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**RECONSIDERATION OF THE BATTLE OF  
SANDFONTEIN: THE FIRST PHASE OF THE  
GERMAN SOUTH WEST AFRICA  
CAMPAIGN, AUGUST TO SEPTEMBER 1914**

**By**

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**Dissertation/thesis submitted in fulfilment of the  
requirements for the award of the degree Master of  
Arts in History**

**Department of Historical Studies**

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**University of Cape Town**

**2003**

**Compulsory Declaration**

**This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and been cited and referenced.**

Signed by candidate

DATE

14 February 2003

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## **ABSTRACT**

**Thesis/dissertation written by Rodney C. Warwick, post-graduate student in the Department of Historical Studies, University of Cape Town, submitted on 14 February 2003, in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree Master of Arts in History.**

This thesis investigates the first phase of the German South West Africa military campaign during August - September 1914, conducted by the Union Defence Force on behalf of the South African government and British Empire. Its primary focus concerns the battle of Sandfontein on 26 September, and it attempts to re-explain and reinterpret events at this military engagement, with the specific emphasis upon trying to enlarge our understanding of why the defeat occurred, revealing the muted controversies surrounding it, and analysing how nearly three hundred UDF troops endured the horror of being trapped and shelled for a full day on a desert koppie. Besides describing, contextualising, utilising, and challenging the older historiography on Sandfontein, which consists essentially of dated patriotic battle accounts, more recent works in military history, including methodologies intended to analyse and explain how men endure in modern warfare, have been juxtaposed with numerous archival and secondary sources. Other issues concerning the first phase of the GSWA invasion, neglected or ignored in earlier historiography, have also received attention. These include the experiences of the force's black members, the white political disputes that assisted the shifting of the defeat culpability to Afrikaner Rebels, and the colonial police background of Lukin's force which it is suggested, was not entirely suitable for suddenly embarking upon conventional modern war.

The thesis attempts to re-interpret some of the First World War South African military historiography, to that compatible with historians elsewhere, through a rigorous analysis of the first battle ever fought by a military force operating on behalf of a South African government. The writings of British military historian John Keegan serve as typical examples. The landmark social psychological studies by S. A. Stouffer and his co-authors on post-Second World War American troops in combat, have been widely used in this thesis to facilitate the understanding of UDF soldiers'

behaviour during the Sandfontein battle. These studies are significant in that they are still regarded by contemporary military historians as ground-breaking research that enhances the accurate historical portrayal of modern battle. It is contended that the previous historiography under-scored the reality of the Sandfontein combat, and intended to ensure the military's reputation during a period when the South African Party itself was under constant electoral threat by its Afrikaner Nationalist and white worker opponents. The thesis poses the view, that because of sensitivities in white politics, the ruling SAP's Defence Minister, General Smuts, "pushed" the invasion of the German colony through his field commander General Lukin, before a thorough intelligence appraisal had been achieved. In short, this work's central purpose is to utilise the evidence derived from different archives, a range of secondary sources, and several field excursions to the battle terrain, and to "unpack" the Sandfontein battle records, producing a reappraisal reflecting more familiar and predictable patterns of human behaviour and limitations, compatible with verified data regarding the reactions of men to combat, and general paradigms in which military personnel and forces of the time operated. The thesis concludes that the battle and GSWA first phase received for political reasons inadequate investigation, that the engagement was far more traumatic for the UDF participants than the historiography expressed, and that an investigation using the above-mentioned methodology into the "inner nature" of battle at Sandfontein, reveals the soldiers' endurance was a consequence of a complex range of reasons related to military socialisation and the physical battle context.

## PREFACE

This dissertation grew from an inspiration originally derived from reading Gerald L'Ange's Urgent Imperial Service: South African Forces in German South West Africa, during a two year teaching stint in Pietersberg (today Polokwane) in the Limpopo Province during 1996-97. Having spent the previous two years combing the Anglo-Zulu War and South African War battlefields while teaching in Kwazulu-Natal, locating and exploring the remote Sandfontein battlefield in southern Namibia was the priority of my holiday that July, and the determination grew to discover more of the military campaign there during the First World War.

Early the following year, I made plans to register in 1998 for the writing of a Masters thesis at the University of Cape Town, according to a proposal entitled, "The South African Military Campaign in GSWA, 1914-5." After moving into the research and writing, my interest once again shifted specifically to Sandfontein, and a desire to elaborate more vividly on the reality of the battle, as experienced by the men of the South African Mounted Rifles and Transvaal Horse Artillery on 26 September 1914. The abundance of post-Second World War military history writing, particularly that of John Keegan, displaying a style very different to and considerably more realistic than the dated South African GSWA campaign historiography, prompted my decision to attempt an account that might assist towards bringing an almost forgotten part of our history up to date, by focussing specifically on this long-forgotten clash of arms during the First World War in Namibia.

My thesis therefore has the battle of Sandfontein as its central focus. It tries to outline something of the combat reality, and suggest some contentions regarding the political events and military developments that led to the battle, while not avoiding the issue of culpability for the defeat, as I become more familiar with my sources. Placing responsibility for why the battle occurred, and the defeat itself, received no pointed attention in prior battle accounts, necessitating my exploring and incorporating it, as a separate dissertation concern. By working thoroughly through the historiography of Sandfontein and the campaign, I was with greater ease able to outline my own new interpretations of these writings and the battle, based on the political contexts of the

“official” historians, the use of recent military history methodology on the “inner nature of battle,” the experiences of the black Union Defence Force members, the Union government’s urgency to invade GSWA, the muted anger at the defeat and the manner in which “official” writers, historians, and journalists dealt with it.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Postgraduate Scholarships Committee assisted from the outset of my registration, with the award of the Rose & Sydney Mullne Scholarship in early 1998. I would like to record my sincere thanks also to the Harry Oppenheimer Centre for African Studies Institute, who granted me a research award in April 1998, and the Swiss Award in June of that year, and again in July 1999. The University Scholarships Committee ensured some financial assistance during both February 1998 and June 1999. Being at the time a full-time, unemployed, mature student, I was very grateful indeed for all this help. I would also like to acknowledge the financial study grants received from Diocesan College (Bishops) at the beginning of 2001 and 2002 respectively; as a history teacher my hope will always be the successful infusion of my students with an intellectual curiosity about, and enjoyment of, this academic discipline that is the meeting place of all knowledge.

Many other individuals have assisted hugely in various ways, and I hope to record my thanks to most of them here. My supervisor Christopher Saunders has given the most significant assistance in ensuring that I create something that hopefully fits the structure, intellectual rigidity and purpose of a thesis. He has been a patient source of help throughout the years of my registration. Mac Bisset, Peter Digby, and Gerald L’Ange all helped with suggesting sources, lending or providing material, while Hamish Patterson of the South African Military Museum in Johannesburg, provided informed discussion in response to specific queries on military technicalities. Jochen Mahncke, current vice-chairman of the South African Military History Society’s Cape Town branch, in his own free time, translated a considerable amount of German sources for me, including an entire critical chapter from von Oelhafen’s account. Former teaching colleague Michael Makin helped too regard German translations. My friend Ken Gardner willingly assisted with proof-reading several sections in the very

last two weeks before submission, and offering invaluable advice regarding style and grammar. Numerous other individuals, too many to mention all by name here, contributed memoirs of relatives, documents and anecdotes of the GSWA campaign. The librarians and archivists at the following repositories all have my gratitude for the service they rendered while I researched: UCT Libraries, particularly the African Studies section, the South African Library and Cape Depot of the National Archives in Cape Town, the South African National Defence Force's Documentation Services Directorate in Pretoria, the South African Military Museum Library in Johannesburg, and the National Archives of Namibia in Windhoek. Finally, my thanks go also to the personnel of the Bishops Information Technology Centre, and one of my students, James Hall, for assisting me regarding the thesis photographs.

Paul Naish of Durban introduced me earlier to the importance of thorough battlefield investigation in KwaZulu-Natal during 1994-95, while another friend, Hein Altmann of Walvis Bay, long a lone explorer of the GSWA campaign battlefields, has always been an interested fellow enthusiast of my trips. Alistair Mckechnie, Cobus Olivier, and Andrew Carpenter, all accompanied me at different times to Namibia, and explored Sandfontein, Ramans Drift, Houms River, and Warmbad, sharing the pleasure of viewing and staying out in remote locations barely changed since 1914. Steen Severin, the current owner of the Sandfontein and Houms River farms, has been a continual supporter of this thesis, and through his managers and employees on the current game farm, has always been most helpful. I remember fondly the several days in late September 1998, spent at Sandfontein with his former business partner, Michel Dorochoer and his wife Anne-Marie, and was greatly saddened to hear of Michel's tragic death a year later. Andries Smit, Jannie Le Roux, Gerrie Van der Westhuizen, and Jakkie Adriaanse, were amongst a number of friendly and helpful individuals in the Warmbad/Sandfontein/Houms River district, who have given my friends and I hospitality. My thanks to all these people who made field research such a pleasure. For her quiet encouragement in ensuring the completion of this thesis, my deepest thanks of all go to Margot.

**Rodney Warwick**  
**Rondebosch, 14 February 2003**

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# **Reconsideration of the battle of Sandfontein: The first phase of the German South West Africa Campaign, August to September 1914.**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Union of South Africa's invasion of German South West Africa (GSWA) has become virtually a forgotten fragment of that twentieth century historical landmark, the Great War of 1914-18. Within contemporary South African public consciousness, it would be mostly relevant to a dwindling number of older whites whose fathers and grandfathers were active participants.<sup>1</sup> Other enthusiasts would comprise a handful of historians, mostly of a military speciality, and individuals involved in memorabilia collections, archives, and museums. There were only a few set battles in the UDF's GSWA campaign of 1914-15, grotesquely dwarfed in terms of human slaughter and misery by the European horrors during the same period. Besides the direct participation of military forces from the British and German Empires, there are no obvious parallels between the battles fought in and around the countryside of France and Belgium, or the Eastern European Front, and the sparse fleeting encounters eighty-nine years ago in the deserts of modern Namibia.

This dissertation hopes to illustrate that a fresh analysis of the campaign's first phase does have merit in expanding our comprehension of South African history and society in 1914. More specifically, its intention is two-fold: Firstly, and most pertinently, to further our understanding of how the UDF combatants between mid-August to the end of September 1914 experienced the first period of their country's invasion of GSWA, with particular reference to their defeat at the battle of Sandfontein on 26 September. Secondly, it suggests that the Union government, led by the South African Party, pushed through, before and after Parliament's formal declaration of war, an urgent and impatient plan, based upon political considerations, to make an immediate and highly visible impact in its military operation against the neighbouring German Colony. This petulant act of policy, combined with the failure to devise a sound strategic assessment based upon thorough intelligence and communication, led to the defeat of a sizable South African military detachment at a koppie and set of desert wells called Sandfontein, some thirty kilometres into GSWA. The

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<sup>1</sup> The vast majority of correspondents who responded to my national press appeal for resources, were the children/nephews/nieces of white GSWA veterans. In the case of several Afrikaans correspondents, there were several first generation descendents of 1914 rebels.

reversal was embarrassing to both the Minister of Defence Jan Smuts and the Staff of Defence Headquarters (DHQ) in Pretoria. There was no formal inquiry into the disaster. On the contrary, Brigadier-General Timson Lukin, the commander of "A" Force, or the "Namaqualand Field Force," and Lieutenant-Colonel Reginald Grant, the Officer commanding the 1st South African Mounted Rifles (SAMR) Regiment, were simply given stiff pats on the back by the Defence Minister. Lukin and Grant, the latter being the officer responsible for the over three hundred personnel at Sandfontein, were together with their men officially lauded for perseverance and bravery in resisting a much larger German force for the entire day. There was never any public airing of culpability for the disaster to challenge or even inconvenience politicians or senior military commanders. Sources used in this dissertation, however explicitly imply the debacle was discussed in UDF circles for many years later.

Sandfontein was the new UDF's baptism of fire in conventional warfare against a foreign foe. The Force was barely two years old when the British government made their appeal to the Boer-led Union Parliament for ties of Empire to be acknowledged, by the new nation making a direct intervention on behalf of the Empire's war effort into a formally declared European war. London implored Prime Minister Louis Botha to authorise a military assault on one of the Kaiser's most distant colonies. The call fell on receptive ears, for amongst other compelling reasons, the SAP government believed that it was honour-bound to assist the British peoples. Once hostilities had commenced in Europe, Pretoria responded affirmatively to the request for the silencing of German radio-transmitters in Windhoek and Luderitz, and the denial of GSWA ports to German use. Rather than engendering national unity, however, as had occurred in Britain and other "white" dominions, the Union government's decision to take the country into war brought sharp disunion amongst particularly white South Africans. To some Afrikaners there was the suggestion that the time was now ripe for open armed revolt, and the re-establishment of the defeated Boer Republics. There is a long accepted direct link between the 1914 Afrikaner Rebellion and the government's decision to invade GSWA, and it was against this uncertain domestic political background, that the events leading to Sandfontein unfolded. The battle, and its outcome, were in turn directly linked to the conduct of Afrikaner rebel, Manie Maritz. That the time was out of joint came through clearly in the urgency of the government to bring the war home to all sections of the white public, and the anxious determination of DHQ to ensure that the first blow be struck quickly by the UDF. It was the government's intention to alert doubters to the reality of the enemy on their doorstep, before the Afrikaner rebellion gained further supporters and consequent momentum. The Union government

had clear political motives for accelerating the timing of the GSWA invasion, besides the military justifications and imperial links that compelled the requisite manifestations of loyalty.

Of all the set battles in the GSWA Campaign, Sandfontein was the only one that the UDF lost, and the reversal had no particular impact upon the eventual Union victory. The defeat was forgotten amidst the enthusiasm of final victory achieved by Botha's troops with the German surrender in May 1915. Numerically one of the smallest Imperial participants, South Africa continued to face sterner tests during the First World War, several being immortalised in the historiography of the period. The battle of Delville Wood, for example, became part of the unifying mythology of the dominant order, while Sandfontein as a defeat, with its whiff of political expediency, disappeared quietly and conveniently from collective public memory. This thesis attempts to revive the context and course of this forgotten military clash, and attempts to make more explicit where ultimate responsibility lay. Its central focus, however, is to attempt some reinterpretations of how previous accounts viewed the battle.

The thesis suggests that Louis Botha's government needed something dramatic to assert the wisdom of their chosen route to invade GSWA, reassure those doubters amongst their supporters, and demonstrate their resolution to potential political mutineers. The political course chosen was the launching of an immediate military thrust into the German colony, regardless of lack of proper intelligence, or immediate military resources, or the practicalities of the operation. The consequences of this decision culminated with the UDF defeat at Sandfontein, the details of which are analysed as the core detailed component of the dissertation. The issues that created the divisive and emotionally charged passions in 1914 South African politics have long ceased to carry significance in the lives of most South Africans in 2003. What is still relevant and deeply concerns, is the acknowledgement of the hardships, horrors, and grief which war brings. There is also a need to set down of a record that accounts and explains the remarkable camaraderie amongst those who wage war, and how they experience and cope with the terrors and stress of the battlefield. The South Africans serving in Lukin's "A" Force were both regulars and volunteers, white "British" South Africans and Afrikaners, and black and coloured "agterryers." This dissertation attempts to tell their stories, and they how performed their duty in remote corners of the British and German Empires, as the Great War of 1914-18 descended. The UDF men at Sandfontein fought, died, or entered captivity, because of inflamed national politics, the inevitable expedience of its

practitioners, and the confusion of field commanders attempting to follow politically motivated directives.

### **Thesis outline**

The dissertation begins with a short general background chapter on the military culture of white South Africans, and the creation of a Defence Force via the 1912 Defence Act, reinforced by a brief look of the “military mentality” amongst white South African men in 1914, pre-Union and the post-Defence Act volunteer system. The short introduction of these features assists in helping to understand something of the broader military culture of the UDF troops at Sandfontein.

The second chapter concerns the “koppie occupation,” and later German attack at Nakob. It introduces a variety of themes closely connected with events relevant to the UDF invasion of GSWA in August -October 1914. This original border dispute at an isolated spot on the Union/GSWA border, three hundred kilometres west of Upington, exploded into public view on 19 August, when an English prospector, Fred Cornell, discovered recently built German sangars on a low koppie near the tiny SAMR frontier post. Once the publicity hungry Cornell had wired his story to the press, a frenzy of patriotic articles on the violation of the Union’s borders appeared in the SAP supporting newspapers, goaded on by indignant readers’ letters, and terse official statements from the government. The “Nakob incident” inflamed the turbulence already created by the Union government’s intention to honour its membership of the Empire and to invade GSWA. It provided legitimate cover for presentation to republicans and other equivocators. The English press responded to the German action with outrage, stoking up the war euphoria of British South Africa, and giving unconditional support to the Union government’s “official line” while Afrikaner Nationalist calls for neutrality were dismissed with scepticism and hostility. The public heat engendered by Cornell’s report of the Nakob “occupation” reached manic proportions in South African press and public opinion a few weeks later. This occurred when German troops and Afrikaner “Vrij Korps,” rebels from the German colony, attacked the Union police post at Nakob, killing and capturing most of the small SAMR detachment, in purported response to Lukin’s men attacking Ramans Drift.

The third chapter deals with the beginnings of the 1914 Afrikaner Rebellion in the Northern Cape. This is covered to the extent that it furthers our understanding of the political background to the

first phase of the UDF's attempt to invade GSWA. The pro-Government publications lambasted Manie Maritz and the Afrikaner Vrij Korps, alleging that his leadership had a vital impact upon the operations and fortunes of Lukin's troops on the Orange River. The accusation was that because German troops on the colony's eastern border faced no opposition, they duly marched west, significantly adding to the massed concentration against the UDF at Sandfontein. This was a consequence of Maritz's treachery rendering part of the original DHQ invasion plan inoperable, by refusing orders to assist Lukin's forward advance towards Warmbad, and later leading most of his men into rebelling and resistance against government forces in the Northern Cape. This point receives further elaboration on the seventh chapter on "Culpability." The contention in this thesis is that the imminent outbreak of the Afrikaner Rebellion in the Union was one of the catalysts that set the SAP government to instruct the rapid occupation of Sandfontein by a UDF force. An attempt is therefore made to accurately ascertain the degree to which Maritz's actions were a direct cause for Lukin and Grant's reversal, as strongly alleged by the UDF and its supporters, and outlined in the contemporary secondary sources.

The hurried assembly and departure of "A" Force is dealt with in a fourth chapter, together with an analysis of the confusion pertaining to a variety of intelligence reports on German military strength, compounded by the not always competent cooperation from farmers in the border area. The first skirmishes along the Orange River broke out after South African Mounted Rifles troops crossed into GSWA at Ramans Drift on 13\14 September. Intelligence regarding enemy movements, derived from the German prisoners and forward reconnaissance, was not thoroughly scrutinised by the UDF commanders. Incomplete and ill-utilised information, together with constant pressure from DHQ, prompted Lukin and his field commanders to expedite an early occupation of the Sandfontein wells. The Germans anticipated this and planned accordingly to successfully confront their opponents at the koppie. Lukin warned his political superiors that logistically "A Force" was not yet ready for a determined advance into German territory, but went on to occupy Sandfontein anyway. However, after the 16 September attack on the tiny Nakob SAMR post, and the raising of the political temperature in the Union, further reinforcements under Lt-Col Grant were despatched to the wells in response to reported German military movements in the vicinity. This resulted in the eventual trapping of an even larger UDF force by the Germans.

The fifth chapter attempts a description of the battle at Sandfontein. While a variety of battle accounts surfaced immediately after the war, with more appearing a few years later, and an entire

campaign history was produced in 1937, locating unpublished first-hand accounts of the reality of combat at Sandfontein was difficult. Comparing both South African and German accounts, a balanced description is attempted on how events unfolded during the battle, thus orientating the reader for easier comprehension of the new interpretations of the soldiers' experiences, as set out in the next chapter on historiography. The battlefield site some seventy kilometres south of Karasburg (Kalkfontein in 1914) is fully utilised as a source. Several personal inspections and photography, have been useful in assessing the terrain, and evaluating the accuracy of contemporary sketches and reports. The overall objective of this chapter is to present an honest, fresh, and accurate re-examination of events as they unfolded during the day, which resulted in Grant's eventual decision to surrender his force.

The sixth substantial chapter reviews the campaign's historiography, surveying firstly what other accounts said about the battle. It then moves towards the central concern of the thesis, namely some new interpretations, including the significance of the British colonial and police culture of the UDF troops, the experiences of blacks, and the usage of methodologies not existent when earlier accounts were penned, to outline how the UDF soldiers actually experienced the combat at Sandfontein. These are all dimensions that are lacking or inadequate in previous writings.

In reviewing the earlier historiography, one intention is to demonstrate how the SAP government partly identified its respectability, and the popularity of its decisions, as coupled with the good name, reputation, and past doings of a very important state agency, namely the UDF. This analysis also demonstrates how Sandfontein was eulogised as a glorious defeat by authors sympathetic to both the government and Defence Force. There was never any serious revisiting of the battle circumstances by contemporary journalists and writers, and the accounts from an assortment of military correspondents and officers were never critically scrutinised by later writers of the GSWA campaign.<sup>2</sup> So sensitive for the government were the political and military motives, that no public discussion of the disaster was encouraged. South African military historiography never moved beyond the accounts written directly or a few years after Sandfontein, and J.J. Collyer's detailed history of the entire campaign, published in 1937. This dissertation is different in that it makes critical use of these sources, and also specifically reviews the issue of culpability for the Sandfontein disaster, providing new insights regarding the political imperatives that led to the

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<sup>2</sup> For example, L'Ange, G., *Urgent Imperial Service*, Rivonia, 1991, and Ungleich, T.R., *The Defence of German South West Africa during World War*, MA thesis, University of Miami, 1974.

engagement, and most importantly, a fresh interpretation of the battle reality experienced by those UDF soldiers who participated.

Lukin's force is analysed through the pre-1912 policing and colonial background of the units and their members. The culture and ethos of the SAMR regiments almost exclusively reflected that of a typical Imperial colonial corps. This refers specifically to the appearance, organisation, and British colonial identity of the SAMR regiments, created by Smuts's defence legislation for both a policing and military role. This was in response to contemporary political considerations, such as the need for a paramilitary mounted police capable of tackling urban worker strikes or black rebellion. Because the UDF Permanent Force, where the SAMR regiments comprised the fighting component, were perceived by some Afrikaners as "English," this orientation gave further impetus to the republican ambitions of rebels such as Maritz, and the rebel belief that the UDF existed to protect British Imperial interests. It is further contended that because the SAMR had largely originated from a policing culture, and had less than two years to ensure a conversion to that of a professional army component, their inexperience in the logistics of conventional warfare was a factor in the confusion of moving men efficiently up to the Orange River border.

The black and coloured participants at Sandfontein were vital components of the logistical structure that hauled the varied paraphernalia of an animal drawn force. The "non-white" component of Lukin's Command, provided much of the muscle that carried the different parts of the "Namaqualand Field Force" from their various unit bases across the Union, to Cape Town, Port Nolloth, Steinkopf, and finally to the Orange River Drifts. Many of these men, not actually even considered soldiers in terms of their formal descriptions and roles, participated nevertheless in DHQ's "forward thrust" in GSWA, and suffered the combat and surrender at Sandfontein, while as captives they received particularly harsh treatment from the Germans. Comprising around sixteen percent of Lukin's original force of over four thousand, these voluntary black "agterryers" were charged with the multitude of tasks created by "A" Force's huge contingent of horses and mules that carried men, drew wagons, and transported the vast quantities of materials and stores which the Force utilised and subsisted off. This section tries to recover something of their experiences, largely marginalized as they were in earlier writings, and isolated in separate statistics in official documentation. It also sketches the reactions of blacks to 1914 events in GSWA, their recruitment and use during the campaign's first phase, and how they were utilised as a separate component of

the UDF. Their deeds and experiences have been largely an untold story for eighty-nine years.<sup>3</sup> Some of the sources studied have opened a small amount of insight into their involvement with “A” Force, up to and including the Sandfontein battle, where several died alongside the white soldiers. Also researched, is the sad final indignity, where the burial of dead black participants after the battle was done in a racially separate grave from the white UDF men, while their remains were not re-interred along with those of the white soldiers at a 1922 formal military ceremony in Warmbad.

The thesis then moves on towards attempting new interpretations of historiography, endeavouring to realistically describe how the UDF men actually experienced the day. Combat research and methodology derived from various sources, is utilised to bring some authenticity to Sandfontein accounts that gloss unrealistically over acutely difficult situations. Participants at Sandfontein were inclined to manfully describe hardships with a strong undertone of being carefully observed by an audience that would be unforgiving of any revelation that hinted at weakness, shame, cowardice, or uncontrolled fear. All of the latter emotions are inevitably integral to the horror of modern war, which Sandfontein certainly typified. The original battle details are described in accounts that betray so little emotion as to what the real horror of Sandfontein must have been, and these have been reassessed with the assistance of sources that facilitate a more realistic portrayal. Sandfontein was a place where both regular and volunteer UDF soldiers experienced the full stress and effects of modern weaponry in a First World War engagement, and this is re-evaluated as a core part of the dissertation.

