant's Horse. The artillery took up a position on the right of the guard of honour and the Union Jack was unfurled. The bands of the Scots Guards and the other two regiments played alternately while awaiting the arrival of the burghers. The following is the scene as described by F C Moffett in his book *With the Eighth Division*:

'The first prominent Boers to appear were Prinsloo, De Villiers and Crowther - fine looking men; they were preceded by Sir Godfrey and Lady Lagden, from Basutoland, who had come to witness the final scene. Then followed the commandos, who threw down their arms and ammunition with a certain effect of swagger in front of the guns. The whole scene was most romantic ... In the background were huge mountain masses standing out in the clear morning air, and from these came the various commandos winding down the steep mountain paths to the valley below. They were a motley lot - old and young men - some mere boys; all had two horses each at least, but many had three, the spare ones being used for baggage, which consisted of pots, pans, bedding, blankets, etc. There were a considerable number of natives among them, all of whom were mounted, though scantily clad. A huge number of wagons and Cape-carts followed, in which were many women, the wives of the burghers.'

Trooper William Corner, in his most fascinating book *The Story of the 34th Company (Middlesex) Imperial Yeomanry* also tells of the surrender and of the brawny artillery smiths with their anvils and sledgehammers for the destruction of the surrendered arms. His company was called upon to furnish guards for the surrendered burghers, and he comments as follows:

'We were not allowed to talk with the prisoners. They appeared eager to do so. They seemed most anxious to glean some information as to their ultimate destination. The prisoners, one and all, looked neat and, for the most part, fairly clean. They did not appear as if they suffered hardships beyond the ordinary ones attendant upon long treks. Of saddles and horses they had a good supply, and were better mounted - if on smaller horses - than we were. They were in civilian clothes, without uniform or uniformity, but coloured blankets and shawls lent an occasional bright touch to their assemblage. Some few were belted, but, apart from these particulars, there was little to mark that they had been a military body. They held about them more of the appearance of the hunter than of the soldier, and many of the older, big-bearded men reminded me of venerable pioneers of the western prairies of America. As they halted in the road, holding in check their restless little ponies, a tall, grave-looking man with a narrow, long, sandy beard, rode down their line, shaking hands here and there in the ranks. As he turned at the head of the little column nearly every man lifted - for a moment - his right hand and ejaculated a single word. I asked what it was, and I was told that Prinsloo was saying goodbye, and that the word was "General".'

Incidentally, William Corner was able to choose a pony from the spare horses the Boers were obliged to hand over, and he was able to take from an old Boer a little bay pony which he named 'Prinsloo' and which carried him for many months thereafter.

The surrender at Slaapkranz went on for several days and the prisoners of war were despatched in parties of two hundred to the town of Fouriesburg under the escort of the Imperial Yeomanry.

When General Bruce Hamilton at Eerste Geluk, near Sebastopol, received orders to cease hostilities, he immediately sent flags of truce to the Boers who had gathered at Solomon Raath's farm at Klerksvlei following news of the surrender of General Prinsloo. Commandant Olivier, who it will be remembered had left through the Golden Gate exit, was apprehended by one of General Macdonald's staff officers about eight miles (12,8 km) along the way to Harrismith. He promised to remain where he was until he had heard from Prinsloo, but did not keep his word and moved on to Harrismith with all speed. Bruce Hamilton was too far off to catch him up and, on 31 July, moved forward towards the Golden Gate exit, sending word in the afternoon that he wished to see Major LE du Moulin of the Sussex Regiment. He instructed Major du Moulin to ride on to Raath's farm at Klerksvlei, about four miles (6,4 km) further on, where he was to receive the surrender of five commandos. General Bruce Hamilton informed Du Moulin of the terms of the surrender, which was to be entirely unconditional, with the reservation that private property should be respected and that each burgher should be allowed a horse to ride to his destination, wherever that might be.

Accordingly, Major du Moulin, accompanied by Lieutenant R Bellamy of the Sussex Regiment, a mounted escort, and one or two other officers hurried off in the direction of Klerksvlei as the afternoon wore on. After crossing the Klerkspruit at the drift they came upon a substantial, well-to-do farm of considerable area, with a large orchard and several outhouses. This was Klerksvlei, owned by Mr Solomon Raath. and it was around this farm in all directions, as far as one could see in the fast fading light, that the Boers were encamped; the whole neighbourhood was covered with men, horses, wagons and bullocks.'