To this end, in terms of methodology, an endeavour was made to follow something of the example set by contemporary British military historian, John Keegan, the doyen of those writers who in the last twenty-five years or so have attempted to accurately portray the soldiers’ real experience of battle.<sup>4</sup> Other studies of soldiers’ battlefield experiences utilised in this dissertation include the landmark research undertaken by the then American Army Historical Service, published in 1949 in several volumes as Studies in Social Psychology in World War II, 1949. The authors, S.A. Stouffer, A.A. Lumsdaine, M.A. Lumsdaine, R.M. Williams, Jr., M. Brewster Smith, I.L. Janis, S.A. Star, L.S. Cottrell, Jr., were commissioned during the Second World War to compile the first ever set of

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<sup>3</sup> Ian Gleeson in his book, The Unknown Force Black, Indian and Coloured Soldiers Through Two World Wars, Rivonia, 1994, does provide some initial accounts of these troops’ experiences in GSWA in pp 10-16, as does Grundlingh, A., Fighting their Own War- South African Blacks and the First World War, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1987.

<sup>4</sup> Keegan, J., The Face of Battle, London, 1974, was the first, and perhaps most influential.

data and analysis regarding the behaviour of troops during battle situations.<sup>5</sup> Much of the subsequent writing on the subject, including Keegan's, and others utilised in this thesis, has referred back to this work, given its thoroughness in plotting the behaviour of soldiers in modern combat over several lengthy and active campaigns.

These socio-psychological studies concern a different war and set of protagonists. But the essential elements of human fear and reaction to the stress of combat, would be as consistent with South African troops in the midst of being trapped and bombarded on a desert koppie in 1914, as with for example, United States Marines packed on a beach and under heavy fire at Iwo Jima in early 1945. The similarities in the battle experience lie within the sheer intensity of the ordeal, involving as it did the use of rifle and machine gun fire, artillery bombardment, lack of food and water, inadequate or unobtainable medical help and resources, and no prospect of escape by sudden flight. The Studies in Social Psychology in World War II, base themselves on a range of battles involving US troops. In terms of human dynamics concerning the "hidden nature" of battle, soldiers' combat behaviour should have remained consistent with Sandfontein, the one obvious difference being the availability of data to Stouffer and his collaborators regarding the American military combat veterans of 1943-45, in contrast to what was unwritten, and publicly unspoken of by the Sandfontein veterans. However the most important common variables remain, namely armies, the use and effect of modern battle weapons, and most important of all human beings with their emotions, fallibilities and powerful instinct for survival.

Bringing such research to Sandfontein proved a daunting exercise when virtually all the secondary sources utilised for the thesis are obvious products of time, place, and purpose, being explicitly created to disseminate a clean and positive military image, and toeing the dominant political line of the day. Examples of these are the Nongquni magazine, the contemporary official publication for the SA Mounted Riflemen, Police, and Prisons services, "official" and regimental histories, newspaper reports, and private letters exchanged between veteran officers more than twenty years later.

A final chapter attempts to link the culpability for the defeat at Sandfontein on both DHQ, including the Defence Minister Jan Smuts, and to a lesser extent, the senior officers and commanders of "A" Force. This pinpointing of responsibility, however, needs tempering by an

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<sup>5</sup> The relevant work is as follows; Studies in Social Psychology in World War II, The American Soldier: Volume 2, Combat and its Aftermath, Princeton, New Jersey, 1949. The authors are S.A. Stouffer, A.A. Lumsdaine, M.A. Lumsdaine, R.M. Williams, Jnr., M. Brewster Smith, I.L. Janis, S.A. Star, L.S. Cottrell, Jnr.

acknowledgement of the political context and military imperatives of the time, for these dictated the fortunes of war. Linking with the fourth and sixth chapters, it is contended that the rash despatch of troops into enemy territory in 1914, based upon political considerations, without thorough analysis of intelligence or a proper assessment of the Sandfontein location, led to the defeat and capture of Grant's force. There was also a failure to ensure the requisite logistical backup that might have averted disaster. It is asserted that the defeat at Sandfontein was avoidable, and that embarrassed UDF staff officers and SAP politicians in the Union who, mindful of the political storm brewing, never allowed a close examination of the events that led to the defeat. The SAP government were also determined to safeguard the reputation of the fledgling UDF, which was so much part of government internal and external policy in the formative and turbulent years of Union between 1914 and 1924. The disaster at Sandfontein did, however, ensure muffled anger from veterans for some years.

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## CHAPTER 1: WHITE SOUTH AFRICAN MILITARY CULTURE AND ORGANISATION, 1902-1914.

### Introduction

Many UDF soldiers who participated in the GSWA campaign had served in the SA War. Scores of local colonial units had formed part of the Imperial Forces, while some 87 635 white men had served in the former Republican forces against the British Empire.<sup>1</sup> Most of the middle ranking and senior UDF officers in GSWA had 1899-1902 combat experience, or from black/white conflicts during the previous two decades, and these contributed to endorsing the frontier mentality of whites, where soldiering was almost an obligatory rite of passage towards manhood. This aspect of colonial culture ensured there would be no shortage of volunteers for the GSWA campaign. Many Afrikaner men responded to the call to serve under trusted and familiar leaders from the SA War, although nationalists held back, or joined the rebellion against the Union Government. The ultra-patriotic British South Africans, familiar with service in volunteer regiments and high profile patriotic military displays, needed no second bidding to sign up. This enthusiasm is evident by the numbers of white volunteers who participated between September 1914, and May 1915, where estimates are of over 50 000 white men, equally spread between both language groups.<sup>2</sup> Black, Coloured and Indian South Africans, relegated by contemporary social culture to non-combatant status, still volunteered in their thousands for menial roles, their motives ranging from loyalty to British Empire ideals, economic necessity, or a desire shared with white soldiers to “prove” their character. Political as opposed to military ideals are influential in enticing men to enlist and perform in battle,<sup>3</sup> and an uncritical belief in the ideals and defence of the Empire was certainly imperative to many of the volunteers, particularly those of British stock. Afrikaners also followed the political ideals of Louis Botha and the South African Party, but more often “followed the man” rather than a cause, as old loyalties, legends and camaraderie from 1899-1902 reasserted itself.

Broadly speaking, a colonial military mentality existed in the white community, largely because of the cumulative white response to racial conflict over land and resources, and this mentality remained therefore an omnipresent feature of the South African white male culture. The military

<sup>1</sup> Pakenham, T., *The Boer War*, London, 1979, p.572.

<sup>2</sup> Rayner W.S. & O’Shaughnessy, W.W., *How Botha and Smuts Conquered South West Africa*, London, 1916, p.288. Reitz, D., *Trekking On*, London, 1933, pp. 93-94.

<sup>3</sup> Kellett, A., *The Soldier in Battle: Motivational and Behavioral Aspects of the Combat experience*, in Glad, B.(Ed), *Psychological Dimensions of War*, Newbury Park, 1990, 227.

ethos amongst colonials had been further emphasised by the hostilities of the SA War, and continued in those immediate years that followed. Additional volunteer regiments for British South Africans sprang up directly after 1902. For example, the Transvaal Scottish emerged while the post-SA War Witwatersrand still contained thousands of South African Colonial and Imperial war veterans. The direct intention of creating this regiment was to fill a perceived need for local defence. The 1932 Regimental History gives a candid contemporary insight into the unit's *raison d'être*;

(because of) concern for what the native problem might hold in store, it was but natural that the idea of forming volunteer regiments should occur in the minds of the Government and people.<sup>4</sup>

Citizen Force regiments catered for the part-time soldiering in the British South African society, and maintained a military mentality as part of the collective psyche of this community. The professional and middle classes gained social credibility by serving in a volunteer unit, which was an approved and fashionable manifestation of patriotism and manhood.<sup>5</sup> Working class men showed less enthusiasm, but the rank and file still showed up at drills and parades, suggesting that patriotic pride and the desirability of wearing a uniform did play some part in the ordinary man's thinking.

#### **The Volunteer Military Forces of the South African colonies, 1902-11.**

The military structures within the South African colonies between 1902 and the creation of the UDF in 1912 were organised as far as was practical according to British Army training and procedures.<sup>6</sup> The Afrikaner Boer Commando system had disappeared in compliance with the Vereeniging treaty terms, although they were revived as Rifle Associations through the 1912 Defence Act. The almost exclusively British South African colonial military units continued in the post-SA War period, and identified themselves emphatically with the defence of Imperial interests. In the Cape Colony, a Commandant-General, assisted by two staff officers, commanded all military forces. These consisted of the one thousand strong Cape Mounted Riflemen (CMR), and a

<sup>4</sup> Juta, H.C. History of the Transvaal Scottish, Johannesburg, 1933, p.4.

<sup>5</sup> South African Who's Who, 1908-09 & 1911, Durban, many of those listed pursued "Volunteering" as a hobby.

<sup>6</sup> Collyer, J.J. The Campaign in German South West Africa 1914-1915, Pretoria, 1937, p.15.

volunteer balance of approximately three thousand members. The equivalent military organisations in the Transvaal and in Natal were structurally almost identical to that of the Cape, while presumably because of the small numbers of white English-speaking men, there was no part-time military force established in the Orange River Colony.

The UDF's GSWA historian of 1937, J.J. Collyer, remarked that the volunteer forces and structures had "exhibited the advantages and defects inherent in such a (volunteer) system."<sup>7</sup> There were enthusiastic officers, non-commissioned officers, and troops, although amongst the ranks there were considerable absences from drills and training programmes arranged to ensure minimum military efficiency, and indicative of some lack of motivation amongst some of those who served as ordinary soldiers.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, a review for the Transvaal Volunteers and Cadets for the year 1910-11, reported very favourably on the troops, and that most of the units had far more volunteers than places.<sup>9</sup> However, it is hardly surprising that officers played the part-time soldier role with gusto, for as in the post-Victorian British Army, including its part time component, officers in South African colonial units drew from the upper strata of English-speaking whites. Part-time soldiering offered approval and reward, and a significant proportion of prominent men who held senior ranks in volunteer units, clearly considered the role a socially desirable and useful hobby.<sup>10</sup> It follows that others aspiring to ascend the social ladder quickly followed the same route. An early start to introducing military culture was structuring it into secondary education. Prominent boys' schools had direct affiliations to individual units: King Edward VII School in Johannesburg with the Transvaal Scottish, Maritzburg College and the Royal Natal Carbineers, Diocesan College in Cape Town and the Duke of Edinburgh's Own Rifles, were all examples. The South African colonies were part of an Empire where officer's rank and regular public military pageantry were important expressions of patriotism and pride. However, compared with the upper and middle classes, volunteer service would inevitably have carried less significance in the social circles of the white South African working class. Collyer describes the following:

Volunteer Commanding Officers had to contend with the difficult problem arising out of the existence of a large number of volunteers in the ranks who merely did the least amount of

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp14-15.

<sup>9</sup> Annual Report on the Transvaal Volunteers and Cadets for the year 1910-1911, Militaria, Vol 3, 1971-73, (UCT Journals Collection bindings) pp 80-81.

<sup>10</sup> South African Who's Who, 1908-09, 1911.

training demanded for regulation “efficiency” and attended the minimum number of drills to earn the capitation grant for their corps, and the by no means inconsiderable quantity of those who failed to do even this.<sup>11</sup>

The “capitation grant” was limited government funding to individual units, and underlines the existence of official endorsement regarding the volunteer system, and the perceived necessity of some local capacity for defence.

Collyer explained there was still a “small proportion of the rank and file who, impelled by an active sense of duty and responsibility, gave up time and leisure, and often money, to consistent efforts to become proficient in their military duties.”<sup>12</sup> The units were thus able to function as peacetime components, but with rank hierarchy that obviously demanded a preponderance of ordinary troops. The volunteer regiments were largely located in towns and cities populated by considerable numbers of white English-speakers. Some of the regiments had histories and traditions almost as old as the arrival of the first larger groups of settlers in Natal and the Cape. The colonial population was accepting of a part-time military culture as a necessary and intrinsic component of their society. Dominy refers specifically to colonial Natal in the late nineteenth century.

The garrison and settler society were situated in a much larger African context and needed to assert a racially defined superiority over the majority African population. This meant that the social mechanisms were necessary to make the military “rough” into the settler “respectable.”<sup>13</sup>

Perceptions of soldiers amongst South African colonials, had by the early twentieth century evolved well beyond the contemptuous public image of Kipling’s “Tommy.” In the over ninety years that followed since the British troops had first set foot in Natal, the white settlers of the colony had long taken charge of their own internal defence needs. British colonials throughout South Africa had to ensure the management of their own manpower resources for defence, in terms of the feared threat by indigenous black communities. Given the historical circumstances,

<sup>11</sup> Collyer, *The Campaign*, p.15.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.

<sup>13</sup> Dominy G., *The Imperial Garrison and the wider society in colonial Natal; The making of the rough and respectable*, Paper for the 15<sup>th</sup> biennial conference of the South African Historical Society, (Grahamstown, 1995) p.2.

continued political control came via the threat of superior armed coercion. By the time white conquest of remaining independent black tribal entities ended towards the end of the nineteenth century, the volunteer units had become “respectable,” and a unique military culture created as an indispensable facet of white South African society. Colonial society was not, however, homogenous in terms of wealth and class. The officer positions, and even the ranks of elite units, were reserved for men of purported superior social standing. The 1914 diary writings of Frederick Addison, a member of the Royal Natal Carbineers illustrate this:

In those days it was a privilege to be a member of a local volunteer regiment....I was lucky to be accepted by such a famous unit...The mounted regiments of Natal were as fine a body of horsemen as one could find anywhere in the world; a great proportion of them were off the farms and belonged to the Natal polo clubs. They were magnificent material and nearly all fit to hold commissions in any regiment. This quality was also to be found in the infantry and artillery units of South Africa.<sup>14</sup>

It was from these volunteer regiments, the CMR, and the recreated Boer commandos, together embracing two separate military cultures, that the UDF emerged in 1912.

#### **The 1912 Defence Act and the creation of the Union Defence Force.**

The Defence Act shaped a formal South African military organisation in the wake of political Union in 1910. Jan Smuts, destined to become the country's first Minister of Defence, had already given insight to his own thinking regarding the necessity of such a force. At the Imperial Defence Conference of 1909 he stated:

each part of the Empire (should be) willing to make its preparations on such lines as will enable it, should it so desire, to take its share in the general defence of the Empire.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in L'Ange G, *Urgent Imperial Service*, Rivonia, 1991, p.101.

<sup>15</sup> *British Parliamentary Papers*, Cd 4948 of 1909, p.33, quoted by T.R. Getz in an unpublished 1995 UCT MA thesis, *Smuts and the Politics of Colonial Expansion: SA Strategy in regard to SWA (Namibia) and the League of Nations Mandate*, p.27.

The Defence Act partly intended to remedy features of the unsatisfactory volunteer system, particularly with regard to designing a legal structure that would ensure compulsory attendance of citizens at organised training events.<sup>16</sup> Its author was Smuts who moved it through parliament with little delay, although not without criticism from members who objected to his dispensing with some of the traditional military methods used in the past by Afrikaners.<sup>17</sup> John X. Merriman advised Smuts to consider the purpose of a Defence Force in terms of its most likely enemy, and suggested a small highly professional force capable of dealing with an external foe, and that Boer Commandos would be preferable to townsmen, a comment that hardly flattered the volunteer units.<sup>18</sup> Smuts brushed detractors aside and set out to establish an army that synthesised British South African and Afrikaner military heritages, in essence, the mounted and dismounted volunteer colonial regiments, and the mounted Boer Commando.

The Defence Act effectively abolished the volunteer system, although retaining the titles of the older colonial units. Every white male citizen between the ages of seventeen and sixty was legally liable to render service to the country in time of war. However, the real effect was to ensure part-time military training for those under twenty-five.<sup>19</sup> The Union was divided into fifteen military districts,<sup>20</sup> while the Act created a small Permanent Force mounted infantry component, consisting of five South African Mounted Rifles regiments (SAMR). However, the UDF's real manpower strength lay with the Active Citizen Force (ACF), particularly the numerous Rifle Associations. By the end of 1913, the ACF "included the best personal of the old Volunteer Regiments," augmented by white citizens aged between seventeen and twenty one years of age.<sup>21</sup> This category of young white men were now legally liable for intermittent military training, although it was intended that voluntary service of four years "peace training" would bring the force to its intended strength of thirty thousand.<sup>22</sup> The strength of white South African military culture is indicated by the fact that in January 1913, the first year of registration, there were 44 193 volunteers out of a total of 64 000 liable for service,<sup>23</sup> according to Collyer, "the pick of the experienced volunteers and young manhood of the country."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Collyer, *The Campaign*, p.15.

<sup>17</sup> Ingham, K., *Jan Christiaan Smuts, The Conscience of a South African*, Johannesburg, 1986, p.65.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Statutes*, Act No. 13 of 1912, p.190, (Defence).

<sup>20</sup> *The South African Yearbook 1914*, George Routledge and Sons, Ltd, London, 1914.

<sup>21</sup> Collyer, *The Campaign*, p.15.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp15-16.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.16.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

Section 4 of the Act allowed for the rebirth of the traditional Boer Commando system by the introduction of the system of Rifle Associations. As with the existing ACF units, the Rifle Associations existed to ensure that legally all young white men under twenty-five years of age underwent military training. These commandos ensured, for platteland Afrikaners, a culturally familiar military system, but with the members issued, as in the old Boer Republics, with a government rifle and ammunition.<sup>25</sup> Thousands of white men past the age of twenty-five were to serve voluntarily in the part-time forces. Younger participants in the GSWA campaign who had no combat experience from the SA War, were raised in a culture whereby part of the coming to manhood included the bearing of arms in war. This applied as much to the British South Africans with their fashionable spit and polish regiments and post-Victorian jingoistic patriotic ethos, as it did to the Afrikaner masculine social dynamics and history, which had produced the mounted armed commando, the Boers' own unique military institution. For the first phase of the GSWA campaign, however, the government chose to rely largely upon the SAMR regiments, and English-speaking ACF units. The catalyst for the government mobilising these forces came through two developments: the Nakob "koppie occupation," and the Afrikaner Rebellion, both addressed in turn within the following two chapters.

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<sup>25</sup> Statutes, *ibid.*, pp240-243.

## CHAPTER 2: THE NAKOB “KOPPIE INCIDENT”

### Introduction

This chapter reviews the details and historiography of the Nakob “koppie incident,” and attempts to demonstrate its relationship to the first phase of the UDF invasion of GSWA in September 1914. The review suggests that an understanding of this seemingly almost trivial and long forgotten border dispute, is important in explaining at least part of the Union government’s haste in invading GSWA, and the strong reaction of scepticism and hostility by Afrikaner dissidents to the government’s interpretation of events. The culmination of both the Nakob affair and the first phase of the GSWA invasion, as far as Afrikaner Nationalists were concerned, was the failed 1914 Afrikaner Rebellion. The connection between the latter and the UDF invasion is examined more closely in chapter three. This chapter on “Nakob” particularly attempts to provide insight into the strident South African English-language press response, where the significance of the border incident was magnified to an unrealistic importance, and clearly calculated to influence the South African Party government. This vividly reflects the pro-Empire feelings and the 1914 war euphoria of British South Africa, and the polarisation between Union government supporters and those Afrikaner republicans who opposed both the GSWA invasion, and the pro-Empire philosophy of Botha and Smuts.

**The German occupation of the Nakob koppie; its discovery, and the reaction by the press and Union government. (see Map 2)**

On 15 August 1914, an English prospector, Fred Cornell, discovered that German troops had dug entrenchments and constructed stone fortifications (sangars or schanze), on top and around a koppie near the GSWA/Union border at a point marked on maps as “Nakob.” Besides a farm of the same name just inside the Namibian boundary, and a South African border post close to a perennial water source, there is no evidence in this remote area today of any other colonial settlement.<sup>1</sup> In 1914, however, there was a very small official border presence on the Union side, represented by a tiny South African Mounted Rifles outpost. On the 16th of September, a sizable force of Germans<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Personal inspection of the Nakob farm and surrounding area, December 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Gerald L’Ange in Urgent Imperial service, p.53, states the attack was carried out by the Afrikaner Vrij Korps under Andries De Wet, one of the pro-German Boers in the colony actively collaborating with the German military. This detail is not footnoted, but in all likelihood, L’Ange’s source would have been Rayner & O’Shaunessy, How Botha and Smuts conquered German South West, where it reads on page 52, “It transpired that the Germans (who attacked

attacked this miniscule SAMR position, killing the corporal in charge and capturing the rest of the tiny garrison. Rifleman Joshua Human was seriously wounded, and a handful of other UDF members eluded their captors and escaped to Kakamas.<sup>3</sup> The disputed koppie according to press and subsequent accounts, lay just within the Union side of the border, and overlooked a waterhole. Collyer reported that German troops had “strengthened and repaired some old entrenchments on the hill,” and clearly implied that the incident was of trivial significance, and that no clear evidence suggested German intention “to violate Union soil” or “invade the Union.”<sup>4</sup> This retrospective assessment by the senior member of Louis Botha's staff during the GSWA campaign, is markedly different from the strong tone and wording of 1914 press reports that explicitly condemned the Nakob invasion as deliberate aggression, and worthy of an immediate military response. Ironically, it was this very point the Afrikaner Nationalist historian G.D. Scholtz stressed in his 1942 account of the 1914 Rebellion, elaborated further upon below.<sup>5</sup>

It seems that the government did allow for some exaggeration and public speculation concerning the significance of the Nakob incident, in order to rally public feeling behind the GSWA invasion plans. When Collyer admitted in 1937, as indicated above, that “the enemy may be acquitted of any deliberate intention to violate Union soil and the episodes certainly indicate(d) no intention to invade the Union,”<sup>6</sup> “Volksgeschiedenis” historians like Schultz moved in with a vengeance. His book was not the first account on the Afrikaner Rebellion written from a nationalist perspective, but it was widely read by Afrikaner intellectuals. The UDF's Military Intelligence had secretly acknowledged at the time that the koppie occupation in itself constituted no particular threat. In an “Intelligence summary to 5th September 1914,” it noted that on 20 August, German troops “were stated to be fortifying a kopje, some 500 to 700 yards on the Union side of the border, 3 miles south of Nakob.”<sup>7</sup> German troop strengths at their Nakob post were 25 men on 14 August, with 200

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were commanded by Andries de Wet, a Dutchman, but naturalised German., ...Andries de Wet had raised this force himself with funds specially provided by the German Colonial Government.” There is also no footnoted reference to endorse this statement. T.R.H. Davenport in an article, South African Rebellion, 1914, published in Volume 73 of the English Historical Review, 1963, p.84, states the attack was launched by the Vrij Korps, but again without any specific footnoted verification. Joshua Human's account is emphatic in that German troops were involved; this was related to this author in a letter dated 26 February 1998 by W. Bruwer of Douglas, who had known Human personally. The Germans were probably cooperating with the Vrij Korps, as was the case during the assault upon Upington in January 1915.

<sup>3</sup> Cape Times, 18 September 1914, p.4.

<sup>4</sup> Collyer, The Campaign, p.22.

<sup>5</sup> Scholtz, G.D., Die Rebelle, Johannesburg, 1943, pp 69-72.

<sup>6</sup> Collyer, The Campaign, p.22.

<sup>7</sup> Documentation Services Directorate, South African National Defence Force, Pretoria, World War I, GSWA, Box 21 (Intelligence GSWA of A Force via Port Nolloth 1914-15), Intelligence Summary to 5<sup>th</sup> September 1914.

troops and 6 guns at Ukamus.<sup>8</sup> The report explained that the occupation was “shown subsequently to be a purely defensive measure, the kopje being occupied only at night.” It was acknowledged that the Germans must have at some stage been confronted with their deed as they, “expressed their ignorance that the kopje was in British territory, and...announced that they will cease occupying it.”<sup>9</sup> With this kind of information available, and despite military control of press information, the newspapers were allowed to construct a highly emotive version of events, considering that press communiqués on military matters all originated from DHQ in Pretoria, and strict censorship had applied since the outbreak of war.

Three days after the German incursion near Nakob, the Cape Times informed its readers of the incident via an official press release from Pretoria,<sup>10</sup> a similar report having appeared in The Star the day before.<sup>11</sup> During August 1914, the largely white English-speaking readers of the South African press faced a daily splash coverage of European war news, much of it focussing on alleged German atrocities in Belgium and France. With their readers doubtlessly anticipating an imminent government reaction to “koppie occupation,” the Cape Times endorsed its report with a detailed description of southern GSWA, the German military forces located there, and the road and rail communications network in the territory. The “invasion” at Nakob could not have occurred at a more remote spot; the sole communication between this point and the next town was a sand track of some one hundred and forty kilometres to Upington, and on the Nakob side, this road continued to the southern German town of Warmbad, approximately one hundred and forty kilometres away. At Nakob, close to the koppie that Cornell discovered being “fortified,” the German and Union frontier posts faced one another at a short distance.<sup>12</sup> The nearest other SAMR station from Nakob was at Zwartmodder, some seventy kilometres due east, with a total personnel of two men.<sup>13</sup> The Cape Times dramatically announced that the track between Upington and Nakob took some nineteen hours to cover, being “very heavy going practically all the way,” and that during “the past year or two more than one white man has been lost in the desert in trying to make that journey.”<sup>14</sup> The newspaper seized on the purported German incursion under the heading: “The Union Invaded.” It remarked that the presence of German troops “entrenching themselves in Union territory proves

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Cape Times, 22 August 1914, p.7.

<sup>11</sup> L'Ange, Urgent Imperial Service, p.11.

<sup>12</sup> Cape Times, 22 August 1914, *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

the necessity and the urgency of the Government's decision to mobilise the forces of the Union.”<sup>15</sup> The newspaper acknowledged that the strength or immediate purpose of the German “invaders” was unknown, but that the neighbouring colony’s regular military strength numbered 2992, and could be boosted with the addition of reservists to about 6000. The German troop numbers concerning the koppie incident could never have been significant, particularly considering the hostility between the Germans and their subjugated black and coloured subjects. The Cape Times admitted that the German colonial government would have been reluctant to suddenly relocate and concentrate for invasion, their thinly spread military personnel, whose task had been for several years the suppression and preclusion of internal rebellion.<sup>16</sup> As for the “invaders” purpose, the newspaper conjectured the rather unlikely possibility that these troops intended procuring food supplies from the Northern Cape districts to supplement the outlying German military stations such as Ukamas. These areas, the report reasoned, would be the first most likely to be affected by the naval blockade of trade to and from GSWA. Such was the one theory suggested by the Cape Times on the “koppie invasion,” it also idly speculated, with ultra-patriotic judgement, that the German action constituted “another example of the madness which proceeds destruction.”<sup>17</sup> Whatever its musings, however, the message from the press to the Union government was clear, and the newspaper expressed it in the following forthright manner:

We do not believe for a moment that it required the violation of our territory by the forces of the enemy to nerve the Government and the people of the Union to assist Great Britain actively, and to the uttermost, in the hour of need.<sup>18</sup>

Describing the events at Nakob as “an outrage on our own borders,” and “an attack on our integrity,”<sup>19</sup> the Cape Times was successfully catching the jingoistic fervour of its readers. There is a stark contrast between the reality of a handful of German soldiers, occupying and fortifying with trenches and low rock walls, an unknown hill on a remote border, and the strident call to arms by the press editors and journalists. British South Africa in every respect was mirroring the same hysterical jubilation with which the populations of the European nations had greeted the outbreak of the First World War, and it was partly this passion and patriotism that spurred the march of the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.6.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

UDF military units as they crossed the Orange River into GSWA less than a month later, taking some of their men directly into disaster at Sandfontein.

The individual responsible for virtually all the information on the Nakob incident was Cornell, who published a lengthy and dramatic article in the Cape Times of 19 September 1914, reporting a successful German military attack on the SAMR post three days earlier.<sup>20</sup> At the war's outbreak in mid-August, this tiny military station contained only three SAMR members, of whom Acting Corporal James Hall was the senior, and these soldiers undertook policing duties in their immediate district. Hall and Rifleman Green were in the process of escorting a "Hottentot prisoner" the one hundred and twenty kilometres to Upington, the very day that war was formally declared between Britain and Germany.<sup>21</sup> Cornell's prospecting camp was located a mile away from the SAMR post, and it was here on 7 August, that he and two companions met Rifleman Van Wyck, who had brought a despatch from Zwartmodder, warning that the outbreak of war in Europe was imminent, and the tiny UDF post must be alert to any German military activity. The remaining SAMR soldier at the border post was Rifleman Joshua Human, who became the second UDF casualty of the GSWA campaign, after Rifleman George Harley, shot on 14 September at Ramans Drift. Human was alone at the time of the message's arrival, and this "gallant young Dutchman," according to Cornell, could not understand the "formal phraseology in the document" which Cornell then explained,<sup>22</sup> before discovering, a few days later, evidence of the German "invasion."

Cornell's article elaborately detailed his discovery of koppie fortifications during a self-initiated scouting mission on the afternoon of 15 August, and described the 16 September German attack on the post, when the eight "gallant boys of the SAMR" had been "martyred" after waiting "five weeks for the reinforcements that never came."<sup>23</sup> The tone of Cornell's writing is melodramatic and extravagant, but also specifically descriptive, suggesting that his facts were authentic. He discovered "the first schanz, freshly built and neatly loopholed," after making his way on foot to the koppie, "passing international beacon 121 on my way, and from it making sure that the koppie was well within our territory." Cornell went on to find "schanz after schanz all commanding our

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 19 September 1914, p.7.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Also see Cornell, F.C. The Glamour of Prospecting, 1920, published in Cape Town, 1986, pp 324-334, where he related a slightly different version of events.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 19 September 1914, p.7.

territory - and all built on it.”<sup>24</sup> His written conclusion of his discovery was carefully penned to strike patriotic pro-Empire chords amongst newspaper readers across South Africa:

For fortress it is, covering and commanding the flat country on the British side for fifteen or twenty miles, dominating every road to the poor forlorn tin shanty held by the British, and also guarding all approach to the German post and water a thousand yards to the rear westward.<sup>25</sup>

In the Introduction to the 1986 edition of Cornell's 1920 account of his many prospecting adventures in the Northern Cape, T.J. Couzens notes correctly that the prospector had an ability to attract publicity, citing that a “classic case is the famous Nakob incident.”<sup>26</sup> Cornell relates how he had dramatically informed the UDF in Uppington of his discovery, after riding all night to break the news, and how it was consequently relayed to DHQ:

I reported to the OC of the ‘SAMR’, but he had no reinforcements to send, and knew no more of what was going to happen on the border than did the poor little ‘garrison’ at Nakob! Meanwhile my sworn statement was wired to Pretoria, where they took a serious view of the matter.<sup>27</sup>

As to recreating the events that morning when the UDF men were overwhelmed, the Cape Times described the clash in the following terms:

In connection with the Nakob fight, it appears that a force of 250 Germans with three maxims, attacked Nakob at daybreak yesterday. The SAMR garrison of five<sup>28</sup> resisted till their ammunition was expended. The casualties occurred whilst the

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Cornell, The Glamour of Prospecting, Introduction, p x.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.333.

<sup>28</sup> There is some confusion in newspaper reports as to the number of troops involved. Some say eight and others five. In Rayner & O’Shaunessy, pp 51-52, the figures are given as eight, of which two were killed, three captured, and three escaped. Archival documentation (SANDF, DSD, SAMR Volume 4, Box 770) reports six prisoners’ names, which added to the dead Cpl Coulter, would make seven.

men were attempting to escape....the other two, who were returning from patrol, rode into the midst of the Germans...Corporal Coulter was shot dead as he was mounting his horse at a hundred yards distance.

Rifleman Human was shot in the back, the bullet coming out at the point of his chin, whilst preparing to mount. He is not expected to recover.<sup>29</sup>

Through Cornell, the Cape Times continued to cover the story with dramatic tones of outrage:

Surrounded by their overwhelming numbers, facing with their eight unerring rifles not only the three hundred Mausers of the Germans, but the deadly fire of no less than three maxims, the gallant boys of the SAMR have gone under, fighting gallantly, wiped out as they knew only too well they would be, after waiting five long weeks for the reinforcements that never came.<sup>30</sup>

Human's account of the Nakob fight provides us with additional detail; he and one other soldier obeyed orders to creep up and eavesdrop on the Germans at their post, and when challenged, the two SAMR men had fled. It was during this incident that Human had suffered severe wounding and capture.<sup>31</sup> These details seem to point to a situation where the Germans had attacked the SAMR post the following morning, in direct response to a violation of their border by "spying" UDF soldiers. Whatever the truth of the matter, the press certainly had a role in "pushing" the Union Government towards invading GSWA. Human was a lifelong "Smutsman" and his serious wounding and imprisonment by the Germans had rendered him "anti-German till his death," despite the medical care he received.<sup>32</sup> His account of the Nakob incident, however, differs in some detail from those published in the press, principally regarding who actually initiated the clash. This in the sense that the SAMR soldiers had crossed the border for surveillance purposes, and the

<sup>29</sup> Cape Times, 18 September 1914, p.4.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 19 September 1914, p.4.

<sup>31</sup> Letter dated 26 February 1998 from W. Bruwer in Douglas, Northern Cape.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

German attack on their post followed directly upon the UDF men's discovery and capture.<sup>33</sup> The South African press had reported the German attack on the SAMR post as being completely unprovoked. It is also entirely plausible that the attack at Nakob was in response to the UDF's 14 September attack on the German Police station at Ramans Drift, for by this stage, Lukin had long been despatched with his SAMR Brigade, or "A" Force, to commence the first phase of the GSWA invasion.

The Nakob incident did have one final sad sequel. Two weeks later, the press released a report concerning an alleged atrocity. The Cape Argus described how an Afrikaner farmer, ignorant of the earlier battle at the SAMR post, had walked into the same German troops some six hours later while intending to visit his brother in the vicinity. The Germans informed the two brothers they were under arrest. This was in line with a recently declared policy of transferring inland all GSWA border farmers. The tragic result was that the farmer had taken fright at his imminent incarceration and in panic attempted to flee. The soldiers had shot him dead despite the fact that he had been unarmed and on foot.<sup>34\*</sup> The report is significant in that the press kept Nakob in the news, and that this unnecessary spilling of blood in the immediate aftermath of the German clash with the SAMR troops, suggests that emotions and battle strain were still high. It also puts into balance various earlier accounts of the 1914-15 GSWA hostilities, which are sometimes styled as being such where chivalry was a marked feature.<sup>35</sup> It was also another incident used by the press to raise the political temperature in support of a full GSWA invasion.

With the Nakob incident headline news, on 21 August 1914, two days after the first press reports, a meeting of politicians, military officers, and the most senior railway official, was convened at DHQ with the intention to establish the first plan of operations for a military invasion of GSWA. Chaired by Smuts in his capacity as Defence Minister, other members present included Brigadier-Generals Beyers and Lukin, the two most senior UDF men in the positions of officer commanding the Active Citizen Force and Inspector-General of the Permanent Force respectively. There was no overall Commanding Officer of the military or a Chief of Staff post. The other individuals attending were Colonels P.S. Beves, Sir Duncan McKenzie, and Colonel P.C.B. Skinner, a British Army officer

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Cape Argus, 30 September 1914, p.3. \* It is also a moot point whether members of the Afrikaner Vrij Korps would have killed a kinsman so needlessly..

<sup>35</sup> A typical example is recorded in Collyer, The Campaign, p.43, where after the battle of Sandfontein the German commander Colonel von Heydenbreck, was reported to have congratulated his UDF counterpart, Lt-Col Grant on the SAMR/THA defence.

loaned to the UDF for instructional duties. The sixth member at the gathering was Sir William Hoy, the General Manager of the Railways.<sup>36</sup> Collyer states that: "The decisions reached by this meeting were arrived at 'after prolonged discussion' ...and no doubt bearing in mind the composition of the gathering, represented a compromise and the reconciliation of divergent views."<sup>37</sup> In all likelihood, Beyers, who was the only Afrikaner Nationalist present, would have been at odds with the others, although a first plan of operations was decided upon, to which all present must have consented, albeit reluctantly by the ACF commander.

A month after the alleged occupation of Nakob, its circumstances were surpassed by further developments in the Union government's plans to invade the German colony. ACF and Permanent Force SAMR troops had been mobilised, landed at Port Nolloth, and marched to the Orange River Drifts, and by 12 September, the Union government gave Lukin authority to enter German territory.<sup>38</sup> Within three days, several skirmishes with German forces had ensued with casualties on both sides, while DHQ was deeply concerned at alarming rumours circulating around the potentially disloyal demeanour of Lt-Col "Manie" Maritz, the senior UDF officer appointed to the North-West Cape.<sup>39</sup> These details are dealt with at length within chapter four concerning: "Deployment of the UDF to the Orange River drifts and Sandfontein," and chapter seven: "Culpability," regarding Maritz's impact on the first phase of the GSWA invasion.

On 15 September, Beyers had resigned his position in the UDF because of his disagreement with government plans to invade GSWA, while General De La Rey's accidental shooting had occurred that evening, thereby exacerbating an already seriously tense political situation within the Union. A formal state of war already existed between South Africa and Germany by 16 September when the German troops at Nakob attacked the SAMR counterparts. In contrast to what the press had been speculating on Cornell's reports, as was mentioned above, it would be more realistic to link the German attack at Nakob, with the SAMR crossing at the Orange River drifts two days earlier, and clashing with German troops within GSWA.

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<sup>36</sup> Collyer, The Campaign, p.27.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.30.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.33.

## The validity of the “Nakob Incident”

A re-examination of the Nakob incident provides a useful insight into the contemporary political divisions and suspicions between British and Afrikaner South Africans, and the imminent violent split amongst Afrikaners. It has been long acknowledged that the Union government’s GSWA invasion plans were a significant factor in precipitating the Afrikaner Rebellion. The events at Nakob were to rankle in Afrikaner Nationalist historical perspectives nearly two decades after the incident, when Scholtz accused Cornell of collaborating with UDF officers.<sup>40</sup> According to Scholtz, Cornell had declared before one of the Judicial Commission of Enquiry into the Rebellion, that he had been communicating (“in verbinding gestaan het”) with certain officers who were drawing up military maps,<sup>41</sup> and that a UDF military patrol encountered an armed German soldier on the koppie a week after Cornell's discovery. When ordered to leave the German had done so without argument, suggesting that aggressive German entrenchment and imminent invasion was far from an accurate description of the situation at Nakob in August 1914.<sup>42</sup> Scholtz went on to attack the SAP government, who through the Department of Railways and Harbours, produced a map with Nakob appearing on the German side of the border. The map was intended as a parliamentary prop to explain a proposed railway extension from Prieska to Upington. However, when Cornell's Nakob report appeared in the press, railway officials changed the map by shifting Nakob to the Union side. Because of this amendment, Schultz insisted that:

The map had to confirm the report, and in this regard the map was just as misleading as the report.<sup>43</sup> (translation)

Carl Weidner in a letter to the Cape Times in May 1948 probably reflected the truth of the Nakob matter as well as anybody. Weidner had managed a citrus estate at Goodhouse on the banks of the Orange River for nearly four decades,<sup>44</sup> and had accommodated Lukin's troops there, both prior and after the Battle of Sandfontein.<sup>45</sup> Writing on the entirely separate issue of “South African future neutrality” in 1948, Weidner reflected upon the events of August 1914 for substantiation of his arguments.

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<sup>40</sup> Scholtz, Die Rebelle, pp69-72.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p.69.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.71.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p.73-74.

<sup>44</sup> Reitz, No Outspan, London, 1943, pp.

<sup>45</sup> World War I, GSWA., Box 14, letter dated 11 September 1914 from C. Weideman to Captain Clery, UDF.

Again- take our own (1914) armed protest, solely the cause of leaving people in the dark until the last moment when public opinion has to be manufactured by all sorts of untrue statements about a wandering Nakob and violations of this (my) border which never did take place. Is now this vital question of our neutrality again to be shelved until we are once more to be split into two camps.<sup>46</sup>

While the vast majority of writers concerned with South African history today would be extremely reluctant to side with the actions and political intentions of the 1914 Rebels,<sup>47</sup> the questions remain: Why did the Union government find it necessary to go to such lengths in their inflation of the Nakob incident as a part justification for the GSWA invasion? To what extent did the press collude with the government in exacerbating anti-German public hysteria? One of the contentions of this dissertation is that the government for political reasons moved too quickly in ordering the UDF to invade GSWA, and had to continue to carry majority public opinion with it, even after the Sandfontein disaster. The SAP government's public stance that the Nakob "koppie incident" constituted aggression by the Germans, continued after the completion of the GSWA campaign. We now need to look specifically at the Afrikaner Rebellion, and its relationship to the first phase of the GSWA invasion.

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<sup>46</sup> Cape Times, 11 May 1948.

<sup>47</sup> Even the Afrikaner Nationalist historian Prof. C.F.J. Muller wrote of the rebels; "No government worthy of its name can passively allow its subjects to take up arms against it". 500 Years A History of South Africa, Pretoria, 1975, p.402.

## CHAPTER 3: THE AFRIKANER REBELLION AND THE FIRST PHASE OF THE UDF'S GSWA INVASION.

### Introduction

The South Africa situation in 1914 was one where war passions, opinions, and responses were markedly more different and divided compared with the rest of the British Empire. In that sense Nasson is correct in stating that the war, "brought rifts, not national unity, for it provided an occasion for the discharge of particularist beliefs, loyalties and identities, grounded in contradictory political and social cross currents."<sup>1</sup> There is a direct link between the Afrikaner Rebellion and the Union government's decision to invade the GSWA, which must receive some attention. Less significant, but still worthy of mention, was the negative reaction to the Nakob incident and the GSWA invasion, by members of the working class English-speaking whites, particularly on the Witwatersrand, in stark contrast to the feelings of the majority of their kin.

### English-speaking working class objections

Industrial unrest in 1913-14 had created a small but vociferous group of politically disenchanted British South Africans, some of whom voiced strong views on the events surrounding the planned GSWA invasion. The outrage expressed by the press and government supporters at the Nakob incident was not shared by these white workers, many of whom who had come into painful conflict with the state. They remained outraged at perceived government brutality and injustices during recent strikes, particularly when Smuts, as Minister of Mines, Interior and Defence, made the decision to deport nine of the January 1914 Strike leaders, and introduce controversial legislation to cover his tracks.<sup>2</sup> Smuts was a hated figure amongst the militant white working class, and received a number of anonymous abusive letters from English-speaking workers, in addition to those from Afrikaners who were sympathetic to, or participants, in the Rebellion. One writer was specifically insulting when referring to the Nakob incident:

Everybody now looks through your stinking lie about Germans  
entrenching themselves in Union territory, why don't you tell us

<sup>1</sup> Nasson, B., *War Opinion in South Africa, 1914*, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol XXIII, January 1995, Number 1, p.271.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

what became of these mythical Germans; are they still there?.....

I can assure you, the Germans will be hailed as deliverers from mean skunks like you who suck South Africa's blood. How hard you are trying to keep your job. You will be kicked out in any case by a Labour Party man. If you had the least feeling in your mean carcase (sic) you would have resigned long ago, knowing as you do that you are hated by all your decent compatriots and by many Englishmen besides.<sup>3</sup>

There are a number of letters in this collection from both English and Afrikaner correspondents, some of the latter written sarcastically in English and penned with the same vituperated tone. On the subject of the UDF's defeat at Sandfontein on 26 September 1914, the same correspondent wrote to Smuts with sneering satisfaction:

You just try to take GSWA as you darkly hint...and we will see some fun. You will get plenty of magnified Zandfonteins.<sup>4</sup>

Considering that the newly created UDF was instrumental in the crushing of the 1914 Strikes, it would be instructive to establish how many strikers forgot their feelings and actually served in the Force during the GSWA campaign. The SA Labour Party, which had initially condemned the war when it broke out in Europe, as unjust and only benefiting capitalist arms manufacturers, had by the September parliamentary session backed government plans to attack GSWA.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Afrikaner Rebellion**

The most important fissure amongst whites in 1914 lay between Afrikaners. It was this, rather than the anti-Smuts bitterness of English-speaking white workers, that had the greatest political significance and severely jarred both government and country for over five months. What follows therefore is a short analysis of the plotting behind the Afrikaner Rebellion, and its connectedness to the government's decision to invade GSWA, besides the divisions caused amongst Afrikaners.

<sup>3</sup> African Studies Manuscripts Collection, UCT, Smuts Private Letters, Vol 12, 1914.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Nasson, War Opinion, pp 265-266.

Both the occupation of Union soil and the armed attack on its border guard at Nakob by a foreign power reverberated across the press, political, and military circles, and was used by the Union government as part of its explicit justification to invade. This decision served as a catalyst for angry Afrikaner Nationalist zealots to rebel against the government, although rebel leaders and their mostly impoverished “five bob a day” followers were initially successful in retarding, then delaying military operations against the German colony. The largest number of rebels were drawn from the white populations of the north-eastern Free State, Western Transvaal and North-Western Cape, where debt, landlessness, deepening class divisions, drought and poor harvests,<sup>6</sup> played a significant role in drawing poor white Afrikaners into impulsive armed ventures against the state, particularly as the Rebellion was bolstered by the leadership of 1899-1902 popular heroes, such as De Wet. The cost of the Rebellion was over three hundred and twenty two lives lost and many more wounded, at considerable public expense, besides damage to property.<sup>7</sup> More important, however, from a political viewpoint, were the divisions amongst Afrikaners that left indelible hurt and anger between communities, families, and individuals.<sup>8</sup> There were serious political consequences for the SAP government, as the Nationalist Party drew in votes from those thousands of disaffected Afrikaners, who were in turn added to those already alienated by industrial disputes. There were the martyrs, principally Jopie Fourie and Beyers, who were to be borne as heroic and tragic figures within future Afrikaner political mythology. The legacy of bitterness from the 1914 Rebellion remains still embedded in Afrikaner political culture nearly ninety years later.

The central question posed, is to what degree the Afrikaner Rebellion was directly connected to the government’s GSWA invasion decision. In order to attempt an answer, we need very briefly to overview some of the rebel motives and the course of events regarding their leaders’ planning. Only with such an analysis can we hope to locate the GSWA invasion in relation to the Rebellion. Nasson has pointed out other additional interesting stimuli to barely dormant Afrikaner republican feelings, included letters and copies of speeches despatched to Hertzog by Henri Bourassa, the French-Canadian champion for an independent Quebec, and reproduced in turn by newspapers such

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<sup>6</sup> Nasson, *Ibid.*, pp 262-264.

<sup>7</sup> In the *Official History, Union of South Africa and the Great War 1914-1918*, Pretoria, 1924, a figure of 5 100 000 pounds is given, p.25.

<sup>8</sup> There are numerous examples of these divisions; one example deserves mention; the details were brought to this author’s attention by D.P Pretorius from Nylstroom (now Modimolle) in a letter dated 17 March 1998. The writer’s father, Lt-Col N.J. Pretorius, led the military force that captured Capt Jopie Fourie at Nooitgedacht outside Pretoria in December 1915. Pretorius and Fourie were both friends and cousins. In subsequent years Pretorius was treated as an outcast by his community; members of church congregations walked out of services when he entered, and there was at least one plot against his life. N.J. Pretorius later became an SAP Member of Parliament.

as De Zuid Afrikaan and Ons Land.<sup>9</sup> Afrikaner anti-war sentiment was also located amongst ostrich, fruit, wool and wheat farmers, who feared disruption in markets and exports, and the resultant effects of poverty amongst both whites and blacks.<sup>10</sup> Certain rebel leaders and their apologist historians have contended that no real uprising against the state actually occurred as such. They suggest that the government's impulsivity led to a number of violent incidents around the country, which were in effect "outbursts of spontaneous defiance" by angry Afrikaner Nationalists.<sup>11</sup> This contrasts with the common view that the rebels intended overthrowing the government and recreating the original Boer Republics. According to Davenport, the Fouche, Duncan and Lange reports, which all officially commissioned inquiries into the Rebellion, are unbalanced due to their uncritical portrayal of the government's viewpoint,<sup>12</sup> while later accounts by the rebels and their supporters contradicted the official government conclusions, but equally failed to satisfactorily provide objectivity on the subject.<sup>13</sup>

The most important issues in our analysis concern the motives of the rebel leaders, the degrees of cooperation between them, and how intelligently the government handled the affair.<sup>14</sup> The contention that the Rebellion occurred purely out of opposition to the GSWA invasion, still leaves much unexplained. Davenport views the Rebellion in three phases: Firstly, the mystic visions of forthcoming Afrikaner republican independence by the seer Van Rensburg, located in the Western Transvaal during August. Secondly, demonstrations and seditious talk by prominent individuals against the government in various scattered military camps during September. Thirdly, actual armed rebellion with violence against government forces, this taking place in very much the same districts as the affected military camps in October, with the violence only subsiding by late January the following year.<sup>15</sup> These three symptoms of Afrikaner discontent do not have any clearly defined connections, although it is suggested that Manie Maritz in the Northern Cape and General Beyers in the Transvaal, had been in prior communication concerning a proposed plot to overthrow the SAP government by the middle of September.<sup>16</sup> Maritz's failure to move his troops ("B" Force) to the German border in support of Lukin's "A" Force, during the latter's critical operations inside

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<sup>9</sup> Nasson, War Opinion, p.260.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Davenport, T.R.H., South African Rebellion 1914, The English Historical Review, 1963, p.75.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp74-76.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.75.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.78.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

southern GSWA in September, was strongly held against him by the UDF and its historians as the major contributing factor in the Sandfontein defeat.