Major de Moulin, in his book *Two Years on Trek, Being some Account of the Royal Sussex Regiment in South Africa*, gives a graphic description of the proceedings which followed. He describes how he rode up to the farm, sent for five commandants, and arranged for the collection of all the arms and ammunition, and the horses and ponies, and had these placed under guard for the night. His account continues:

'Old Mr Raats [sic] was very civil, providing a room and preparing supper for us and looking after our horses; there were quite a number of Boers staying at the farm also, among them being six or seven of the biggest men that I had ever seen; they were very tall, enormously broad shouldered and stout in proportion, and quite filled the dining room at the farm when they all came in at once. The Boer laager was not all composed of fighting men by any means; there were large numbers of non-combatants - women, children and Kaffirs [sic], hangers-on who attended to the feeding of the commandos or drove sheep and cattle, and other nondescripts who did not belong to any commando but who accompanied the Boers, all the same. Then there were a number of what they called "Trek Boers"; these were Boers with their families, cattle, wagons, horses and all their belongings, who had quitted their farms and were moving or trekking with the commandos; these men had some splendid wagons and teams of magnificent oxen with them. There were many Boers who spoke perfect English.

For several hours that night the Boers collected in groups round their camp fires, singing hymns, and it was late before everything was quiet, and we were able to sleep. Mr Raats [sic] had provided us with the guest chamber of his house, and this room was fully furnished in the most elaborate style, including even a bath. Our first step had been to throw up the narrow window and ventilate the room as much as possible; we should have preferred to sleep in the open, but as we had no kit except what we stood up in, this was not advisable.

Soon after daybreak the next morning the collecting of rifles was proceeded with; numbers of Boers came crowding in from the hills around, eager to surrender their arms and ammunition, and in a few hours we had accumulated a large heap on the ground. The ammunition we filled into bags and loaded on wagons, but the rifles were placed in a great pile and burned, as we had no means of carrying such a large number; they were rendered quite useless, as the barrels were made soft by the heat, and all the foresights, backsights and other attachments were melted off.

The Boers told us that they had left nine or ten wagons, mostly loaded with rifle ammunition, on the road about three miles off [4,8 km]; the bullocks had been taken away by the Harrismith Commando, and the wagons were left there with a few Boers in charge; they also said the road was terrible, and that it would take a long time to bring in the wagons, even if bullocks were sent out for this purpose.

A report to this effect being made to the General, the Engineer officer, Lieut Evans, was sent out to destroy the wagons. This was done during the day by blowing them up; unfortunately, owing to some Kaffir [sic] putting a bag of powder in close proximity to the fuse, a premature explosion took place, and the old sergeant of the Royal Engineers section, Sergeant Munn, was somewhat seriously injured, while Lieut Evans himself was cut about a good deal.'

Major du Moulin then describes in great detail the arrangements which were made to implement the surrender of the five commandos and to prepare them for their movement to the nearest railhead, the despatch from the area of the 'Trek-Boers', the sorting out of all the wagons, carts, horses and livestock, and the disposal of the surrendered ammunition. The Boer commandants, who were all men of standing and position, were most courteous in their address and manner of speaking on all occasions. They appeared to be honourable men and accustomed to being treated with a great deal of deference by the burghers. On the same morning, 1 August 1900, General Bruce Hamilton rode over and had an interview with the five commandants, ascertaining that they understood thoroughly the conditions upon which their surrender had been accepted - that each burgher was to be allowed a horse to ride to his destination, and that all private property was to be respected. The Boers, unaccustomed to travelling on foot, would have done anything to avoid being compelled to walk. They were amazed at the marching ability of the British soldier and frankly admitted that they could have done nothing of the sort.

The author visited Klerksvlei on 8 March 1978, and was shown over the house and given an account of its history by Mrs Elize Crowther, the wife of Col Robert (Bob) F Crowther, owner of the farm and the grandson of Commandant Robert Crowther. Local legend had it that the surrender of the commandos was signed on the front stoep of the house, which is certainly large enough for this purpose, alt-

though the various accounts do not make this clear. It is also believed that a portrait of Queen Victoria in the house at the time saved it from being burned by the British later in the war as was the fate of most of the farmhouses in the area. There is no doubt as to the authenticity of the house as the inscriptions '1884 SJA Raath' and 'Klerk Vly' were carved into the stone lintels of the two front doors, while the fireplace in the main reception room or *voorkamer* is inscribed with the names 'S J A Raath' and 'S E J Odendaal' (the latter being Raath's second wife). In the passage was an old-fashioned photograph of Solomon Raath.