Louis Botha in his capacity as Prime Minister, and Smuts as Minister of Defence, called a meeting of Transvaal UDF officers on 14 August to discuss their war commitments. During this gathering, by Botha's own admittance, he detected hostility to the invasion plan by several of those present, including Beyers, Maritz and Kemp, details of which are further confirmed by Maritz.<sup>17</sup> What is striking, as Davenport observes, was that men of dubious allegiance to government intentions were left in strategic positions of command within important military districts, namely Kemp in Potchefstroom, Maritz in the Northern Cape, while Beyers remained the Commandant-General of the ACF.<sup>18</sup> In defence of Botha and Smuts, the summary dismissal of these officers would not have been prudent, and in all likelihood could have been harshly perceived by Afrikaners not yet entirely committed to either side. The consequences of such an action would have been unpredictable, and potentially disastrous, and the government had no way of accurately ascertaining the number of further potential rebels.

Around the same date of the above meeting, Maritz and Beyers were privately concluding plans, to the effect that the former was to liaise with the Germans and commence hostilities against government forces by 15 September.<sup>19</sup> Davenport challenged Scholtz who attempted to separate the treasonous acts committed by Maritz from the conduct of Beyers, asserting that the "logical line of cleavage" is not one dividing Maritz from other leaders, but rather "a line dividing the events before 16 September from those after the date."<sup>20</sup> In other words, Beyers had been in treasonous communication with Maritz regarding the latter's intentions to communicate with the Germans, although subsequently, Maritz and his men embarked on violent acts of rebellion after mid-September, without further contact with Beyers. As Davenport puts it:

To prove collusion between Beyers and Maritz before 15 September would not make Beyers in any way responsible for the overt acts committed by Maritz, which belong mainly to a later date; but it would throw light on the ramifications of the so-

<sup>17</sup> Maritz, M., *My Lewe en Strewe*, Johannesburg, 1939, p.64.

<sup>18</sup> Davenport, *South African Rebellion*, pp79-80.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p.80.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.79.

called 'September plot', and perhaps implicate Maritz in schemes associated with the name of Beyers.<sup>21</sup>

Essentially the plot was to begin with a sequence of armed acts by rebels at specified locations; key points were to be occupied and government forces routed in the process. Potchefstroom would fall on 15 September to Kemp, insurrection would commence throughout the Western Transvaal, Beyers would lead an assault on Krugersdorp and Pretoria, and De Wet would begin rebellion in the Free State. Upon the proclamation of a Republic, a provisional government would form with Beyers as President, while other rebel leaders would occupy senior military posts.<sup>22</sup>

Maritz maintained contact with Beyers, at least up to 14 September, through a GSWA Afrikaner, P.J. Joubert, whom he appointed as his Staff Captain.<sup>23</sup> Maritz intended to begin the rising from military bases in Upington and Kakamas, having already in his capacity as commanding officer of the Northern Cape military district, received instructions from DHQ to mobilise 1000 members of the ACF for training. The vast distances that many of these troops had to travel to the Northern Cape made their rapid concentration difficult. By 15 September, Maritz still did not have sufficient men, and no satisfactory arrangements had yet been concluded with the Germans. Together with another GSWA Afrikaner, P.G. De Wet, who was acting on behalf of the German Governor Seitz, Maritz crossed over to the German Colony in late August. De Wet proceeded to Windhoek to procure artillery and troops, and set up a meeting between the Governor and Beyers.<sup>24</sup> Seitz had hesitated on the supply of men and materials to Maritz, but agreed to the formation of an armed "Vrij Korps" of GSWA Afrikaners, some of whom were "*bittereinders*" who had fled into German territory at the close of the SA War in 1902. Their presence in the rebel forces elicited responses from Free State commando leaders called up for military service in the UDF, that they did not want to attack fellow Afrikaners.<sup>25</sup> The formation of the Vrij Korps occurred on 9 September, its leader being De Wet's brother, Andries, together with an understanding from the GSWA Governor that it had to operate under German control, and would be expected to initiate hostilities with Union Forces in the Northern Cape. Katzenellenbogen points out the gulf between Maritz's presumptuous expectations of the Germans, for example his belief in their "permission" for the "independent South Africa" to "annex" Portuguese Delagoa Bay, and the guarded reactions he received from the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.80.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp81-82.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp83-84.

<sup>25</sup> Nasson, *War Opinion*, p.261.

suspicious Seitz,<sup>26</sup> whose contact with Afrikaner rebels seemed entirely based on German self-interest.

These arrangements could not have been entirely satisfactory to Maritz, for it stands to reason that his first interest would have been the success of rebellion in the Union, not assisting the Germans in defending their colony. He needed war materials and men, but the German governor's priorities did not perfectly match those of the rebels. The Germans at best hoped to defend GSWA with delaying tactics until the war was resolved in their favour within Europe. They certainly did not have the means to seriously invade the Union, but they could supply limited resources, including a handful of troops and artillery, to assist the rebels in distracting Union government forces across the Orange river, and in the Upington district. Therefore the Germans were directly involved in military attacks upon Upington and Kakamas in late January 1915, as well as the Rietfontein police station during March. During the Upington attack, the Germans operated in direct collaboration with the Vrij Korps and other Afrikaner Rebels. Maritz was hoping for the substantial movement of war supplies from the German colony into the Union. A prerequisite for this to succeed, however, would surely have been as little military activity as possible occurring in this region, until the rebellion was well stocked in respect of munitions and men. These circumstances were completely rocked by the SAMR attacking Ramans and Houms Drifts on 13/14 September, the attack on Nakob by the Vrij Korps and German troops on 16 September, and the extensive fighting at Sandfontein on 26 September.<sup>27</sup> By early October, Union troop reinforcements had reached Upington, and Maritz had an unequal fight on his hands, with no or little hope of success.

Maritz did not welcome the Nakob attack, and he had no prior knowledge of it. It could not therefore have been a signal intended for the Rebellion to commence,<sup>28</sup> but rather just constituted propaganda value to the Union government for whipping up public emotions over their GSWA invasion intentions. The Rebellion plans proceeded with Kemp and other leaders facilitating an environment amongst ACF troops at the Potchefstroom military base conducive to mutiny. Men called up for part-time military training were deliberately inducted into a camp atmosphere that encouraged a negative response to government plans to attack GSWA, with the intention to begin an armed campaign that would re-establish Boer independence. It was the accidental death of De

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<sup>26</sup> Katzenellenbogen, S.E., Southern Africa and the War of 1914-18, in M.R.D. Foot, War and Society, 1973, p.110.

<sup>27</sup> Davenport, South African Rebellion, p.84.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 84-85.

La Rey on the night of 15 September, that threw things into confusion,<sup>29</sup> disorientating and shaking both Beyers and Kemp. In consequence, the plans at Potchefstroom came to nothing. Maritz who was initially oblivious to De La Rey's death and its effects, continued his movements in the Northern Cape, but the actual conspiracy between the rebel leaders had terminated. What remained, however, were the various resentments and expectations of disenchanted Afrikaners, further fuelled in many cases by poverty. Some of the most powerful feelings concerned the legitimacy of Parliament in making the decision to invade, and the purported compulsory call-up of ACF men to participate in the invasion. Disenchanted Afrikaners questioned why and how Parliament could have supported Botha without dissolution and a general election.<sup>30</sup> The rebel leaders were still active, and political tension remained at a level where the avoidance of violence became unlikely. The outbreaks of internal rebellion by mid-September were simply a matter of time, regardless of the various rebel leaders' prior intrigues.

The disunity and depression amongst Afrikaners during these times are starkly obvious; for example a correspondent was quick to point out how his stepfather from the Graaff-Reinet district was called up for military service by the government in 1914, but participated with little enthusiasm.<sup>31</sup> This particular individual, C.D.Blom, was recruited for a Kakamas bound commando, ordered to prevent rebels from joining others in GSWA. Apparently, during discussion of his experiences, Blom always emphasised the point that at no time did he, "fire a single shot at his fellow countrymen," despite being involved in several skirmishes.<sup>32</sup> When ordered to cross into German territory, Blom claimed that he and his comrades had refused to obey, and were in consequence sent back to their homes without incurring any legal sanction.<sup>33</sup>

There are numerous references in newspaper reports to resistance from Afrikaners regarding the call-up for the GSWA campaign. For example, in Klerksdorp, during early January 1915, thirteen men who had been ordered to South West Africa refused and were summarily gaoled. The

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp85-86.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Details from a letter dated 25 February 1998, written to the author by H. Odendaal of Bloemfontein.

<sup>32</sup> It is a reality in the writing of military history that one can be as John Keegan puts it, "trying to reconstruct the events from the accounts of those whose reputations and self-esteem may thereby gain or lose." (Keegan, *Face of Battle*, London, 1974, p.31.) In the years subsequent to 1914, the rebels' credibility gained significantly in Afrikaner Nationalist historiography. Any government Afrikaner military veteran of either the Rebellion or GSWA campaign, depending on the kind of community he lived in, would have felt at some stage the need to explain the circumstances of his own participation. The 1930s to early '80s were politically highly charged years within Afrikanerdom. There was a strong emphasis placed upon volk unity and persistent dissidents were ostracised. We do not know to what extent this correspondent's (H. Odendaal) sources were influenced by such pressure, but we know that the serious political divisions must also have impacted upon Afrikaners who were loyal to the government.

<sup>33</sup> Letter from Bloemfontein correspondent, H. Odendaal, dated 25 February 1998.

magistrate was unwilling to try the case on grounds that it fell outside his jurisdiction, resulting in the referral of the charges to the Defence Department. At Bloemhof, sixty men refused to participate and were placed “under arrest pending instructions from Pretoria,” while six men in Krugersdorp were gaoled for the same reason.<sup>34</sup> In the cities, there were numerous incidents of citizens being arrested for the use of seditious language. A typical example was a report in the Cape Argus of 11 January 1915, concerning Giles de Korte, who had recently appeared in the Cape Town Magistrates Court. His charge was:

unlawfully using seditious language, or did attempt to incite dissatisfaction against or disregard the authority of persons acting and in pursuance of the Government authority, by uttering words to the following on a public tramcar: ‘General Smuts is no d--m man. He is doing England's dirty work. The English could not manage the German West Africa business themselves, and he had to call out the Transvaal burgers to do it for them. The proclamation (To call up the burgers) was his first dirty act’

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Smuts was placed in a predicament where the decision to invade GSWA had, at varying levels in white society, invoked a response of, as Nasson puts it: “bloody minded truculence.” While the Minister could confidently call upon most English-speaking whites in Cape Town, Durban, or Johannesburg,<sup>36</sup> he had to tread more warily amongst large portions of Afrikaners, and urban English workers. It appears that the government had not been entirely clear on whether the invasion was for volunteers alone. Only on 21 September, in an ambivalent proclamation quoted in the Lange Report, had Botha and Smuts brought a measure of clarity. It had regretted “disquietude” because of “the impression gaining ground that it was the Government's intention to commandeer citizens of the Citizen Force Reserve and National Reserve for war service...outside the Union.” The proclamation concluded by stating: “It is quite improbable that the Government will find it necessary to call out any more regiments of the Active Citizen Force for service outside the Union.”<sup>37</sup> What is clear, however, is that men were arrested and charged for refusing to join the

<sup>34</sup> Cape Argus, 8 January 1915, p.3.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 11 January 1915, p.5.

<sup>36</sup> Nasson, War Opinion, p.269.

<sup>37</sup> Lange Report, p.30, as quoted by Davenport, South African Rebellion, p.86, footnote 1.

invasion, regardless of the proclamation, because the polarisation between the rebels and government supporters, had in reality left no room for neutrals.

Potential Afrikaner rebels noted that the government appeared to be coercing ACF members into GSWA war service, and this was bitterly resented. Maritz was able to exploit this by pointing out that some of his men had responded to their military call-up, simply because they were obeying the law. When Smuts asked him to position his troops in readiness to face the Germans, Maritz stated that "B" force, as it was now termed, was not entirely ready, and that as it consisted of troops legally called up for part-time service, not all had volunteered to invade GSWA. Maritz phrased his feelings as follows:

if the Germans advance owing to action of Government and the volunteers cannot repel them, the public will unanimously refuse to fire a shot.<sup>38</sup>

Nasson and Garson agree that by 1917 more than half of Afrikaners were "explicitly opposed to Union war policy."<sup>39</sup> Whatever the truth of that, and it would be difficult to accurately quantify it, large numbers of loyal Afrikaners did respond to Botha's call in 1914, certainly well in excess to the final mustering tally of rebels.<sup>40</sup> Likewise, large numbers of burgers followed Botha during the second phase of the GSWA campaign, and under some of the most respected Boer field commanders of 1899-1902. The divisions in the Afrikaner Volk, however, were painful. Piet Van der Byl, a UDF junior staff officer, recalled how during the Rebellion, at the decisive battle of Mushroom Valley in November 1914, two opposing small groups of mounted burgers had galloped parallel along either sides of a fence, calling to each other by first names, before realising they were on opposing sides and exchanging shots.<sup>41</sup> During the same encounter, there were tensions between British South Africans, and loyalist Afrikaner commanders, as personified by the mutual dislike between Coen Brits and Lukin, the latter with his SAMR Brigade that had just returned from the defeat by the Germans at Sandfontein.<sup>42</sup> Although Van der Byl was an unswerving and uncritical Louis Botha disciple, his description of the Prime Minister at the end of the Mushroom Valley

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., footnote 4.

<sup>39</sup> Nasson, *War Opinion*, p.261.

<sup>40</sup> According to the *Official History*, p.25, 11472 men went into rebellion. This figure is probably a significant under-estimation, but there can be little doubt that the active rebels constituted a minority of Afrikaners.

<sup>41</sup> Van der Byl, P., *From Playgrounds to Battlefields*, Cape Town, 1971, pp 117-118.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp 114-115.

battle empathises with the tragedy as felt by many Afrikaners.<sup>43</sup> Another ardent Smuts and Botha loyalist, Denys Reitz, wrote sadly of his own feelings in the wake of a skirmish between pro-government burgers under his command and rebels from his home district of Heilbron:

After a short fight they put up a white flag, and we were surprised to find that we had captured the major portion of David Van Coller's Heilbron commando, from our own district, ...Nearly three hundred surrendered, with over four hundred horses, and every one of the captured men was an acquaintance, a client, or a friend.<sup>44</sup>

Reitz was a loyal follower of those Afrikaner politicians who had made a solemn commitment to white unity within South Africa. The unbending emphasis that Botha and Smuts placed upon post-SA War white racial reconciliation, and their enthusiastic support of the country's membership and duties within and to the British Empire, were dutifully followed by scores of their kin. Predictably, however, not all Afrikaners would march to the same drum. There was still much mutual antipathy between the white language groups, while the post-SA War economic depression had resulted in war weary former plattelanders humiliated to the status of a depressed urban proletariat. For Afrikaners, this was combined with smouldering irrevocable anti-British sentiment, fear of black encroachment in the social and economic spheres, blind prejudice, xenophobia, lack of education, rigid insular perceptions, and concern that their heritage and language would in time be rendered extinct by its political impotence. Such were the circumstances, perceptions, and forces, that Botha, Smuts, and the SAP could never bend to their favour regarding the Volk.

While British South Africa, with the exception of some embittered members and supporters of the Labour Party, rejoiced at the coming of war and flocked to join the UDF regiments, many Afrikaner loyalists unquestioningly followed their own leaders, namely Botha and Smuts. Some like Reitz went to war with insight and understanding of the international and national circumstances, as well as commitment to their country and its leaders' philosophy. The prospect of adventure and war experience drew others, as did the Afrikaner masculine culture, which placed a strong emphasis upon commando duty against an enemy as being a rite of passage to manhood. Others joined the commandos in response to government instructions, as they believed citizens

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pp 119-120.

<sup>44</sup> Reitz, Denys, *Trekking On*, pp85-86.

should. The path followed by Reitz and scores of other "*Bloedsappe*," was both magnanimous and intelligent, although like the rebels, could also be viewed as simply the pursuit of self-interest. For the *Bloedsappe*, this would be best understood in the context of white South Africans seeking their own economic prosperity and political security, in a continent and country where Europeans were destined to remain a minority. For the rebels it was the re-creation of an Afrikaner Republic, which like that of Paul Kruger's a decade and a half before, would have embraced racial exclusivity to the ultimate extent. The first phase of the campaign was, however, to be conducted by the largely British South African SAMR regiments, while the Union government's decision to invade GSWA, showed up the cracks in white society, vividly illustrated by the outbreak of the Afrikaner Rebellion. We need now to turn towards the events leading up to General Lukin's "A" Force moving up to the Orange River border of southern GSWA, and into the defeat at Sandfontein.

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## CHAPTER 4: UDF DEPLOYMENT TO THE GSWA BORDER AND SANDFONTEIN

### **“A” Force in Cape Town: its composition and its advance via Port Nolloth and Steinkopf to the Orange River drifts, 31 August -24 September 1914. (Refer to Maps 3 –5)**

In accordance with the decisions made by Smuts, Lukin and other senior UDF officers at the 21 August meeting at DHQ, a multiplicity of arrangements now ensued to begin the GSWA invasion. This thesis concentrates specifically upon “A” Force, or the “Namaqualand Field Force,” which was Lukin's command, also referred to as the “SAMR Brigade.” Maritz commanded “B” Force,<sup>1</sup> which was intended to assemble at Upington, while “C” Force under Colonel P. Beves, was to land at Luderitzbucht.<sup>2</sup> The fact that Smuts had assigned the largest of the three invasion components, namely “A” Force, to the responsibility of the Permanent Force commander, indicated its central significance in the Defence Minister's mind; a point further bolstered by the fact that it was the only one of the three invasion components where the vast majority of the troops were regulars. In “B” and “C” Forces only a very small handful of officers were professional soldiers. The SAMR regiments, with accompanying artillery and support units, assembled in mid-August at the Rosebank Show Grounds in Cape Town. These early preparations would have been an exhilarating time for men fired by patriotism and anticipating the prospect of active service. One of them was Sergeant A.E. Bishop of the 5th SAMR, a thirty-one year old SA War veteran from Bedford in England. Bishop's feelings were probably fairly typical when in 1953, he reflected back upon the frenzied activity at the Roseback camp as “A” Force were suddenly ordered to prepare to travel to Cape Town. At the harbour they would embark upon ships that were bound for Port Nolloth:

it was all rush and bustle and nobody seemed to get any rest but it was a new life to us and we enjoyed the excitement. After being there (in Rosebank) about 3 days we suddenly got the order at dinner time that we had to leave for the docks at once. The midday meal had not even been eaten and it was ‘pack up and clear.’ I remember what a scramble it was, dixies full of stew, jam tins open and food lying everywhere. Some men put all these hickeldy-pickledy (sic) on to one of our mule wagons

<sup>1</sup> According to Collyer, *The Campaign*, this consisted of “1000 all ranks” with no artillery, p. 28

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, “1824 all ranks,” with six artillery pieces.

and down to the docks we rode through Cape Town. The people turned out to watch us in large numbers.<sup>3</sup>

Each of the five SAMR regiments consisted of mounted troops, with each of these roughly divided into three field squadrons of approximately 100 men each. There were actually, however, considerable differences in manpower between the different regiments. The 1st SAMR contained 388 whites and 42 blacks, compared with the 3rd SAMR's 190 white and 25 blacks, while the other three regiments' numbers fell somewhere in-between. "A" Force's combat balance consisted of the 2nd and 4th Permanent Artillery Batteries of the SAMR, each armed with four modern 13 "pounder" QF (Quick-firing) guns, although the 2nd Battery was reassigned elsewhere when it arrived at Steinkopf. The ACF contingents were the Witwatersrand Rifles (10th Infantry) and a battery of the Transvaal Horse Artillery (THA) (8th Citizen Battery), also equipped with four 13 "pounder" guns. Additional support for Lukin's brigade consisted of a signals troop, a field ambulance, and a "stationary hospital," which included the only female members of "A" Force, namely five nursing sisters. There was also a "pioneer section," in all likelihood engineers, an intelligence unit, a water boring section, a veterinary service consisting of 3 officers, and the ammunition column and supply/transport train. The total personnel figures were 3315 white men, the 5 white female nurses, and 653 black and coloured men.<sup>4</sup>

To ensure the expedition, DHQ had scabbled to pull all its resources together; The Cape Times reported on 15 September, while the first SAMR troops were already crossing the Orange, "further supplies of horses, mules, donkeys, and vehicles will probably be required shortly." The newspaper also reported on government instructions to farmers that local magistrates had to be informed as to what transport equipment and animals were for sale.<sup>5</sup> Clearly, the DHQ Staff Officers were working at extreme limits to try and ensure the logistics of the GSWA invasion.

Some troops had spent up to a week at Rosebank before their orders arrived on the morning of 29 August to sail for Port Nolloth.<sup>6</sup> The first troopship, the *Galway Castle*, left on 30 August with virtually all "A" Force's white members, but without the draught animals and with most of the

<sup>3</sup> Memoirs of A.E. Bishop, posted to me by his son E.J.B. Bishop, of Summerstrand, Port Elizabeth, with a letter during March 1998.

<sup>4</sup> SANDF, DSD, SAMR, Box 1044, Field State "A" Force, 14 September 1914, File 5\655. Collyer gives a total figure of 2420. (The Campaign in GSWA, p.28) However, this excluded the black members, and probably the many of the support personnel too. The archival primary document's data must take precedence.

<sup>5</sup> Cape Times, 15 September 1914, p.6.

<sup>6</sup> Adler, F. B., The History of the Transvaal Horse Artillery, Johannesburg, 1927, p.22.

black personnel attached to the artillery and ammunition columns.<sup>7</sup> Due to the heavy manual nature of the work in the artillery and supply units, there was a large preponderance of black members in these entities. A second ship, the Colonial, was only to depart on 7 September, the result of a bureaucratic muddle over the issue of transporting all the remaining animals and men in one vessel.<sup>8</sup> If urgency and efficiency were priorities in getting "A" Force to the GSWA border, then DHQ and those Staff Officers in charge of logistics, were certainly slow in producing effective procedures.

The two ships arrived at Port Nolloth on 31 August and 8 September respectively, although final disembarkation of all "A" Force, occurred only by the night of 16-17 September.<sup>9</sup> Lukin's men then entrained in relays to their "Advanced Base Camp" at Steinkopf, some sixty miles from the coast. The SAMR was therefore already occupying Ramans and Houms Drifts on the Orange River border, and scouting into southern GSWA, with patrols skirmishing against German troops, before the full "Namaqualand Field Force", and its logistical support and supplies had even left the last ship. Long before his Brigade had consolidated itself at one point, Lukin found himself in a position of having to give orders to initiate hostilities. On 22 September, he had informed DHQ that it would require three weeks for the transport and storage of adequate supplies to forward bases on the border. His entirely rational argument was that such a logistical build-up was essential before an effective advance could be attempted.<sup>10</sup> The reply was that a move upon Warmbad, which lay some forty miles north-east of Ramans Drift, and containing a permanent German military base, was to be expedited as soon as such logistical back-up allowed.<sup>11</sup> This impatient "hurrying up" from ministerial level in Pretoria, without adequate intelligence reports, or a proper assessment of the terrain, has been identified in this thesis as the most important factor that ultimately led to the Sandfontein defeat. This contention is further examined in Chapter seven on "Culpability." As Lukin was harassed with petulantly urgent communications from DHQ, so was this tone reflected in the telegrams sent by his Staff to various units at Port Nolloth, further illustrating the unevenness of "A" Force's operational beginnings. While hostilities were about to commence at Ramans Drift on 13 September, telegrams from Lukin's HQ to units still at Port Nolloth clamoured for their speeding up to reach Steinkopf. For example, one telegram of such a description was received by the officer commanding (OC) the THA, dated 12 September:

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Collyer, *The Campaign*, p.30.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.32.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

You are instructed to push the personnel of your battery on to Steinkopf with the least possible delay, leaving your transport to follow<sup>12</sup>

And again, regarding telegrams despatched on 13 September to two of the SAMR regiments:

2nd and 3rd Regiments instructed to leave without delay for Steinkopf- Officer to be left behind and follow with transport, equipment, etc.<sup>13</sup>

The lack of adequate provision regarding adequate transport, supplies, and general logistical back-up, bedevilled "A Force," who reached the GSWA border in jumbled confusion, yet were expected to commence a conventional war almost as soon as the leading members arrived.

#### **UDF scouting and events along border, before their crossing into GSWA.**

That the Germans had long been reinforcing their military structures in GSWA with additional equipment, particularly artillery, was evident from intelligence reports sent from the Secretary of State for the Colonies, to Lukin, as early as January 1910, when he was still Commandant-General of Cape Colonial Forces.<sup>14</sup> These early intelligence reports show that the old Cape Colonial government had deliberately observed German military movements within the southern border regions of GSWA, before August/September 1914. This information was available in 1914, while like Lukin, most of the Cape Colony's military personnel were now part of the UDF Permanent Force. There had, however, been more recent intelligence gathering; illustrated by the contents of one specific document, marked "secret" and headed "Intelligence Summary to 5th September 1914." This document was also indicated as having been despatched to the "O.C. "A" Force, via Cape Town," although it would not in itself have caused great concern to Lukin. It stated that on 7 August, there had been about 100 German troops at Sandfontein, 70 at Warmbad, 100 at Kanus north of Kalkfontein (today Karasburg), while an unknown number were rumoured to have stationed themselves on 27 August at Sperlingsputs, a water-point lying some fifteen miles north

<sup>12</sup> SANDF, DSD, GSWA, World War I, Box 18, Capt. B.C. Judd, Staff Captain, "A" Force, Message Book.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> National Archives, Cape Town, DD 1145, CC1129, Correspondence from the Colonial Secretary's Office in Cape Town, 21 January 1910, to General Lukin, as Commandant General, Cape Colonial Forces, KWT.

west of Ramans Drift. The summary was non-committal regarding the significance of these troop strength details and positioning, pointing out that “the numbers given do not exceed those generally stationed in this area.”<sup>15</sup> Throughout the period of the UDF’s pre-Sandfontein operations, German troop strengths and movements varied with each report, perhaps an unsurprising detail given the difficulties in effectively scouting the terrain, and the considerable distances between the various outposts and water sources. However, the German commanders displayed a high level of experience and competence regarding their regular, and often undetected, manoeuvring of both large and small contingents of men. This pattern was to culminate in their sudden and undetected boosting of manpower around Sandfontein during the morning of 26 September.

One of the SAMR’s scouting patrols had travelled from Steinkopf on 8 September towards Vioolsdrif, a crossing in the Orange River some fifty miles downstream from Ramans Drift. This detachment, consisting of a lieutenant and five men from the 5th SAMR, observed the drift for several hours, and noted no movement on the opposite side.<sup>16</sup> Clearly, with such a markedly long and isolated frontier, the Germans had not even bothered to guard this obvious crossing point,<sup>17</sup> with its proximity being so distant from their main bases at Kalkfontein and Keetmanshoop. During the same period, another SAMR patrol observed German police patrolling at Ramans Drift.<sup>18</sup> Their report suggested that the tiny German border guard appeared virtually oblivious to UDF preparations and observations: “Regular German patrols of 2 men seen at 11.00am and 5.00pm. (Do not cross to Union Bank).”<sup>19</sup>

On 9 September, the same SAMR patrol, under Lt Kunhard, met the farmer from “Guidhip”(sic) (today “Geidip”), which is situated on the north bank of the Orange, some three kilometres downstream from Houms Drift. The farmer, Mr Mostert, provided information on German troop movements, but he also gave notice that preparations for hindering the UDF were in progress in the southern regions of the colony. The Germans were implementing a SA War style “scorched earth” policy, this being the forced abandonment of farms and stock, besides the destruction of fodder; a fate which Mostert was anxious to avoid for himself.<sup>20</sup> Many of the Afrikaner farmers in the

<sup>15</sup> SANDF, DSD, GSWA, World War I, Box 15, SAMK proceeding to GSWA via Port Nolloth 1914-15, Intelligence Summary to 5<sup>th</sup> of September 1914.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., letter dated 10 September 1914, headed: Patrol to Viools Drift, , World War I.

<sup>17</sup> Today this is the point where the modern N7 crosses from the RSA into Namibia.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., Intelligence Summary, 10 September 1914.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., letter dated 11 September 1914, headed: Reconnaissance- Steinkopf to Ramans Drift, Lt Kenhardt, 7/9\14-10/9\14.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., Report by Mr Mostert of the farm Guidip on the German side near Houms Drift, dated 10<sup>th</sup> September 1914.

southern part of GSWA had little time for the perceived pro-British policies of the Union government, and some even participated in the “Vrij Korps” with other Afrikaner rebels. Whatever Mostert's politics may have been, self-interest was a far higher priority and he submitted a report, dated 10 September, to Capt Geary, the Intelligence Officer at Steinkopf.<sup>21</sup>

The gist of Mostert's information was that on the 7th or 8th of September, there had been only fourteen men stationed at Sandfontein who were engaged in clearing a makeshift runway for aircraft. Having visited Warmbad some ten days earlier, he noted that all the German civilians had left, leaving only between twenty-five and thirty troops as a garrison, while two officers had been inspecting the water-site at Norechab, six miles north of Sandfontein, “looking for a position to take up.” His report also mentioned that the Germans anticipated an attack by Union forces and were taking precautions, for example destroying the “windlasses” over the wells, and removing the pumps from other watering places. Like many other farmers along the southern GSWA border, Mostert had also suffered recent stock confiscation from the authorities. He was extremely concerned at the prospect of inland deportation by the Germans; and there had been stories of farmers being “ordered into concentration camps;” the latter detail confirmed by H.P. Steyn of Wellington, who had reported his father being forced to such a location and his stock confiscated.<sup>22</sup> German troops had also commandeered supplies from the aggrieved Mostert: His main stock of lucern was looted to the effect of some thirty thousand pounds (mass) of a crop that he claimed was of sixty thousand pounds weight, “enough for seven hundred horses and if cut every month would last twelve months.” After leaving his wagons, crop and stock behind, and fleeing to the Union with his family, Mostert, somewhat unrealistically, appealed for the UDF's specific protection of his property. Carl Weidner, the Gudous (Goodhouse) based manager of the Orange River Ostrich Farming Syndicate, wrote the following on the farmer's behalf.

He wishes the General would send a strong patrol to cover lands of lucern on this side of the river to prevent the Germans from destroying his crops.<sup>23</sup>

While the SAMR patrols were reporting on a border situation that appeared to indicate that the Germans, if not completely unaware of impending UDF movements, did not seem in the process of

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., Intelligence Summary to 8<sup>th</sup> September 1914.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., Report by Mr Mostert.

planning any dramatic traps, another patrol of interest was by two black scouts of "A" Force's Intelligence Unit. For several days before 12 September, a detachment of the unit had observed German military movements in the terrain above Gudous, and eventually had operated as far as Norechab. Here they had dutifully recorded the presence of ten enemy soldiers, although Geary's report shows that due to lack of water, they were unable to continue their reconnaissance towards Warmbad. Amongst other information received by the Intelligence Officer, were the details of German troops occupying all the nearby water points, and despatching patrols of between three to six men on a regular basis towards the river. On one Sunday, the scouts observed as many as four different patrols in one day.<sup>24</sup> The scouts' information is significant in that it confirmed the reality that the Germans had not dropped their guard, and certainly not to the extent suggested by interrogated German prisoners, captured by the SAMR a few days later.

Like the UDF, the Germans preferred to use small groups of five to seven men in reconnoitring the vast and arid terrain. The UDF black scouts in their groups of two operated in enemy territory at considerable risk, for relations in GSWA between black and white were charged with hate, both before and since the 1904-05 Nama War. The Germans would have had no hesitation in executing any of their black subjects, or any other blacks for that matter, suspected of assisting the enemy. The black scouts, unarmed and completely isolated, would have patrolled in a manner that reduced their chances of detection. Their fate if captured would have been harsh, a reality which for all the other terrors of combat, the white soldiers would not have faced.

Kunhardt's patrol made contact with the SAMR post at the Goodhouse drift, still at this stage manned by only two white soldiers. He included in his report a rough inventory of stores available at the Goodhouse farm, including wheat, lucern, and forage, and added a curt note, stating, "supplies must be denied to the enemy."<sup>25</sup> The farm manager, Carl Weidner, had no choice but to cooperate with the military, which in a war situation had full government authority to either commandeer or alternatively destroy goods, in the risk of these falling into enemy hands. On 11 September, Weidner had written a letter to Geary at Steinkopf, promising full provisions "at our own expense" for a UDF "posse of 6-10 men," should such a force be based at Goodhouse. Weidner was, however, careful to add "until your provision columns arrive," and asked that his letter be given by any UDF commander to Mr C.J. Crowley, an underling manager with authority on the farm. He justified the operation by pointing out that a UDF force would "at once place our

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., Intelligence Report dated 12/9/14, written by Capt W.J. Geary, Intelligence Officer, A Force.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., Report by Mr Mostert

pumping plant on the river bank out of harms way.”<sup>26</sup> Weidner had kept contact with the military on the impending war situation on the GSWA border, for on 8 September, he had written a report concerning German aircraft flying on the north side of the river, and the detonation of explosions within GSWA, which he suggested came from their destroying water-wells at Sperlingsput some fourteen miles away. His Nama labourers were also feeling the impact of impending war in that Weidner nonchalantly noted he had “dismissed thirty more men” and was “keeping twenty which the farm must have.”

### **The Ramans Drift occupation by the 4th SAMR**

The Nongqui gives the date of 4th SAMR’s crossing of the Orange River at Ramans Drift as the night of 13 September.<sup>27</sup> There had already been an earlier crossing of the border on 12 September, some ten miles east, at the undefended Geidip, while Houms Drift was occupied on the night of the 14th.<sup>28</sup> It was at Ramans Drift that the first UDF casualty occurred, just as the soldiers arrived on the north bank<sup>29</sup> (see photograph no.14). A meticulously drawn, labelled, and coloured military intelligence map of this specific border region had been available from 1907, although it is not certain if it was in the possession of Lukin’s field commanders during their advance<sup>30</sup> (see map opposite). Three crossings are marked at Raman's Drift: a wagon, foot and boat drift. The former two are indicated as impassable when the river comes down in flood. Photographs in Nongqui, dealing with 4th SAMR’s crossing, show a pont and rowing boats nearly adjacent to a point, marked by a cross, indicating where the South Africans landed.<sup>31</sup> Careful study of the map and photos, and the fact that these troops moved into German territory in early spring, before any onset of rain, suggests that the 4th SAMR had in all probability ridden across or near the boat drift.

Obtaining descriptions concerned the background and attitudes of the UDF members involved in the GSWA campaign was hardly an easy task for the researcher. Personal records compiled by the military, and still surviving in official repositories, are incomplete, non-existent, or rudimentary. Often one is therefore dependent upon some kind of analysis of what individual UDF propagandists

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., Box 14, C.T. Crowley, Goodhouse.

<sup>27</sup> The Nongqui, September 1915, p.124.

<sup>28</sup> SANDF, DSD, SAMR, Box 1044, File 516/87, uncompleted manuscript, “History of the GSW Campaign being written by Col. The Hon H. Wyndham.”

<sup>29</sup> The Nongqui, September 1915, p.124.

<sup>30</sup> South African Library, Cape Town, map (labelled “War Office”, April, 1907), Cape Colony Reconnaissance Series, Warmbad, Sheet 128-A G.S.C.S. 1764.

<sup>31</sup> The Nongqui, September 1914, Photograph by D.J. Noonan, 4<sup>th</sup> SAMR, p.326.

had to say about the men. A good such example is a melodramatic article entitled "The Flag," published in the Nongqui, which describes how Rifleman George Harley of Pietersburg, the first fatal casualty of the campaign, had carried along with him to the border, a red flag that held considerable significance for the unit. This flag was seized by Harley's comrades during the January 1914 industrial unrest in Johannesburg, and it accompanied the regiment to GSWA as a kind of "battle memento." The details of the article, although sensationalist and detached from the harsh realities of conflict, provide some insight into the strong sense of boyish camaraderie that was a marked feature of the SAMR regiments. This clannish and insular culture is conveyed throughout the various articles in the Nongqui. Behind this military ethos the SAMR rank and file appear almost removed from the rest of contemporary society, including the harsh struggles for a living by their fellow working-class white South Africans. Two selected quotes are instructive:

The tale (regarding Harley's death and the red flag) begins at Johannesburg during the time of the Strike Riots, when the 4th SAMR were engaged in handling that turbulent body of miners and others who were creating a little hell upon earth in that erstwhile peaceful town.<sup>32</sup>

the red flag might have been overlooked and left behind had it not been for Rfn. George Harley, of "B" Squadron, who made it his particular duty and pleasure to see that the Squadron's flag went with them. ...it might, and probably would, have been left behind had it not been for Harley, who looked after that crimson rag as assiduously as a mother her babe<sup>33</sup>

Harley was highly unlucky to be shot by a German officer who made a brief and pointless stand to protect his fatherland's prize African colony. His death and the subsequent capture of this German, was the full extent of the initial resistance faced by the UDF during their crossing into GSWA. This incident was accorded another dramatic description, typical of some of the dated sources:

Raman's Drift was commanded by a German blockhouse or police station...All the Germans save one, however, scuttled at

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., September 1915, p.124.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

the first rifle crack. The exception was an officer, apparently, who endeavoured, Horatius-like, to hold the position himself. He surrendered to superior numbers, but he managed to kill one of our men first.<sup>34</sup>

A photograph in Nongqui shows a German soldier in the UDF camp, surrounded by SAMR troops.<sup>35</sup> The caption reads: "Patrol bringing in prisoners. The German in the centre is the man who shot Rifleman Harley" (see Nongqui collage, photograph no. 16). One is inclined to question the apparent calm acceptance by the Union troops regarding Harley's death, but there is no suggestion from any of the obtained sources that the German prisoner came to any harm. However, German prisoners were generally quick to respond to their captors' questions, when military details were requested (see pages 52-53 of this chapter). The German officer had caused what surely must have seemed to many of the SAMR men, a pointless death, particularly considering he had shortly thereafter surrendered. He had sought to ensure his life by surrendering and this was accepted because the UDF men were familiar with the enemy's right to exchange his life, in return for prisoner of war status. This first minuscule skirmish's details are laboured because part of this dissertation's intention is to attempt an analysis of the UDF soldiers' experiences during the first phase of the campaign. How did they perceive the enemy? What was a "good fight"? Where did, or could, generally accepted ethics of war be disregarded or ignored? Because virtually all of the secondary accounts of the campaign are almost entirely filled with an unrealistic sense of stiff-upper lip fortitude, there is a need to delve deeper into establishing a clearer picture of real human feelings and experiences. One has to rise above what Keegan refers to as the "rhetoric of history."

that inventory of assumptions, and usages through which the historian makes his professional approach to the past - is not only, as it pertains to the writing of battle history, but is so strong, so inflexible and above all so time - hallowed that it exerts virtual powers of dictatorship over the military historian's mind.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Rayner & O' Shaughnessy, How Botha and Smuts Conquered GSW, p.41.

<sup>35</sup> The Nongqui, December 1914, Art Supplement (To face page 371).

<sup>36</sup> Keegan, The Face of Battle, p.35.

In other words, “military historians,” such as the Nongqui writers, were conditioned by prevailing attitudes and assumptions about the proper conduct of war. They would have written descriptions regarding various events during the GSWA campaign, strictly within a particular paradigm. The contributors to Nongqui were even more constrained by the fact that the publication was utterly committed to enhancing the UDF's image, and any negativity cast on the Defence Force and its exploits would have been unacceptable. Given that such sources were produced within a context that very narrowly, and unquestioningly, circumscribed their tone and content, it is obviously imperative to treat them with ongoing circumspection. This is particularly true for writing any military history account, which as Keegan says, exhibits “some sense of reality in the sense that it ties up with everyday human behaviour and the norms of military performance.”<sup>37</sup> Such is what this author is attempting in this dissertation.

Regarding the experiences of other German prisoners, there are some clues amongst various documents. In a report dated 15 September 1914, written at Ramans Drift by Capt Dalton and despatched to Lt-Col Dawson, the 4th SAMR commander, information was provided on enemy military movements across the border, all of which was obtained after interviewing one of five Germans soldiers apprehended shortly after the South Africans crossed the river.<sup>38</sup> Another account, written by an unknown source, and dated about 1926, described this event:

a patrol of German soldiers, consisting of a Sergeant and several men rode from the direction of Sandfontein along the so-called road to Ramans Drift and right into the arms of one of the pickets and were promptly captured. They had not the slightest inkling that the drift had been occupied. This incident happened at sunrise and our reconnaissance patrol (to Sandfontein) left shortly afterwards, otherwise it is probable they would have met.

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These were German policemen and listed as prisoners in a Keetmanshoop newspaper nearly a month later.<sup>40</sup> The senior man was a sergeant named Max Keobert who was interrogated on the

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.37.

<sup>38</sup> SANDF, DSD, Box 15, SAMK, proceeding to GSWA via Port Nolloth, Letter, 15 September 1914, from Capt. Dalton to Lt-Col. Dawson at Ramans Drift.

<sup>39</sup> South African Museum of Military History Library, Johannesburg, folder A. 416, document headed, “Unrecorded details of Sandfontein; Some impressions of men who were there”

<sup>40</sup> Keetmanshoop Zeitung, No. 40, 8 October 1914, p.1.

morning of 14 September, providing the SAMR officers with a considerable amount of information. If this German was aware of any plan to entrap the UDF at Sandfontein then he successfully eluded the issue by disclosing all else. Koebert's information suggested a strange state of relaxation amongst the German forces, despite the war declarations, and the predictable commencement, at some stage, of hostilities along their border with the Union. The Germans "were not expecting an attack from British troops in the Cape Colony (sic)," neither had there been, as far as Koebert knew, "orders to increase their (German) vigilance when near the enemy border."<sup>41</sup> The Sergeant claimed that he and his four men had departed from Warmbad the previous morning, under instructions to convey "a few mules" from Ramans Drift to Warmbad. At the time of their departure, they had received no news of the mobilization of Union troops, a strange admission considering the UDF advance from Port Nolloth had been under German aerial observation.

The German military strength in the south of the colony, as outlined by Koebert, would also have given little serious concern to Lukin and the UDF field commanders, if it had been accurate. According to the sergeant there were only 17 German police stationed at Sandfontein, with no artillery or machine guns; at Warmbad were positioned some 60 to 70 policemen, with two machine guns; and further north at Kalkfontein were another 150 policemen. The biggest southern military base in the colony was at Keetmanshoop, where Koebert provided a figure of 80 military personnel. In the entire GSWA colony, he declared there to be 2500 German soldiers, with ten field guns firing a shell of over ten kilograms, and a total "service strength" of 4500.<sup>42</sup>

That afternoon on the same day, a second German, Erich Mueke, was also questioned; he gave somewhat different information and at first had been clearly reluctant to co-operate. Dalton remarked that Mueke had been interrogated by Kunhardt, "who (had) eventually succeeded in getting him to talk."<sup>43</sup> This section of Dalton's report reads as follows:

Additional information- He was told to be on his guard as it was possible that the Union forces might invade GSWA- but despite these orders there was no increase in guard at Ramans Drift.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> SANDF, DSD, WW 1, GSWA, Box 15, SAMK proceeding to GSWA via Port Nolloth, 1914-15, letter 15 September 1914 from Capt. Dalton to Lt-Col. Dawson at Ramansdrift.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

Despite the contradiction with Koebert's statement regarding no attack being expected, Mueke also revealed that there were some 50-140 men at Warmbad, with two maxim machine guns and two models of artillery: one firing a shell of 7-8 kilograms, and a lighter calibre which used a 3-4 kilogram shell, but that only three guns were actually in use. Both Mueke's and Koebert's information differed again from that given to Lt-Col Berrange by a local resident, Hendrik Griffenberg, who some four days earlier had travelled down from Warmbad. Griffenberg explained that the German military strength at Warmbad was 300 men with two "pom-poms" (A quick-firing artillery piece) and four maxim machine-guns, and that the garrison there was well provisioned, occupying three forts around the town. Similar military resources existed at Kalkfontein, in addition to the presence of the German General Staff.<sup>45</sup>

The German police were fully involved in the defence of the colony, although the SAMR officers did not seem to distinguish these men as such, reporting the prisoners to be members of the "8th Company, Warmbad."<sup>46</sup> Although these prisoners, as junior police personnel would have been unaware of their military General Staff's strategic plans, and despite the likelihood that their answers were limited by language constraints, the UDF interrogators still failed to establish that larger numbers of German troops were in the area. It is clear in retrospect that larger detachments were moving around between water points, because town garrisons had been reduced to a bare minimum, and the latter detail had been confirmed by the prisoners. Although later allegations of inadequate scouting and forward reconnaissance have credibility, to what extent was Lukin, and his field commanders, also influenced by incomplete or inaccurate information, derived from German prisoners and civilians?

During the same day that the prisoners were interrogated, Lt-Col Berrange, the 5th SAMR regiment commander, telegraphed the Staff Officer at Lukin's headquarters at Steinkopf, that he had occupied Houms Drift some twenty-four miles further east of Ramans Drift, and thereafter, despatched troops inland in the direction of Sandfontein, ten miles away, with instructions to pursue German patrols.<sup>47</sup> Skirmishes were quick to ensue, and on the same day, a patrol from the 5th SAMR in attempting to capture four German troops, "moving in from Sandfontein," found itself caught under heavy fire from a koppie occupied by some fifty troops, resulting in two

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., Telegram to GSO Namaqualand A Force Steinkopf from Lt-Col Berrange

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., Box 18, Capt. B.C. Judd Staff Captain, "A" Force, (Message Book).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., Box 15, Telegrams, Col. Berrange, 5<sup>th</sup> Regt SAMK proceeding to GSWA via Port Nolloth 1914-15, Telegram, 15 September 1914.

severely wounded UDF riflemen.<sup>48</sup> Such are the details from official military documentation, although Rayner suggests that the South Africans were in fact pursuing the rest of the Germans from the abandoned blockhouse at Ramans Drift.<sup>49</sup> This is a good example from this dissertation's research, where a dated secondary source confuses and conflicts with archival primary documents. If Rayner's assertion is correct, then the remaining "blockhouse" Germans, in extremely difficult terrain, would have had to ride, at a very fast pace, some twenty-four miles upstream from Ramans Drift to Houms Drift. This would have meant riding first east, and then north, into the koppies and ravines making up the territory between Houms Drift and Sandfontein. This latter area was patrolled by members of the 5th SAMR and Rayner claims that the clash occurred after: "A patrol of the 5th Regiment set out in pursuit of the Germans (from the Ramans Drift blockhouse), and discovered them in a position higher up the river."<sup>50</sup> There were, as far as can be established, no German blockhouses at Houms Drift that the 5th SAMR could have attacked. Berrange's telegram of 15 September described the skirmish as precipitated by "four Germans moving in from Sandfontein." Therefore, either Rayner confused the incident with another, or the telegram details are inaccurate. With the latter constituting the primary source, it takes precedence over a secondary account. Capt Davis of the SAMR sent a message later that day, clearly stating that the German troops had returned to Sandfontein.<sup>51</sup> Inadvertently or not, the Germans appear to have led the South Africans into an ambush, and this would not be the only occasion along the GSWA border during September 1914, that Lukin's "A" Force would be outwitted by their opponents.

Details of the ambush incident released by DHQ to the press, concur with those contained in Berrange's telegrams, although a more dramatic slant was evident, which clearly suggests the UDF had achieved a clear upper hand in the engagement. The report in the Cape Times of 18 September described the incident as follows:

It is officially announced that a patrol of the 5th SAMR, whilst in pursuit of a German patrol on the north side of the Orange River, encountered superior numbers of the enemy in a strong position. Our men succeeded in driving the enemy from the position, and in the action sustained two casualties, Rifleman

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Rayner & O' Shaughnessy, How Botha & Smuts Conquered GSW, p.41.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> SANDF, DSD, GSWA, WW 1, Box 15, Telegrams, Col. Berrange, 5<sup>th</sup> Regt SAMK proceeding to GSWA via Port Nolloth 1914-15, Telegram, 15 September 1914.

J.P. Van Baalen being killed, and Rifleman B. Nesbit being wounded<sup>52</sup>

If the UDF had indeed “driven the enemy from the position,” then where are the German casualties and why are they not evident in documents or secondary sources? The reality was that journalists like Rayner and the Nongqui writers, were equally constrained to reflect only details compatible with promoting the UDF and South African war effort. Rayner was entirely dependent upon whatever information the military chose to give him, and their official clearance of anything thereafter written. Clearly some prolonged fighting had taken place at the ambush. Berrange rushed off his third telegram of the day to Steinkopf, urgently appealing for 20 000 extra rounds of .303 rifle ammunition, and “reserves for machine gun section.”<sup>53</sup>

Telegraphing the following day from Geidip, two miles downstream from Houms River, Berrange reported that Captain Davis had indicated the return of the German troops to Sandfontein, and the recovery of Van Baalen's body. This soldier, Johannes Petrus Van Baalen, who had been slain in the previous day's skirmish, was documented as “shot head” (sic) and derived from Hartesbeesfontein, Potchefstroom; he was one of the few Afrikaners serving in these largely British South African units. Rifleman R.B. Nesbit was severely wounded in both legs and was later entered on an official casualty list as: “2661 Rfn. Nesbit, 5 SAMR, Gangrene from bullet wound both thighs, expect fatal termination.”<sup>54</sup> This entry was dated 2 October 1914, and Nesbit did succumb to his injuries. Berrange commended Sergeant-Major Thomas for rescuing Rifleman Van Rensberg under heavy fire, an incident also described by Rayner, but who claimed the recipient of this gallant act to be Nesbit.<sup>55</sup>

### **The UDF occupy Sandfontein**

These skirmishes did not dampen Berrange's enthusiasm for confronting the German forces, and he suggested to Lukin an immediate plan to occupy Sandfontein, including the use of Hendrik Griffenberg, the Geidip farmer. It needs to be noted that, according to a document lodged in the SA

<sup>52</sup> *Cape Times*, 18 September 1914, p.5.