In his account, Major du Moulin also mentions that most of the captured wagons had been previously captured from British convoys and that a field gun of 'U' Battery, Royal Horse Artillery, which had been captured at Sannah's Post, was also recovered. The ammunition which could not be carried away for lack of transport was burnt.

The march of the captured commandos commenced the following day, on 2 August, and the men eventually arrived at Bethlehem, Senekal and Winburg on 12 August. With the exception of about 105 old men and young boys who were issued with railway passes to enable them to return to their homes, the commandos were sent by train to Cape Town and, subsequently, shipped overseas to Ceylon. The net total of the five commandos captured at the Golden Gate was 1 544 men.

To return to the situation inside the Brandwater Basin, some time passed between the formal surrender on 30 July and the actual surrender of all the Boer forces within the basin. Many Boers hid away in the caves and alleys of the basin and the surrounding mountains, but several of these were brought in and large stocks of ammunition were destroyed by parties of Imperial Yeomanry during the ensuing weeks.

There are varying accounts of the total number of men who were captured, but, according to the *Times History*, 4 314 men had surrendered by 9 August as a result of all the combined operations. Three guns were captured, as well as 2 800 head of cattle, 4 000 sheep, and between 5 000 and 6 000 good horses, while two million rounds of ammunition were destroyed.

In conclusion, the author would like to quote the following summing up of operations by the *Times History*:

'In the course of this description of the Wittebergen operations an attempt has been made to point out the errors made on both sides. From the English point of view, of course, that which chiefly dims the glory is the escape of De Wet, owing to Hunter's delay at Bethlehem; though it may be said on the other side that if De Wet had been present it is doubtful if the Boers in the basin would have been brought to book so easily. Again, the escape of the Harrismith and Vrede commandos might conceivably have been prevented if the intelligence had been better and if Macdonald had not allowed a day to be wasted on the 27th after his success in clearing Naauwpoort Nek. Nevertheless, the Prinsloo surrender was one of the greatest military achievements of the war. When it is remembered that Hunter was working with a staff entirely strange to him, in a country which he had never seen before, and under great physical difficulties in communicating his orders to the various columns under him, the achievement appears all the greater. His final plan for a combined attack on all the passes was admirably conceived and carried out with remarkable exactitude, considering that the operations extended over nearly a hundred miles of country. After the escape of De Wet, his one mistake was in not

closing Golden Gate soon enough. On the other hand, although the Boers surrendering here exceeded the number of those who surrendered at Paardeberg, the actual effect on the course of the war was not so decisive. Undoubtedly the most active and determined of the Free State fighters escaped with De Wet and Steyn and Olivier, and those who surrendered included many men already tired of the war. Moreover, while Paardeberg was the turning point in the war, the Brandwater surrender was to the Boers merely an incident which confirmed them in their already fixed determination to fight by guerrilla methods rather than in large masses.'

Bibliography

- Amery, L S (ed), *The Times History of the War in South Africa, 1899-1902*, (London, 1909).
- Corner, W, *The Story of the 34th Company (Middlesex) Imperial Yeomanry*, (London, 1902).
- Davitt, M, *The Boer Fight for Freedom* (New York and London, 1902).
- Du Moulin, Lt-Col L E, *Two years on Trek, Being some account of the Royal Sussex Regiment in South Africa*, (London, 1907).
- Edmeades, Lt-Col J F, *Some Historical Records of the West Kent (Queen's Own) Yeomanry, 1794-1909*, (London, 1909).
- Maurice, Gen Sir F, *History of the War in South Africa, 1899-1902*, (London, 1906).
- Moffett, F C, *With the Eighth Division*, (London, 1903).
- Philips, L M, *With Rimington*, (London, 1901).
- Scott, G H Q, and McDonell, G L, *The Record of the Mounted Infantry of the City Imperial Volunteers*, (London 1902).
- Wetton, T C, *With Rundle's Eighth Division in South Africa*, (London).
- The South African War Record of the 1st Battalion, Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders, 1900-1902*, (Inverness, 1903).
- 79th News*, Journal of the Cameron Highlanders.