<sup>53</sup> SANDF, DSD, GSWA, WW1 Box 15, Telegrams, Col. Berrange, 5<sup>th</sup> Regt SAMK proceeding to GSWA via Port Nolloth 1914-15, Telegram, 15 September 1914.

<sup>54</sup> SANDF, DSD, SAMR, Box 753, Casualties entered from 2/4/14.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* Box 15, SAMK proceeding to GSWA via Port Nolloth 1914-15, telegrams 5<sup>th</sup> Regt. telegram dated 16 September 1914.

Museum of Military History Library, the actual order to Lukin for the occupation of Sandfontein came from DHQ in Pretoria, despite Lukin apparently informing them of the position being indefensible against artillery.<sup>56</sup> Berrange's telegram of 16 September, forwarded to the SAMR Brigade commander, gave an accurate description of the topography regarding the Sandfontein position. The Germans had for several years maintained a police station there as well as periodically utilised it to garrison and replenish troops. The site had been the scene of prior clashes between the Nama and their colonial rulers, as nearby graves of settlers and soldiers still testify today. It was the only clearly demarcated watering point between the river and the town of Warmbad, thereby making its strategic value imperative, particularly when marching across the koppie and ravine-strewn landscape, the large parties of men and animals, all carrying the multifarious paraphernalia of a 1914 UDF force. Berrange's report focussed specifically on the availability of water, the problems of moving troops through the terrain to Sandfontein, and the critical need for a reliable guide:

Between this place (Geidip) and Warmbad is Sandfontein which he (Griffenberg) describes as follows. It is surrounded by hills and the camp is a stony Kop (sic) well fortified with loopholed schantzes, there is water inside and outside the camp, the latter only 55 yards from camp and sufficient for 2000 animals. There are also old water holes outside the immediate camp....The country between Geidip and Sandfontein is very hilly and difficult to scout without water and the same applies to Houmsdrift. Mr Griffenberg offers his services when the forward movement is made and I recommend he be accepted as I have every confidence in him.<sup>57</sup>

Berrange suggested to Lukin, then still at Steinkopf, that the position be seized immediately, although much of "A" Force was still *en route* to the river, the total German military strength in the area had still not yet been fully established, while the force's animal transport were exhausted from the agonizingly thirsty march from Steinkopf up the river drifts. Why was there this pressing

<sup>56</sup> SAMHM Library, "Unrecorded details of Sandfontein," A416, Sandfontein, battle of.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

urgency, when it was quite clear, that overall, the Germans did not have the military capacity to seriously invade the Union?

Berrange continued:

I submit for your approval that Colonel Dawson (Officer Commanding the 4th SAMR which was then established on the north bank at Raman's Drift some ten miles downstream from Geidip-this thesis author's insert) join me in my movements on Sandfontein and my plans are as follows- ....Griffenberg who knows every inch of the country will guide me across country...to make this possible I must push a party on the Sandfontein road as a ...(cover?) (decoy?)\* to my actual movements which must be under cover of darkness. I will of course...(inform?) Colonel Dawson fully and also send him a guide. Horses are in a very weak condition...he established there will be a plentiful supply of lucern at the(sic) later date.<sup>58</sup>

Sandfontein was, therefore, finally occupied by the UDF during the early morning of 19 September, by 200 men drawn from both the 4th and 5th SAMR.<sup>59</sup> They succeeded in losing Rifleman I.G. Wessels, some three miles from the wells.<sup>60</sup> The soldier was initially registered as a deserter; the terse entry in a register reading, "deserted on line of march to Sandfontein, 20/9/14."<sup>61</sup> Wessels was in fact captured,<sup>62</sup> by German troops who had shadowed the UDF advance under the cover of darkness. Given the reality that only limited manpower was available to Lukin, and a good proportion of that was still trudging up to the drifts, these initial detachments to Sandfontein were about all the troops that could be spared at that stage. The Germans had clearly observed the South Africans advancing on the wells, hence their withdrawal and hasty sabotage of the position. According to Rayner, UDF scouts had continued to shadow the German troops involved in the

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Collyer, *The Campaign*, p.31.

<sup>60</sup> SANDF, DSD, GSWA, WW1, Box 18, Captain B.C. Judd, Staff Captain, "A" Force, (Message Book), entry dated 22 September 1914.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., SAMR, Box 870, Register of Deserters.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., SAMR, Box 647, figures examined from ledger entitled, "Casualties of War, 1914-18."

\* As with many of the records on the GSWA campaign, located in the SANDF Documentation Services Directorate archives, these telegrams are in a state of deterioration. My speculations of some words are in brackets.

earlier clash near Raman's Drift, and noted their eventual arrival at Sandfontein, at which time "there were about fifty Germans in the camp."<sup>63</sup> By 19 September, these troops had completely evacuated the position, leaving the elaborate sangar network on the koppie intact. Berrange's telegram of 16 September, indicates that both he and Lt-Col Dawson accompanied their troops to the wells, further confirmed by a manuscript section of an account on the GSWA campaign, written by a Col. the Hon. H. Wyndham,<sup>64</sup> which purportedly used the diary of Lt P. B. Clements, one of the captured UDF officers at Sandfontein.<sup>65</sup> Wyndham states that the wells were occupied by SAMR troops from 16 September, a detail not endorsed by Berrange's telegrams. Berrange's communication of three days later gave a vivid description of the German's hurried attempts in making the SAMR members' occupation as uncomfortable as possible:

19th occupied Sandfontein at daylight found station recently deserted stores destroyed wells intact but pumps destroyed stop Recently killed dogs and goats in well but doctor reports water not contaminated stop New pump recently requested one squadron 4th Regiment...Sandfontein stop German flag captured stop am returning Gaaidip (sic) now stop Colonel Dawson returned Ramansdrift later<sup>66</sup>

The only other casualties reported by the press, besides the already mentioned Van Baalen and Nesbit, were Rifleman F.B. Groenewald, ("wounded by accident"), and Conductor David Van Lille who was reported as killed.<sup>67</sup>

The stage was now set for Lukin to arrive at Ramans Drift on the 24th and to decide to respond to calls from DHQ for a further advance upon Warmbad. The UDF's occupation of Sandfontein was premature in the face of unclear appraisals regarding the German military strength in the area, and doubts expressed by Lukin's officers over the next few days as to whether the wells could effectively be defended, particularly against artillery. With reports of German military movements increasingly coming through, Lukin played his hand sooner than he had perhaps anticipated. Within

<sup>63</sup> Rayner & O'Shaughnessy, *How Botha & Smuts Conquered GSW*, p.41.

<sup>64</sup> SANDF, DSD, SAMR, Box 1044, File 516/87, uncompleted manuscript, "History of the GSW Campaign being written by Col. The Hon H. Wyndham."

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., letter dated 2 December 1916 from the Officer Commanding 1SAMR.

<sup>66</sup> SANDF, DSD, GSWA, WW 1, Box 15, Telegrams, Col. Berrange, 5<sup>th</sup> Regt SAMK proceeding to GSWA via Port Nolloth 1914-15, Telegram, 19 September 1914.

<sup>67</sup> *Cape Times*, 23 September 1914, p.7.

two days, he despatched additional troops to Sandfontein, together with artillery, under the command of Lt-Col. Grant; a decision motivated by an explicit intention to contest the wells against German forces.

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## CHAPTER 5: SANDFONTEIN: THE BATTLE

### Introduction (Refer to Map 6)

On the afternoon of 25 September, a UDF Force under Lt-Col R.C. Grant left Ramans Drift to reinforce the detachment at Sandfontein, without clarity as to the whereabouts and strength of opposing German forces. The main components of the column were three troops (platoons) of the 1st SAMR Regiment's 3rd squadron under Capt P.E.Hale, a section of the THA under Lt Fritz Adler with two 13 "pounder" field guns, two maxim machine guns, and a medical detachment. Overall the column's manpower strength was comprised of approximately one hundred and twenty white and forty black men, with animal drawn transport numbering one hundred and twenty horses, eighty two mules, two ambulance wagons, and four ammunition wagons for the artillery.<sup>1</sup> They arrived at their destination devoid of sleep and sustenance<sup>2</sup> because Lukin had deemed the reinforcement of the wells as urgent. Owing to a donkey supply train still awaited from Steinkopf, the accompanying transport wagons were delayed and no additional rations were available for issue,<sup>3</sup> illustrating once again the shaky logistical arrangements underpinning "A" Force's operations in hostile territory. Two days field rations consisted of five biscuits, one pound of corned beef, and a small issue of coffee.<sup>4</sup> The quantity and quality of rations can markedly influence the efficiency of troops<sup>5</sup> and Grant's troops were also about to face a day's battle without a night's sleep. For many this was also their first experience of war, and this impending ordeal was to be exacerbated by the fact that their physical reserves were already lowered.

Scott's account states that nothing occurred at the wells during the night of the 25<sup>th</sup> and early hours of the 26<sup>th</sup> which created any sense of unease amongst the garrison,<sup>6</sup> however, German detachments only several kilometres from the wells had carefully shadowed Grant's men during the night.<sup>7</sup> It should have been obvious however that something was amiss regarding hostile military movements, for at 4pm, a report telephoned to Lukin at Ramans Drift stated that 150-200 German

<sup>1</sup> SAMMHL, A416, Sandfontein, Battle of, document entitled "At Sandfontein."

<sup>2</sup> The Nongqui, October 1915, Scott, D, "The Story of Sandfontein", p.179.

SAMMHL, Sandfontein, Battle of, A.416, Lt-Col- R.C. Grant's hand written battle account, despatched on 31 May 1936 to Collyer on request, as a resource for writing, The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914-15.

<sup>3</sup> Scott, "Story of Sandfontein", p. 179.

<sup>4</sup> The Nongqui, November 1914, p. 328.

<sup>5</sup> Kellet, A., The Soldier in Battle: Motivational and Behavioural Aspects of the Combat Experience, in Glad, B. (Ed), Psychological Dimensions of War, Newbury Park, London & New Delhi, 1990, p. 223.

<sup>6</sup> Scott, "Story of Sandfontein", p.180.

<sup>7</sup> Von Oelhafen, H. Der Feldzug in Sudwest 1914/15/ auf Grund amtlichen Materials bearbeitet von Hans Von Oelhafen; herausgegeben von der Gesellschaft für kolonialen Fortschritt.- Berlin: Safari Verlag, 1923, p. 37.

troops were spotted the night of 24\25th September at Aurus, some fifteen to twenty miles northeast of Houms Drift. The same group shifted again on the 25th towards Umeis, eight miles east of Houms Drift.<sup>8</sup> Like virtually all the other place names shown on maps of the area, these locations were semi-perennial water sources amidst the ridges and koppies. The only settlements within a reasonable radius from Sandfontein were Warmbad and Kalkfontein, lying twenty-five and fifty-five miles northeast of the wells respectively. The Germans knew the area intimately having long patrolled it against the Nama Bondelswarts. According to Collyer the above Germans were those who on the afternoon of the 26th had successfully thwarted a desperate attempt to assist Grant's force by Lt-Col Berrange and members of the 5th SAMR. German sources show that this military group consisting of the 1st Reserve (Landwehr) Mounted Company, 2nd Regular (Schutztruppe) Mounted Company, and the 1st Mountain (Regular) Battery. All of these detachments were under Major Victor Franke,<sup>9</sup> and this was one of five different groups, each under a separate major, created by Colonel Joachim von Heydebreck, the Commander in Chief of all German forces in the colony. The five groups had been rapidly mobilised to repulse the anticipated UDF advance from the drifts, and now marched and rode according to a pre-planned attack on Sandfontein from different directions.<sup>10</sup> Unbeknown to Lukin these reinforcements had been rushed south by rail from Windhoek two days earlier, with von Heydebreck as their overall field commander.

The German Colonel planned a four-pronged assault on Sandfontein and thereafter a thrust onto the rest of "A" Force entrenched at the river drifts. Franke's group was the designated reserve detachment in the plan. It was strategically placed to remain in the locality between Kinderzit, Umeis, and Arus<sup>11</sup> where it could back up the attack by Major Von Rapport's group from the east, and at the same time cover the Houms Drift road against UDF reinforcements. Other German troops under Major Bauszus and supported by artillery, approached from the south on the 25th,<sup>12</sup> forming the northwest attack the following morning.<sup>13</sup> Lukin had passed information onto Grant about enemy movement and aggressive patrols,<sup>14</sup> and speculated that an enemy force of "about

<sup>8</sup> Collyer, *The Campaign*, p. 37.

<sup>9</sup> Ungleich, T.R., *The Defence of German South West Africa during World War*, MA Thesis, University of Miami, 1974, pp 66-67, quoting German troop details and movements as related in, Hennig, R., *Deutsch Sudwest in Weltkrieg*, Berlin, 1920, pp 86-90.

<sup>10</sup> Von Oelhafen, *Der Feldzug*, p. 37.

<sup>11</sup> Ungleich, *The Defence of GSWA*, p.66, quoting Hennig, *Deutsch Sudwest*, p. 88.  
Von Oelhafen, *Der Feldzug*, p. 37.

<sup>12</sup> Collyer, *The Campaign*, p. 37.

<sup>13</sup> Von Oelhafen, *Der Feldzug*, Map, p.38.

<sup>14</sup> SAMMHL, A416, Sandfontein, Battle of, Grant, written battle account.

three hundred” intended to attack.<sup>15</sup> This underpinned his decision not to withdraw Welby's force from the wells, but rather reinforce and hold the position, despite German troop strengths south of Warmbad still being undetermined. Lukin had placed his faith in those intelligence reports at hand, none of which suggested that just across the river there were now nearly two thousand of the enemy, well supported by artillery. He effectively gambled there were no larger numbers of German soldiers available in the south than those UDF personnel at his disposal. Lukin clearly also believed the German resources would be dispersed and not easily capable of a rapid combined offensive, and that Grant's reinforcements would raise the Sandfontein garrison strength to the speculated German presence nearby. Lukin dispatched not only a significant portion of his limited troop numbers to Sandfontein, but by ordering the two artillery pieces to accompany them, he clearly signalled his intention to defend the position. On the eve of the Sandfontein battle there were three squadrons of SAMR troops (about three hundred men) at Ramans and Houms Drifts respectively, with six SAMR squadrons either en route or encamped at Steinkopf, while the Witwatersrand Rifles were also still en route from Port Nolloth.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, on 25 September, Lukin's brigade was spread over at least five different points, between more than a hundred miles, yet a significant push into enemy territory was undertaken against unknown odds. Such was the confusion of “A” Force's deployment as it responded to urgent orders and suggestions from DHQ.

According to Scott, no forward patrols appear to have been sent out during the early morning until “soon after dawn” when dust was reported from both the north-west and north-east.<sup>17</sup> The UDF response was two patrols being instantly despatched under Lt Northway and Sergeant-Major Barratt respectively towards the former direction, while Sergeant Spotiswood rode out with troops towards the latter. Just as Grant arrived and assumed command, the first shots of the battle were exchanged between Spotiswood's patrol and the advancing German troops.<sup>18</sup> Collyer has a different version to Scott, in that he states only two patrols were ordered out, one in each direction, and at the earlier time of 4am.<sup>19</sup> This could not have been to investigate dust however, as no such movement would have been visible in the dark from the distant ridges approximately four miles away. Some responsibility must therefore lie with Welby for not ensuring regular patrolling throughout the night, as these may have allowed for a more timely warning of impending attack. Considering Lukin's concerns about German troops movements and his prompt decision to

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<sup>15</sup> Collyer, *The Campaign*, p. 37.

<sup>16</sup> Collyer, *The Campaign*, p. 35.

<sup>17</sup> Scott, “The Story of Sandfontein,” p. 180.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Collyer, *The Campaign*, p. 40.

reinforce and defend the wells, it is unclear why Welby did not do more to reconnoitre the surrounding area in the early hours before the battle. Collyer suggests that some responsibility lay with the Intelligence Unit of nine men under Capt Geary,<sup>20</sup> however patrols were also conducted by SAMR members under junior officers, all components under Welby's command before Grant arrived.

At 7.30am Grant was on top of the Sandfontein koppie summit with a panoramic view of the landscape below, but significantly, not a clear sight of all points in his position, particularly the lower slopes and the two spurs which run out towards the southwest and northeast.<sup>21</sup> His reinforcements were clearly visible on the west side waiting for water, as were the dust clouds of the approaching Germans to the north. The skills of the most talented officer would have been extensively tested by the events that fell now so quickly upon one another. Lt Cowley reported that unidentified troops were approaching from the northeast and the SAMR patrols were retreating,<sup>22</sup> while simultaneously the field telephone connection to Ramans Drift was severed. With the wells situated on the opposite side of the koppie to the northeast attack, there would have been a short period when many SAMR and THA men would have been unaware of the impending danger. Some had been relaxing for half an hour before they were conscious of the more visible northwest German advance,<sup>23</sup> and given the numbers of UDF men and their distances apart from both the command post and each other, any instructions from Grant and his staff would have constituted at best a very hasty attempt to arrange the garrison for resisting. A careful examination of the battle site proves that he had few chances thereafter to actually command, because of the location of his summit sangar, and that fact that he was trapped there under cover, far removed from most of his men located on and around the koppie.<sup>24</sup>

The first German troops appeared on the road to Sandfontein that leads twenty miles back to Warmbad; a detachment consisting of a half-company of mounted infantry together with the support in a nearby hill defile of an artillery battery of two guns<sup>25</sup> (four guns according to Scott), the latter remaining entirely hidden until half an hour later when it commenced firing. Ungleich

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.36.

<sup>21</sup> Personal observations of Sandfontein battlefield site, June 1996, September 1998, October 1999, October 2000.

<sup>22</sup> SAMMHL, A416, Sandfontein, Battle of, Grant, written battle account..

<sup>23</sup> The Nonggui, December 1914, p.394.

<sup>24</sup> Personal observations of Sandfontein battlefield site.

<sup>25</sup> Ungleich, The Defence of GSWA, p.66, quoting German troop details as given in Hennig, Deutsch Sudwes, p.88. Official History, p.14.

Von Oelhafen, Der Feldzug, pp 38-39.

quotes Hennig as having the original Bauzus Regiment at Alurifontein consisting out of the 9th Company, the 3rd Mountain Battery, and the 1st Reserve Field Battery (2 guns).<sup>26</sup> Half of the 9th Company together, with the 3rd Mountain Battery, and the overall commander Major Bauzus, marched on to Norachab and then moved south to form the north-western attack. The other half company and the 1st Reserve Field Battery marched to Skunbergs Quelle,<sup>27</sup> and then towards Sandfontein on the Warmbad road, thus forming the north-eastern attack. Von Oelhafen's account states that "Regiment Bauzus" separated into two columns, the right one with the Commander in Chief and his Staff moving south-west via Alurifontein-Norechab, and the left consisting of "Unit Mannhardt" the above stated 1st Reserve Field Battery, further bolstered by mounted infantry.<sup>28</sup>

The eastern attack consisted only of infantry under the command of Major Emil von Rapport. This was a large force composed of four hundred mounted men drawn from the 3rd and 8th Companies<sup>29</sup> and three-quarters of the 5th Company.<sup>30</sup> It marched through the night from Alurifontein, then south with difficulty because of rough terrain to Umeis and Kinderzicht,<sup>31</sup> and finally onto the Houms Drift road where two platoons were left at a ravine with instructions to seal off the route against any UDF reinforcements.<sup>32</sup> Von Rapport and the rest of his men then approached the wells from the southeast, while von Heydebreck and his staff remained at Alurifontein, but had radio contact with Franke's or Ritter's forces. The latter officer commanded three mounted infantry companies and an artillery battery, marching them south from Auros to attack from the southwest.<sup>33</sup>

These troop movement details are important as they illustrate the skill with which von Heydebreck and his officers planned their attack, in contrast to the myopic UDF advance. However the German officers' tactical handling of large troop numbers in difficult territory was superior to their counterparts, a point that the contemporary South African secondary sources never really conceded.

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<sup>26</sup> Ungleich, *The Defence of GSWA*, p.66.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.67.

<sup>28</sup> Von Oelhafen, *Der Feldzug*, p.37.

<sup>29</sup> Ungleich, *The Defence of GSWA*, p.66.

<sup>30</sup> Von Oelhafen, *Der Feldzug*, p.37.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Ungleich, *The Defence of GSWA*, p. 67.

Von Oelhafen, *Der Feldzug*, p.37.p.41.

<sup>33</sup> Ungleich, *The Defence of GSWA*, p.67

### Reconstruction of the battle course: The initial phase

In Scott's Nongqui battle recreation he misses a picture far more familiar to readers of modern military history: namely evidence of predictable human behaviour and the constraints of a combat situation. How can we glimpse the reality of battle that morning? Within an atmosphere of excitement and fear there would also have been amongst the UDF members an intense concentration and camaraderie, as they had not yet experienced the full shock and distress of the battle that swept them up for the rest of the day. The SAMR troops on the northern and eastern koppie slopes had a clear field of fire over an expansive sandy plain, and the German troops, who were experienced in skirmishes with the Nama, would therefore have been wary of initially storming the UDF across the open. The reason was that the *Schutzgruppe* had been conditioned by the Nama, who because of limited ammunition, tended to make every shot tell during the 1904-05 conflict. The Germans would have responded to the South Africans' position with some caution in the beginning, because although Sandfontein was hopeless to defend against artillery, it still proved good cover for skilled riflemen. However the SAMR deployment on the east and north sides must have taken place in some confusion, and with German forces advancing in large numbers from the northeast, a crisp allocation of soldiers into specific positions would not have been realistic. A large proportion of the SAMR soldiers were still in their early twenties and late teens, and their Transkei policing experiences were remote from this situation, although they all knew the killing power of a high velocity magazine fed rifle, and would have first sought cover over any instructions shouted by officers and non-commissioned officers. With their horses left on the western side of the koppie, sheltered thus from any firing emanating from the northeast, the SAMR would have clutched their rifles and raced up the koppie into whatever protection the sangars provided.

Grant's positioned the two maxim machine guns under Lt Butler on the south western spur, ensuring that all directions from the koppie were covered.<sup>34</sup> This successfully repelled an initial attempt by some of von Rapport's riflemen to close in on the UDF position, and these Germans were diverted behind the line of high ground to the southeast, at the end of which a troop under Capt Hale was urgently withdrawing.<sup>35</sup> But that the German troops reached this far so quickly, reinforces the argument that the SAMR dispersal around the koppie was undertaken with extreme haste. According to Collyer, Welby had stationed men well beyond the koppie perimeter:

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<sup>34</sup> SAMMHL, A416, Sandfontein, Battle of, Grant, written battle account.

<sup>35</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," p.180, 183.

Welby recognised the high ground to the east and southeast as 'the key to the whole position' and that if the enemy held it he would make the defender's position 'untenable in less than an hour'. He accordingly occupied this high ground together with a feature to the northeast which commandeered the road to Warmbad. He also placed some of his troops to the west and north-west of his main position, the conical kopje near the water hole and buildings.<sup>36</sup>

From inspecting the battle site it is obvious which features Collyer was referring to in the east and southeast, each lying slightly less than a thousand metres in both directions. To the west and northwest it is less apparent exactly where Welby meant, but the distances to some of the more probable points rapidly increases up to approximately three and a half thousand metres. To the west is a vast plain across which the Germans later advanced, with no high ground. While it is quite conceivable that directions may have been slightly confused, it is less clear where all the SAMR pickets at these outposts were during the Germans advance, and why Scott or Collyer did not document them reporting any enemy movement to Welby. In his unpublished manuscript, Wyndham states:

At about 8am the Picquet occupying the high ground three and a half miles NW of Sandfontein was driven in by the enemy and shortly after an enemy battery opened fire from this position. Within a few minutes another enemy force made its appearance about two and a half miles NW of Sandfontein and drove in the Picquet which was posted on a koppie overlooking the Ramansdrift Warmbad road.<sup>37</sup>

An examination of the terrain cannot assume with certainty the position of these pickets, although upon the higher points to the northwest there are several possibilities. Certainly any outpost on the ridge to the east would have easily spotted German troop movements, long before their arrival on the plain. Lying less than a kilometre away, such a picket's members would have had ample time to

<sup>36</sup> Collyer, *The Campaign*, p.39.

<sup>37</sup> SANDF, DSD, SAMR, Box 1044, File 516/87, uncompleted manuscript, "History of the GSW Campaign being written by Col. The Hon H. Wyndham."

report back at the wells. Scott wrote that Hale had been despatched with a whole troop to occupy “a high and prominent kopje, overlooking the Ramans Drift road.”<sup>38</sup> This would be the “high ground” to the southeast, confirmed as such by Wyndham.<sup>39</sup> We must assume then that Grant ordered Hale into securing this point while the reinforcing column was approaching Sandfontein, yet, Scott also tells us this troop was recalled to “reduce the defensive perimeter” at about the exact moment the Germans mounted troops appeared in the northeast.

It is therefore important to assess how tactically well the UDF troops at Sandfontein were handled prior to the engagement, to what extent Welby constructed a proper plan of outposts, and if so, why they seemed so ineffective on the morning of the attack. If Wyndham is correct that pickets existed somewhere in the northwest, then to what extent were they alert that morning? Were they placed on appropriate high ground with visual command of the surrounding terrain, and if so, where were they during the course of the battle? Why did Grant have to despatch Hale onto the eastern ridge that Welby had purportedly identified as being strategic? Could an earlier warning have realistically allowed Welby to have withdrawn from the wells? If Grant upon his arrival ordered the occupation of the strategic high ground east and southeast, as Scott tells us, positions then abandoned and later used effectively by the Germans during the battle, where were the men Welby has supposedly posted? The Colonel proceeded to very quickly change his mind about the ridge to the east, when according to his own report, an additional enemy force appeared from this direction under von Rapport. Grant reported these soldiers, “moving forward at a gallop, and proceeding to occupy the ridges and outcrops dominating the position on those sides, which I was unable to deny them owing to the weakness of my force.”<sup>40</sup> The evidence presented raises the suspicion that Welby had not used his admittedly limited resources to properly ensure a thorough reconnaissance and observation of the surrounding landscape. More could have been done via patrols to establish German movements or intentions, while better preparation should have been made to ensure effective early warning outposts, although the sources do make it clear that some outposts were posted, specifically in the northwest. However, whatever orders Welby did give regarding any early warning system, they clearly failed to do as he intended.

At the exact opposite side of the koppie and completely out of view from the events unfolding to the northeast, the troops under Lt Scott and Lt Austin had established themselves behind sangars on

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<sup>38</sup> Scott, “The Story of Sandfontein,” p. 180.

<sup>39</sup> Wyndham, “History of the GSW Campaign.”

<sup>40</sup> SAMMHL, A416, Sandfontein, Battle of, Grant, written battle account.

the spur that runs out for about two hundred metres to the southwest. At approximately 8am they sighted mounted troops advancing up the Ramans Drift road which they themselves had just travelled, and were at first under the impression that it was another UDF force.<sup>41</sup> They faced three mounted companies of German infantry under Major Ritter<sup>42</sup> accompanied at a distance by a battery of four mountain guns, lagging two hours behind owing to the exhaustion of its draught-animals.<sup>43</sup> At almost the same time the patrol under Lt Northway dispatched earlier to the north-west now rode back towards the koppie, pursued by "extended lines" of German mounted soldiers who were approaching from the direction of the main Warmbad road, and who in turn were followed by "line after line of mounted troops advancing at the gallop."<sup>44</sup> According to another account, Northway's patrol had made contact with the Germans as far as ten miles away, thereafter making a fighting retreat back to the koppie. These SAMR men ran into that part of Major Bauszus detachment; the latter had received orders from von Heydebreck to advance rapidly towards Sandfontein.<sup>45</sup> Using the same style that indicates he was always alert to absolutely ensuring the UDF's reputation, Scott wrote that Northway's group had, "made good their retirement, but not before checking the too bold advance of the enemy riflemen"; then for some reason this patrol went to ground "about five hundred yards from the western foot of the main kopje." Northway had his horses led in to join the remainder of his squadron's mounts, who were tethered "in the rear of the main well."<sup>46</sup>

Instead of seeking the sanctuary of the sangars, Northway had chosen to fight back from this point. There may have been some kind of misguided bravado in aggressively facing the Germans in full view of his comrades on the koppie, and clearly there was no obvious immediate danger in covering the remaining ground to the koppie, otherwise the patrol's horses would not have been safely led in, as Scott tells us. Perhaps Northway had his own fears of the position's anticipated vulnerability to the German artillery fire, or it could have been a calculated, although ultimately ill-judged decision by a junior officer, who sought to give the rest of the Sandfontein garrison a slight advantage in his detachment having a closer rifle range to the advancing Germans. Alternatively, Northway may have been displaying the reaction of a new troop leader determined to prove himself. As a prominent sportsman<sup>47</sup> recently commissioned from the rank of sergeant,<sup>48</sup> he was a

<sup>41</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," p. 181.

<sup>42</sup> Ungleich, *The Defence of GSWA*, p. 67.

<sup>43</sup> Von Oelhafen, *Der Feldzug*, p. 38.

<sup>44</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," p. 181.

<sup>45</sup> Von Oelhafen, *Der Feldzug*, p. 40.

<sup>46</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," p. 181.

<sup>47</sup> *Cape Argus*, 20 September 1914, p. 3.

member of a military community where practised ideals of masculinity held powerful sway. His decision cost him his life about five hours later, when fearing being cut off from the koppie, Northway was shot down in an attempt to regain it.<sup>49</sup> The reinforcements under Scott and Austin, bewildered at the sheer numbers of emerging German troops, proceeded in error to open fire upon the other patrol despatched to the northwest under Sergeant-Major Barratt, as the latter's patrol raced back to the koppie. Without sustaining any "friendly fire" casualties,<sup>50</sup> Barratt took his men into the position, and with the rest of the garrison faced the multiple German attack that was now rapidly enveloping Sandfontein.

### The artillery dual

The THA guns under Lt Adler were unlimbered between a kraal and the foot of the koppie,<sup>51</sup> and commenced firing on the southwest<sup>52</sup> where the Schutztruppe were still some four thousand yards away.<sup>53</sup> This quick response swung the startled German force to take cover against the koppies south of the wells<sup>54</sup> where it dismounted and began to slowly close in on foot, bringing up the machine-gun which later was to cut off and kill Northway. On hearing the artillery fire, von Heydebreck at the southern end of the Norachab ravine assumed that the north-eastern force had attacked prematurely, and concluded that the UDF force was in the process of eluding encirclement by escaping back down the Ramans Drift road. A junior officer, Lt Lossnitzer, was rapidly despatched to verify the situation and make urgent contact with Major Ritter's force. Clearly the "wireless stations" had proved inadequate amidst the kloofs, ridges, and koppies,<sup>55</sup> resulting in a confused German perception of the battle's opening phase, with von Heydebreck and his staff not even sure which guns were firing, how many, and from where.<sup>56</sup> The German colonel's ability to command at this stage was comparable to that of his counterpart, although in contrast to Grant and his Staff, he was well back from the action. Von Heydebreck's ability to communicate swiftly with his force components was limited as the battle opened, not unlike Grant's situation for the entire day.

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<sup>48</sup> National Archives, Cape Depot, Cape Town, DD, Volume 6\76-78, Regimental Orders No. 25 By Lieutenant-Colonel R.C. Grant D.S.O., Officer Commanding 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment South African Mounted Rifles, King Williams Town, November 18, 1913.

<sup>49</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," p.186.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p.181.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> SAMMHL, A416, Sandfontein, Battle of, Grant, written battle account.

<sup>53</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," p.182.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Von Oelhafen, *Der Feldzug*, p.39.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

Within minutes of the THA section firing, an undetected German battery at the defile mouth to the northeast, over four kilometres away, exploded a time-fuse shell almost directly above the THA guns, striking down a black driver and mule.<sup>57</sup> According to another Nongqui report, written prior to Scott's and based upon an account by a wounded gunner, Corporal L.F. Edwards, the first incoming German shells originated from the south-west and only very shortly thereafter from the exact opposite direction.<sup>58</sup> However, as has already indicated, German accounts state the southern force's artillery support had remained well behind their mounted troops and could not therefore have been in such a position. The northeast German battery could not actually be seen from the koppie, and the immediate accuracy of their shooting was quite plausibly attributed to them having already laid out the range during an earlier occupation of the wells.<sup>59</sup> The German artillerymen were practising the modern method of utilising field guns, namely firing indirect from a concealed position, thereby providing the gun crews with the maximum possible protection.<sup>60</sup> The northeast battery proceeded to fire regular salvos of both percussion and timed air burst shells at the western foot of the koppie, an area that included a walled enclosure, the wells, the THA section, and most of the UDF animals. (see photograph no. 19) Other German shells were directed at the koppie summit which they assumed was an artillery observation post, and drove Grant and his Staff under cover.<sup>61</sup> Grant's presence and commands would have been superfluous to the THA gunners below as he could not even see them from behind his sangar, and despite the battle noise, would have been too far away for verbal directions. The THA gun crews concentration would have been upon loading, firing, and correcting their aim, with control of this battle phase falling upon Adler, who had moved from an observation post on a low point of the koppie and joined his gunners next to the enclosure.<sup>62</sup>

The THA succeeded for a short period in even silencing the German northeast battery,<sup>63</sup> however with no time to dig proper gun pits they fired directly from the open, which rendered their crews markedly vulnerable to shrapnel and small arms fire. Within half an hour a second set of German field guns began shelling the position from the northwest; this was the 3rd Mountain Battery, part

<sup>57</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," p.182.

<sup>58</sup> The Nongqui, December 1914, p.394.

<sup>59</sup> Rayner & O'Shaughnessy, How Botha and Smuts Conquered GSW, p.42.

<sup>60</sup> Doughty, R.A. and Gruber, I.D., Warfare in the Western World, Volume II, Military Operations Since 1871, Lexington, Massachusetts, 1996, p. 513.

<sup>61</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," p.182.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Adler, F.B. The History of the Transvaal Horse Artillery, p.25.

of Major Bauzus force and was initially located to the right of three small koppies about four kilometres out on the plain.<sup>64</sup> The 9th Company (mounted infantry) had occupied these positions before the guns were shifted into place.<sup>65</sup> Adler had taken charge of one field gun and was preparing to shell the mounted infantry component when he observed Bauzus artillery. Accurate shelling by the UDF battery succeeded in causing some casualties,<sup>66</sup> forcing the German northwest artillery to retreat into dead ground from where it soon recommenced to bombard the UDF position.<sup>67</sup> While Battery Sergeant-Major Harris's gun crew continued to engage the northeast battery, Adler concentrated on that to the northwest. All the available accounts of the Sandfontein battle, including those of German origin, praise the THA whose gunners were completely exposed to incoming fire, and endured the frustration of a spring breaking in the breech block of "A" gun which in consequence was temporarily silenced for at least half an hour, considerably reducing the section's fire power at a crucial period.<sup>68</sup> In a difficult operation just prior to this delay, both crews had in response to the accuracy of the German's firing from the north-east, manually shifted their field guns to use the koppie and kraal as partial cover.<sup>69</sup>

Eventually the THA guns final position was behind the walled kraal about five foot high over which the gun directed at the north-west fired, with the other shooting at right angles towards the north-west. According to von Oelhafen, the 2nd Mountain Battery which had originally accompanied Ritter's force, finally made its appearance on the battlefield, "just in time to take part in the complete destruction of the enemy artillery."<sup>70</sup> Scott in contrast reported the German artillery in the south as being a section detached from that in the northwest, namely the 3rd Mountain Battery, that was part of the force under Major Bauzus. Scott claimed these two guns had been "unlimbered on the plain at the foot of the hills to the south of Sandfontein."<sup>71</sup> Considering that this was the side that he had faced during the battle, these details should be reasonably accurate. Wherever the guns in the south had originated, they assisted in pinning Adler's section between three directions of shellfire, and with the kraal wall and gun shields constituting their only cover, ultimate destruction of the section was inevitable.

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<sup>64</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," diagrams: "View from Sandfontein Looking N.W.," p.181, "The Final Position," p.185.

<sup>65</sup> Von Oelhafen, *Der Feldzug*, p.40.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Adler, *History of the THA*, p. 25.

<sup>68</sup> *The Nongqui*, December 1914, p.395.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p.394.

<sup>70</sup> Von Oelhafen, *Der Feldzug*, p.40.

<sup>71</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," p. 185.

### The final resistance from the THA

Most of the sources were determined to record the THA's heroics rather than a chronology, but it appears the most telling blow came, according to Scott, after about two and a half hours when a shell killed Sergeant-Major Harris and wounded the rest of "B" gun's crew.<sup>72</sup> Corporal Edwards described a different situation to The Nongqui, in that at one stage, only he and Gunner Coltman were operating "A" gun, before both were wounded. The publication stated: "They (Edwards and Coltman) managed to get rid of the breech-blocks, however. That finished all the artillery firing on our part." The Nongqui continued to explain that it was only once the two guns had been disabled, and Edwards was moving towards the doctors, that "a shell burst in front of Battery Sergeant - Major Harris, and killed him,"<sup>73</sup> and that after further wounding, Edwards was removed by the two UDF doctors, Captains Holcroft and Dalton, and placed in the kraal now used as a makeshift hospital.<sup>74</sup> Here the Corporal was "out of time for an hour" before regaining consciousness, and if this was the case, it would help explain why Edwards had not heard "B" gun still firing again (as claimed by Scott), and casts suspicion upon the Corporal's story as to who rendered the guns inoperable.

Reconstructing the last hours of the THA serves the purpose of creating a more accurate assessment of the stress of combat upon the gunners, and to what extent they coped, before it was deemed acceptable by contemporary writers that the guns could be honourably abandoned. Edwards and Scott differ and this indicates confusion, in that the latter was adamant "B" gun recommenced firing for ten to fifteen minutes after Harris's death, and was operated by two of the "spare numbers" (surplus gunners) who had accompanied the column. Throughout the engagement, spare shells must have brought to the guns from transport vehicles in the rear. The guns went into action immediately upon their arrival, ensuring no time to unpack and set up the battery's munitions in a convenient spot. The gunners had to man their weapons and face the additional risk from running across open ground under heavy fire carrying shells. Judging from the final roll of men provided by Adler, the remaining THA members crewing the guns and fetching ammunition after Harris's death, numbered about eleven white men, plus the over twenty coloured and native drivers called upon to

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p.184.

<sup>73</sup> The Nongqui, December 1914, p.395.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

assist.<sup>75</sup> According to Adler, the UDF artillery finally ceased to operate after sustaining further casualties and virtually exhausting their ammunition.

Further service of the guns would have only meant a useless loss of life, so with the concurrence of Colonel Grant the guns were withdrawn behind a small wall which gave some shelter from rifle fire and there temporarily disabled, though this operation was interrupted by rifle and machine gun fire.<sup>76</sup>

One assumes here that Adler meant the two artillery pieces were once again dragged, now right against the kraal wall, where he purportedly removed the breech blocks himself.<sup>77</sup> A later History of the THA by Neil Orpen, without any footnoted reference, states that a gunner by the name of Dunbar, who had earlier been instrumental in shifting the transport teams and wagons, remained behind to smash the buffer of his gun with a pickaxe.<sup>78</sup> The buffer is part of the recoil system and its destruction would have rendered the weapon unserviceable. Shortly after the unwounded gunners had withdrawn to the koppie, a German machine gun was brought into action on the Ramans Drift road from the southwest, and it fired around the foot of the koppie.<sup>79</sup> By midday Grant's men ceased to have any artillery support; this against an opponent well backed by field guns and firing from three different directions.

Adler was the last to vacate the THA position; all the sources report that he effectively commanded the section in an extremely dangerous and difficult situation, giving orders for gun laying, moving the animals and teams, shifting the positions of the two guns at least twice, ordering the withdrawal after some kind consultation with Grant (probably by hand signals), and disabling the guns. His leadership may also have had a great deal to do with the gunners resisting as long as they did. In his own account, Adler was modest about his personal participation in the battle, and no other evidence suggests him playing anything but a courageous and responsible role. Yet, it is a curious fact that despite the praise heaped upon him, no decoration came to him for Sandfontein. Although this could be explained by the tradition that British soldiers did not receive decorations while

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<sup>75</sup> Adler, History of the THA, pp73-74.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p.25.

<sup>77</sup> Where is this from?

<sup>78</sup> Orpen, N., The History of the THA, pp 18-19.

<sup>79</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," p. 186.

participating in defeats,<sup>80</sup> it was not a general rule, and Adler's reported conduct was highly praiseworthy in the circumstances. Another explanation for his lack of decoration could tie in a contention of this thesis; that the UDF and Union government chose as far as possible to forget Sandfontein, however well individual soldiers had performed. The gunners had fought until they had simply suffered too many dead and wounded, and this set up the beginning of the collapse amongst the rest of the UDF force at Sandfontein.

### **The 1st SAMR Regiment's defence**

The SAMR troops in the koppie sangars were better sheltered from German fire when compared to the THA gunners, although their view of battle events depended upon what side they faced. Those looking towards the northeast and east would have been completely unsighted regarding the activities of their artillery, although obviously not out of earshot. The total cessation of the THA firing before noon and the reinvigorated German shelling from the northwest and south, would have ensured a strong degree of anxiety and uncertainty amongst the soldiers under Lt Clements, Lt Cowley and Lt Owen. Scott asserts that despite the presence of the German 1st Reserve Field Battery to the northeast, von Heydebreck made no attempt to initially shell the north and northeast points of the koppie. Scott based this on the theory that the attack on these sides was rather of a "holding nature," with the main thrust intended from the southwest.<sup>81</sup> Situated on the koppie's southwest spur and facing this very threat, Scott's perceptions could well have been influenced by his immediate circumstances, however by the end of the day, the beleaguered UDF force faced German infantry, who under the cover of their artillery closed in from literally every conceivable direction.

The SAMR troops missed the worst of the shelling during the morning artillery duel, but skilful German machine gun deployment drastically inhibited their movement on the koppie. One such weapon had been set up directly opposite a ridge to the east, soon after the attack had begun, and almost immediately fired directly into a mass of UDF animals and their black holders, who were sheltering on the southern slope. The animals included mules and horses used for the transportation of the two maxim machine guns, and had been concentrated into a tight group. In a dress rehearsal of the later appalling deliberate slaughter of the SAMR horses, the unfortunate animals were released by their panic stricken holders and men and beasts scattered in all directions, with most of

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<sup>80</sup> According to medal collector Peter Digby.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

the latter being cut down.<sup>82</sup> This killing and wounding of the horses and mules invoked a strong response from Scott, possibly rooted in a subconscious affinity for the animals, who together with the men had endured the wearisome marches across the desert. There must also have been the shocked recognition of the destructive power inflicted by automatic weapons, rendered even more frightening by the trapped and vulnerable position of the UDF soldiers. Although machine guns were by 1914 issued to all European equipped armies, the vast majority of the men in the Sandfontein force would have had no direct experience of their immensely destructive battle effect. The German weapon then swung to fire upon the summit and sangars, seriously wounding and consequently blinding Lt Owen.<sup>83</sup> The response of the two SAMR maxim teams was hampered by the impractical height of tripods that exposed the weapons. In desperation, one maxim team deliberately toppled over their own weapon.<sup>84</sup> Grant remarked on this phase with the following words:

The position was swept by heavy rifle and machine gun from all sides. The number of machine guns was difficult to estimate owing to their positions being frequently changed.... Our machine guns maintained a most unequal contest against several enemy maxims and concentrated rifle and artillery fire from three sides. One was ultimately compelled to cease fire, but the other was never quite silenced.<sup>85</sup>

Understandably the German machine gun fire had a marked effect of demoralising the UDF troops, a point endorsed by Scott when he wrote: "their fire was one of the greatest factors in bringing about, so early in the day, a situation that rapidly became more hopeless as the engagement progressed."<sup>86</sup> The Germans forced the South Africans behind their sangars, completely restricting movement in the open, and made effective verbal fire control instructions by officers difficult to effectively communicate.<sup>87</sup> Exacerbated by ricochets and flying stone fragments, it is a moot point as to how often individual SAMR members would have even raised their heads to fire their rifles.

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p.183, diagram, p.185.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p.183.

<sup>85</sup> SAMMHL, A416, Sandfontein, Battle of, Grant, written battle account.

<sup>86</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," p. 183.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

## The German perspective of the battle

The German infantry attacks during the morning took the minimum of risks; below is an attempt to assess where German casualties were heaviest, and evaluate Scott's comment regarding the effects of the German machine guns in the southwest side when he stated:

Our machine gun and rifle fire at these longer ranges brought the hostile rifle attack to a complete standstill for a period of about three hours, and the forward movement was only re-commenced about noon, under machine gun and artillery covering fire.<sup>88</sup>

Certain facts have been established by comparing the writings of von Oelhafen and Hennig regarding the positions of different German units, with the details written upon gravestones. Six of the attackers killed in action or who died of wounds were with Major Von Rapport in the east, four accompanied Major Ritter in the southwest, and two were with Major Bauszus' detachment in the northwest.<sup>89</sup> The actual death locality regarding two other names on gravestones could not be determined, one being a signaller where there were three such units in operation during the battle, all obviously placed at different points. The other was a senior non-commissioned officer whose designation of "Stab. 3 Bataillons" indicate that he was in all likelihood attached in some form to the Headquarters Staff.<sup>90</sup> There are also forty wounded acknowledged within von Oelhafen's work<sup>91</sup> compared to the total UDF non-fatal casualties of fifty-one, including those captured after the destruction of the SAMR/THA supply column, which during the mid-morning walked into a trap on the Ramans Drift road. The South African situation was also different in that they were by late afternoon trapped under heavy artillery fire, where shrapnel in a small area would ensure significant casualties. Nine of the fourteen German dead held rank, two officers and seven non-commissioned officers,<sup>92</sup> while five other commissioned officers were wounded.<sup>93</sup> Although accepting that at least some of these men were attached to the mainly stationary artillery units, it

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p.184.

<sup>89</sup> Von Oelhafen, *Der Feldzug*, maps, pp 38 and 42.

Inscriptions on gravestones at the German military, police, and settler cemetery on the Sandfontein battlefield.

<sup>90</sup> Translation and advice from Jochan Mahncke. One soldier, Visefeldwebel Peter Schier, was buried in a separate grave, as were the two commissioned officer casualties, Major Emil Von Rapport, and Oberleutnant Fritz Schmidt, while another Vizefeldwebel, Wilhelm Templin, lies in a common grave together with ten other non-commissioned officers and troopers.

<sup>91</sup> Von Oelhafen, *Der Feldzug*, p.43.

<sup>92</sup> Inscriptions on German gravestones at Sandfontein.

<sup>93</sup> Von Oelhafen, *Der Feldzug*, p.43.

does appear that in keeping with contemporary military practices, the German troops at Sandfontein were led from the front.

The German sources were just as determined to portray their efforts with accolades; von Oelhafen describes the SAMR and THA wearing "British" uniforms with "practical camouflage colours," difficult to distinguish from the background, and only by "close up and keen observation could one spot trenches and careless movements by individuals." Commenting upon Adler's gunners, von Oelhafen state, "The artillery...had found cover at the foot of the hilltop behind a stone kraal, and one could only see their (muzzle) flashes."<sup>94</sup> In the swirl of battle, the Germans were respectful of their opponents, just as the authors of South African sources sketched the overwhelming odds faced by the UDF men.

### **The German attacks from the east and southwest**

Von Oelhafen reported that the UDF troops were barely visible from a distance and their rifle fire made negligible initial impact, but that it became increasingly more accurate as the range closed. The most aggressive efforts by German infantry during the morning came on the eastern side and resulted in several fatal casualties. Forty-one year old Oberleutnant Schimdt commanded a platoon of infantry and died at about ten o'clock<sup>95</sup>\* An hour and a half later, his commander, fifty-one year old Major von Rapport, suffered a fatal wound to the stomach while leading a reckless attack across the open sandy plane. Von Rapport's deputy, Hauptman Graf Sourma, then abandoned the attack "due to incomplete preparation."<sup>96</sup> During the German southwest attack, Scott reported that the UDF riflemen had a brief morale boost that morning, when some fifty Germans with their rifles slung climbed down a steep gully on the high ground to the southeast, presenting a clear target. (see photograph no. 24) Several were shot at a range of about one thousand metres,<sup>97</sup> but the evidence suggests that whatever Scott's memories, only one German soldier was actually killed in the incident. A German source indicates that soldiers of the 6th Company participated,<sup>98</sup> and although the numbers of wounded are unknown, a thirty-four year old medical orderly, Vizefeldwebel Wilhelm Templin, was the only member of this detachment slain.<sup>99</sup> The incident highlights again

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., pp 39-40.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, \* P.J. Young in *Boot and Saddle*, p.160, using a German source from the Windhoek press dated 16 October 1914, suggested that Schimdt was in fact killed in the early afternoon.

<sup>96</sup> Von Oelhafen, *Der Feldzug*, 141.

<sup>97</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," p.184.

<sup>98</sup> Von Oelhafen, *Die Feldzug*, map entitled: "Battle of Sandfontein, am 26.9.14. Position after 4 hours." p.42.

<sup>99</sup> Inscriptions on German gravestones at Sandfontein.

some of the contrasts between Scott's descriptions and the reality of the battle. The smallest of successes that day loomed large in his mind, and when writing his account nearly a year later, Scott magnified details that continually endorsed the image of a heroic defence of the wells.

Two German field guns arrived shortly afterwards to face the koppie from two and a half thousand metres in the south and bombarded it for two hours, supported by a machine gun only six hundred metres from the first line of UDF sangars. With this covering fire, German infantry pushed up in line with the machine gun within two hours,<sup>100</sup> while von Oelhafen confirms that Major Ritter ordered both the 4th and 6th Companies to press forward on the Ramans Drift road. His accompanying diagram indicates that German lines in the southwest held back from risking an advance onto the expansive sandy plain that lay between the spur and eastern high ground.<sup>101</sup> In attacking the eastern and northern slopes, the Germans made full use of their machine guns and silenced the second SAMR Maxim gun.<sup>102</sup> Scott described how his troop effectively resisted the German advance on the southern side, so far as the conditions of combat allowed:

Our riflemen were now compelled to resort to snapshooting between the bursts of machine gun fire and the slight lull that prevailed after the arrival of each batch of shells. The sandy plain was very suitable for the observation of fire and in many cases, by working in pairs, our riflemen did some admirable shooting, which time and again held up the advance of the enemy riflemen all round the position. In order to secure cover in the schantzes (sangars) our men were compelled to lie at full length- even a sitting position was unpractical. Under these conditions, apart from the severe shell and machine gun fire, the best rifle shooting could not be expected, and yet the enemy attacking lines were repeatedly held up by our musketry.<sup>103</sup>

The German troops clearly had no desire to storm a concealed enemy under cover, despite their officers being trained according to European military tactics. The unnerving sensations and visual

<sup>100</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," p.185

<sup>101</sup> Von Oelhafen, *Der Feldzug*, p.40

<sup>102</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," p. 183.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 185-186.

impact of advancing into bullets across an open plain, brought swiftly to an end any heroic illusions. Surrounded by ridges and koppies the battlefield significantly accentuated the noise of cannon and small arms fire, making foremost the vulnerability of the frightened and self-conscious human being. The grandeur of the terrain dwarfed the troops, assailing them with the frighteningly amplified noise of weaponry. The Germans while attacking did not have recourse to the constant shelter of rock walls, or even the possible reassurance of comrades lying close by. According to the strategies used by European armies for ensuring a decision in a siege type situation, artillery firepower had to be as heavy as possible, while infantrymen in launching their assault had to display an “almost superhuman, edge to their courage.”<sup>104</sup> However, a determined infantry assault constituted a terrifying prospect for the German field commanders, and they fell back upon the destructive power of their now unopposed artillery. For the rest of the day, the German gunners would render the Sandfontein koppie a hellish place for the trapped men of the SAMR and THA. Von Oelhafen states that Ritter and Bauszus were convinced that the UDF detachment remained by mid-morning well positioned and capable of stout resistance.<sup>105</sup> Scott's remarks on the SAMR riflemen holding the German infantry at bay during this morning period, seem therefore reasonably accurate, although the Germans did not press home their attacks in any manner comparable with the 1914-18 infantry assaults across no mans land in Europe.

The scattering of sangars across the koppie today indicates a thinly spread UDF firing line, while both Scott and Grant recalled that fire control and communication was extremely difficult. Keegan points out that infantrymen, however well-trained, armed, and resolute, “remain erratic agents of death,”<sup>106</sup> and he contends that unless there is some kind of central command direction, soldiers will generally chose their targets badly. He further remarks upon the behaviour of combatants in a battle situation, as being such where they “will open and cease fire individually, ...be put off their aim by the enemy's return of fire, ...distracted by the wounded near them, ...yield to fear and excitement, and fire high, low or wide.”<sup>107</sup> “Dispersion” essentially results in “lack of control which in turn results in poor musketry.”<sup>108</sup> Most of these criteria would have applied directly to the SAMR riflemen with their distant targets, their task being rendered further difficult by virtually unchallenged German machine gun fire and battlefield noise level, while the UDF officers were inhibited from moving around to issue instructions and encouragement. Because of their limited

<sup>104</sup> Keegan J., *The Mask of Command*, London, 1987, p.247.

<sup>105</sup> Von Oelhafen, *Der Feldzug*, p.41.

<sup>106</sup> Keegan, *The Face of Battle*, p.233.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

observation of the firing lines, Grant and his Staff were from a practical viewpoint unable to effectively command, control, and direct the overall force. By hesitating in an early storming of the koppie for fear of sustaining unacceptably heavy casualties, von Heydebreck was acknowledging that Sandfontein was not Belgium or France, and a sizable chunk of his limited colonial manpower resources was on the battlefield that day. The German experience of colonial wars in South West had not been a happy one, particularly in terms of troop losses, and this clearly influenced the tactics of the German commander.

### **The destruction of the UDF supply column**

As a direct consequence of Lukin's insistence that Grant arrive with the reinforcements the following early morning, the latter's supply column had remained behind. The painstakingly slow process of moving men and supplies up to the river drifts from Steinkopf, had resulted in there being no extra rations at Ramans Drift for Grant's men.<sup>109</sup> According to Grant, the supply officer only expected a donkey train from Steinkopf that evening,<sup>110</sup> and the Sandfontein bound supply column left therefore well after Grant's 5pm departure.<sup>111</sup> It including two THA wagons that Adler claimed had to wait for their three SAMR counterparts<sup>112</sup> and an escort of thirty SAMR riflemen under the command of Lt Allen.<sup>113</sup> This column consisted of over a hundred horses and mules, with forty-two white men, twelve native constables and wagon drivers, and five wagons.<sup>114</sup> The late departure and night trek of the supply column epitomised again the confusion and disorganisation of these operations on the Orange River border, but also reveals something of the questionable leadership accompanying the wagons, besides Grant's possible ignorance of the ammunition situation by the end of the battle. The SAMR transport section was under the charge of Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant Macdonald, and included rations and reserve ammunition for Grant's mounted infantry. The Colonel complained bitterly in his 1936 account that proper transportation for these munitions was not available.

They (the supply wagons) never reached me, and the action was fought next day with only the ammunition which the men

<sup>109</sup> SAMMHL, A416, Sandfontein, Battle of, Grant, written battle account.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Adler, *History of the THA*, p.27.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," document entitled "At Sandfontein."

<sup>114</sup> SAMMHL, A416, Sandfontein, Battle of, Grant, written battle account.

<sup>114</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," document entitled "At Sandfontein."

carried on their persons viz. 120 rounds per man. (I must here mention that all my reserve ammunition was on the wagons. While at Steinkopf I had made repeated unsuccessful appeals for vehicles to carry this ammunition, but Lukin informed me with great regret, that such were absolutely unobtainable and finally instructed me to carry the reserve ammunition on the baggage wagons.)<sup>115</sup>

Two platoons of the 1st Mounted Company, a component of Ritter's force, had been detailed to guard the Ramans Drift road against any relief attempts, and it was this detachment that destroyed the two UDF ammunition supply wagons, besides capturing or putting to flight their escort. The 2nd Mountain Battery, while still en route to Sandfontein, also participated in this attack.<sup>116</sup> Von Oelhafen claimed that 15 000 rifle cartridges and 5000 ready made machine gun ammunition belts were seized at Sandfontein after the UDF surrender,<sup>117</sup> which means that additional stocks had been available to the garrison, both before and after Grant's arrival, before his surrender, and despite the ammunition column never arriving. Was the reported ammunition shortage an inaccuracy that Grant claimed out of frustration at the defeat? Leadership problems in the column were also a factor because the SAMR and THA sections separated during the night,<sup>118</sup> before the leading wagons and escort ran into a German ambush. Von Oelhafen described the attack:

shortly after 7am, two platoons of the (1st Mounted) company encountered two ox wagons loaded with ammunition, fodder and provisions for the troops at Sandfontein and guarded by a mounted platoon. The platoons attacked at once, charging after a short exchange of fire; Both wagons and twenty-four soldiers either dead or wounded fell into their hands, the rest of the escort fleeing to Ramans Drift<sup>119</sup>

<sup>115</sup> SAMMHL, A416, Sandfontein, Battle of, Grant, written battle account.

<sup>116</sup> Von Oelhafen, Der Feldzug, p.40.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p.43.

Ungleich, *The Defence of GSWA*, p.73, following Hennig, Deutsch Sudwest in Weltkrieg, states that 5000 rounds of machine gun bullets were captured, along with 15 000 rifle cartridges.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p.27.

<sup>119</sup> Von Oelhafen, Der Feldzug, p.40.

German sources completely exaggerated the number of casualties<sup>120</sup> as archival documents confirm only Macdonald's death and Lt Allan was not amongst the prisoner of war lists.<sup>121</sup> Deaths of white soldiers within the small white population of the Union were virtually impossible to deny or hide, and the prisoner lists do not show a discernable increase in the number of UDF troops captured after the Sandfontein battle. There are no substantial prisoner additions evident; either from the supply column, or the two reversals inflicted the same day upon the afternoon relief efforts.<sup>122</sup> Besides Adler mentioning that the escort were "killed,"<sup>123</sup> there is no other evidence of any other UDF deaths during this engagement besides that of Macdonald. A wounded rifleman from the escort reported the attack, although by this stage the two relief detachments had already been despatched. The rest of Allan's troops would have joined up with the one hundred strong 4th SAMR squadron from Ramans Drift under Capt King; it would have been highly unlikely considering the ethics and honour of professional soldiers, that they simply returned to the comparative safety of the river base.

### **The attempts by Lukin to relieve Grant's force**

By midday von Heydebreck's attention was shifted away from the Sandfontein attack by two attempts to assist Grant's force, both despatched by Lukin along the Ramans Drift road, and Houms River bed respectively. These consisted of a 4th SAMR squadron under Capt King, and a 5th SAMR squadron under Capt Davidson, both of whom rode to investigate the distant outbreak of artillery fire, and the sudden cessation of the field telephonic communication between Ramans Drift and the wells.<sup>124</sup> King's force was forced into cover by an ambush under Oberleutnant Kuehne, which had been established on a strategically placed pass with machine gun support.<sup>125</sup> King's men were still held up when Lukin arrived from the drift at 1am, accompanied by another SAMR squadron and the remaining two THA guns.<sup>126</sup> According to von Oelhafen, the troops under King had withdrawn with "heavy casualties,"<sup>127</sup> although records show only three 4th SAMR men were wounded during the fighting, all of whom were taken prisoner: Sergeant J.T. Clarke, Rifleman S.J.

<sup>120</sup> Also mentioned as such in Ungleich, *The Defence of GSWA*, p.70.

<sup>121</sup> SANDF, DSD, SAMR, Box 647, figures examined from ledger entitled, "Casualties during War, 1914-18."

National Archives of Namibia, Windhoek, PWD file, 24 277/2 Soldiers Graves, Sandfontein, list of white UDF members killed and buried at Sandfontein, Geidip and Ramans Drift.

<sup>122</sup> SANDF, DSD, SAMR, Box 647, figures examined from ledger entitled, "Casualties during War, 1914-18."

<sup>123</sup> Adler, *History of the THA*, p.27.

<sup>124</sup> Collyer, *The Campaign*, pp 43-44.

<sup>125</sup> Ungleich, *The Defence of GSWA*, 72.

<sup>126</sup> Collyer, *The Campaign*, p.44.

<sup>127</sup> Von Oelhafen, *Der Feldzug*, p.41.

Rifleman P.G. Welthagen.<sup>128</sup> No German dead from the 1st Company are buried at the Sandfontein cemetery. All three wounded UDF men were obviously abandoned in the rush to back away from the machine gun fire, but there are no other records that justify von Oelhafen's claim that considerable numbers of 4th SAMR members died.

The only other possible evidence of fatal UDF casualties came from Johannes Visser, a farmer in the district. Nearly three years after the battle, in a sworn statement, he confirmed in July 1917 that a skeleton of a white soldier had been found during May of that year, four miles along the Ramans Drift road.<sup>129</sup> This is a mystifying detail as no UDF troops were reported missing in official records. There were other minor skirmishes in the area with German troops as late as February 1915, when two burger commando members were killed.<sup>130</sup> But this had occurred long after the vast bulk of Lukin and von Heydebreck's troops had left the area, and a very limited German presence retained a watching brief. Official documentation<sup>131</sup> and other sources<sup>132</sup> account for both these burger commando members' deaths and burials. Whose skeleton had Visser found? It is intriguing that such aspects of Sandfontein's aftermath illustrate how official records and secondary sources do not always tally with one other, despite the casualties being statistically manageable. Within this thesis, the focus is on all evidence that may illuminate battle details, and how the UDF revisited the site years later, including establishing whether any efforts were made to recheck official documents, and ensure a coherent record.

Concerning the other relief attempt that day, von Rapport covered the rear of his Eastern force by dispatching Lt Sommer down the Houms River bed with an infantry and machine gun platoon. Sommer set a trap in the river ravine,<sup>133</sup> successfully ambushing Capt Davidson's 5th SAMR squadron, who then retreated out of range for the rest of the day. This action underlines once again the German superiority in using the topography to their advantage.<sup>134</sup> As with the supply column and 4th SAMR squadron, the UDF men walked into a trap without any effective preliminary

<sup>128</sup> SANDF, DSD, SAMR, Box 647, figures examined from ledger entitled, "Casualties during War, 1914-18."

<sup>129</sup> NA of Namibia, PWD file, 24 277/2 Soldiers Graves, Sandfontein, copy of sworn statement by Johannes Hendrik Visser, 3 July 1917.

<sup>130</sup> Rayner & O'Shaughnessy, How Botha and Smuts Conquered GSW, "The Casualty List, Killed or Died of Wounds or Disease", pp 291-292.

NA of Namibia, PWD file 24 277/2 Soldiers Graves, Sandfontein, list of white UDF members buried at Sandfontein, Geidip and Ramansdrift.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Letters from a correspondent in Klerksdorp, dated 3 March and 5 April 1998, describing how his father shot by accident a Lt Wilken, during a patrol near Ramans Drift in February 1915. Wilken's death is confirmed in Rayner's casualty records.

<sup>133</sup> Von Oelhafen, Der Feldzug, p.40.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

scouting. A guide by the name of Burger had pushed forward of Davidson's column and been captured, only to later escape and flee back to the UDF camp.<sup>135</sup> Grant remarked that the sound of distant machine gun fire, just after 11 am, could be heard from the direction of Houms Drift, while Scott admitted the defenders experienced a "keen disappointment" when it was audibly obvious that "attempt(s) at relief had failed and that the advancing forces had been repulsed and driven back by the enemy."<sup>136</sup> Grant's terse description barely reflects the demoralisation that must have been felt deeply across the UDF position.

It is difficult to say how long it (the firing) continued as it could only be heard in the lulls in the firing round our own position. The distant firing however subsequently sounded fainter, proving that it was receding from us, and it eventually ceased, from which we concluded that Col. Berrange, who was holding Homs Drift, had attempted to come to our assistance but had been beaten back.<sup>137</sup>

Documents show Corporal J. Aldridge died in the relief attempt along the Houms River bed, while two other 5th SAMR soldiers were wounded and captured.<sup>138</sup> However correspondence between the UDF and SWA Public Works Department from 1917 to 1922, acknowledge both Corporals J. Ovens and Aldridge of the 5th SAMR buried at Geidip, along with Rifleman Van Baalen who was killed in an earlier skirmish.<sup>139</sup> Ovens who had "been killed about two miles from Sandfontein on the Houms Drift road," and his body had not been found by the "British", and was probably "buried by the enemy."<sup>140</sup> The body location and regiment details suggest that Ovens died in the relief attempt, yet his name does not appear in the UDF archival records. Further correspondence stated that: "Memorial crosses have been erected over the graves of Corporal Aldridge and 'Trooper' Van Baalen," but still no mention is made of Ovens.<sup>141</sup> The two wounded in Davidson's relief attempt were Sergeant Theo Swanson and Rifleman E.D. Coen,<sup>142</sup> and both with listed as prisoners of

<sup>135</sup> The Nongqui, November 1914, p.327.

<sup>136</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," p.186.

<sup>137</sup> SAMMHL, A416, Sandfontein, Battle of, Grant, written battle account.

<sup>138</sup> Figures examined from ledger entitled, Casualties of War, 1914-18, SAMR Group, Box 647.

<sup>139</sup> SANDF, DSD, SAMR, Box 647, figures examined from ledger entitled, "Casualties during War, 1914-18."

<sup>140</sup> NA of Namibia, PWD file, 24 2772 Soldiers Graves, Sandfontein, letter dated 6 February 1917 from the Officer Commanding Union Forces in South West Africa to the Director of Works in Windhoek.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, letter stamped 9 September 1919 from the Director of Public Works to: The Officer Commanding Troops, South West Africa Protectorate, Windhuk.

<sup>142</sup> Rayner & O'Shaughnessy, How Botha and Smuts Conquered GSW, p.295 & 297.

war.<sup>143</sup> Visser included in his sworn statement to relevant military and public works officials, that he had heard the following information via his neighbour at Geidip: “the body of a British Officer was lying exposed in the Hum (sic) river about 2 miles from my house (At Sandfontein).”<sup>144</sup>

What seems apparent from examining the official documentation, is a messy situation of bodies being abandoned, or not located, and official records left incomplete. Visser’s report of the “British Officer’s” body, also suggests it being in the same location as the ambush. The Germans certainly created enough panic amongst the SAMR for the abandonment of Swanson and Coen, while Ovens is listed as wounded by Rayner. As was the case with Aldridge, possibly Ovens returned to Gaidip with his comrades, and died there.<sup>145</sup> The central question remains why the UDF archival records on casualties are incomplete regarding those documents examined. The unknown skeleton, Visser’s reports, and the Namibian archives correspondence concerning the eventual reburial of UDF men killed on the Orange River border area, invoke speculation that the Defence Force was not determined to thoroughly revisit either the battle site, or correct its records. Events and casualty details were not consistently documented, partly it is contended, because of the confusion that day, but also an official reluctance to dwell on a controversial part of the GSWA campaign. The failure of the relief attempts, demonstrated the impotency of Lukin’s force, despite the heroism of the Sandfontein defenders, and even the highly partisan Rayner acknowledged them as debacles:

when reinforcements did appear on the scene these found further progress barred by entrenched troops with four machine guns, which were used to advantage... After several ineffectual attempts to break through these had no option but to fall back. They sustained several casualties, mostly through heavy machine gun fire.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Casualties of War, 1914-18, etc.

<sup>144</sup> NA of Namibia, PWD file, 24 2772 Soldiers Graves, Sandfontein, copy of sworn statement by Johannes Hendrik Visser.

<sup>145</sup> Rayner & O’Shaughnessy, How Botha and Smuts Conquered GSW, p.296.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p.43.

### Further events negatively impacting upon UDF morale

Captains Holcroft and Dalton, both doctors in the SA Medical Corps, set up their station at the west koppie foot by the kraal wall. Once casualties started to occur amongst the THA, doctors and orderlies raced across the “shrapnel-swept area behind the guns,” pulling the wounded in behind the cover of the wall.<sup>147</sup> An important consequence of this “hospital” location was that the medical team were unable to assist the wounded on the koppie during the rest of the day, a situation that must have impacted very negatively upon morale. The injured who did receive treatment were the members of the artillery section wounded during the morning, although not all were rescued, as suggested by Scott. Gunner A.O. Coltman who sustained shrapnel wounds in the buttocks and head<sup>148</sup> took cover under a wagon for the duration of the fight.<sup>149</sup> Ritter’s infantry set up a machine gun approximately five hundred metres to the south-west, very shortly after Adler’s gunners had abandoned their artillery and retreated to the koppie. This weapon effectively pinned down the medical detachment for the rest of the day, rendering impossible any attempt by the SAMC members to assist those on the koppie, where casualties mounted significantly during the afternoon. Corporal Edwards, who lay in the shadow of the kraal wall from 1.00pm to 6.30pm, stated that the slightly wounded THA men had fled with the unwounded to the koppie sangars, while he and nine others remained in the kraal. No attempt was made to raise a red cross flag for fear it would attract too much attention,<sup>150</sup> suggestive that the UDF soldiers were not convinced the Germans would abide by accepted articles governing conduct in war. During the first months after the Great War’s outbreak, English-language papers all over the world had carried a variety of stories on German atrocities in Belgium.

Hard upon the silencing of the THA was another vivid and demoralising shock for the SAMR members, namely the deliberate slaughter of their nearly three hundred assembled horses, tethered in lines adjacent the west slopes. The German guns located to the northwest began a systematic barrage upon the animals, causing the black horse holders to flee to the koppie.<sup>151</sup> What followed for the next two hours was the appalling spectacle of the animals being literally blown to pieces by direct hits from percussion shells, while the time fuse shrapnel shells “accounted for three or four at

<sup>147</sup> Scott, “The Story of Sandfontein,” p.184.

<sup>148</sup> Adler, *History of the THA*, p.73. Gunner A.O. Coltman was not necessarily the same man who Corporal Edwards mentioned in his account. According to Adler’s appendix VI in his book (p.73) there were two Coltman’s at Sandfontein in his THA, A.O. and W.V., both of whom were wounded by shrapnel.

<sup>149</sup> Close, P.L., *A Prisoner of the Germans in South West Africa*, Cape Town, 1916, pp33-34.

<sup>150</sup> *The Nongqui*, December 1914, p.395.

<sup>151</sup> Scott, “The Story of Sandfontein,” pp 184-185.

a time,” covering an area of more than fifty square yards with dead, mutilated and wounded horses. Referring to the slaughter, Scott gave one of the most emotional comments within his entire report: “This wholesale slaughter was certainly the most heart-rendering incident of the day.”<sup>152</sup> Corporal P.J. Young remarked:

The horses on picket lines near the foot of the hill were frantic with fear as shells burst around them. The poor helpless creatures were having their guts blown out...A sore thing for me was to see the body of my horse, and I think many others felt grief in that way too.<sup>153</sup>

It would require little imagination to appreciate the effect of the above scenes on the SAMR men in terms of the emotional impact, witnessing as they were the horrific destruction of their horses, and the sheer destructive power of modern artillery. According to Keegan, the plight of their horses suffering profoundly moves soldiers, however hard or indifferent they may be to the sufferings of other men in battle.<sup>154</sup> Other references in *Nongqui* give some inkling into popular feelings amongst the SAMR soldiers for their mounts. One set of photos showing horses and mules and published in an edition shortly after the campaign's conclusion, is captioned with affection:

The long-faced chums (who) played a very prominent part in the campaign, and suffered severely in the process, owing to short rations, poor grazing and forced marches.<sup>155</sup>

To compound the sadness of the event, many of the petrified horses, even though not tethered, made no effort to get away, while the rest still “huddled even closer together.”<sup>156</sup> One phenomenon regarding soldiers under fire is that they move closer together from fear and mutual morale support, “despite orders and training to the contrary”<sup>157</sup>; animals clearly do the same. The sheer overwhelming superiority of the German military force was now hugely reinforced in the minds of

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p.185.

<sup>153</sup> Young, *Boot and Saddle*, pp 159-160.

<sup>154</sup> Keegan, *The Face of Battle*, p.327.

<sup>155</sup> *The Nongqui*, September 1915, “Art Supplement,” “To face page 131.”

<sup>156</sup> Scott, “The Story of Sandfontein,” p.185.

<sup>157</sup> Kellet, A., *The Soldier in Battle* p.226.

the South Africans, trapped as they were, devoid of artillery support, without food or water, and hearing the firing of relief attempts recede.

### **Command of the UDF Force during the battle**

Grant was wounded in the leg at about noon<sup>158</sup> and command shifted onto Capt Welby, however the Colonel reversed this decision shortly before the surrender in the late afternoon, resulting in some confusion amongst his officers. He described these events as follows:

I felt compelled to allow the command to devolve on Capt. Welby, who was stationed at the foot of the koppie on the west side. My adjutant had to shout the order down to him, as owing to the intense fire and absence of cover it was impossible to convey orders or messages by runner. The same reason rendered it impractical for Welby to ascend the koppie and take up his post at the top, which was absolutely essential for the exercise of effective command, as it was only from there, that the entire position as a whole and the course of the action on all the fronts could be viewed. I therefore resumed command at a later stage.<sup>159</sup>

Grant implied that his becoming a casualty marked some a kind of turning point in the battle as command had to be from the summit. As was shown earlier, the reality was that the UDF troops had experienced little effective leadership during the entire morning from the Colonel and his Staff. The SAMR men remained pinned down in their sangars, which were scattered at impractical distances for communication, with all movement curtailed by ongoing German fire. Grant faced the full extent of danger endured by the men, as did all the other staff officers alongside him: his Adjutant Lt Wakefield, the Intelligence Officer Capt Geary, and a Royal Engineers officer, Capt Turner-Jones, all suffered wounds by the battle's conclusion.<sup>160</sup> Grant however, placed a misguided significance upon his panoramic observation point constituting the most critical factor of command, because personal inspection of the battle site clearly shows that he erred in suggesting, "all fronts

<sup>158</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," p.186.

<sup>159</sup> SAMMHL, A416, Sandfontein, Battle of, Grant, written battle account.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

SANDF, DSD, SAMR, Box 647, figures examined from ledger entitled, "Casualties during War, 1914-18."

could be viewed". A battle situation where a commander has sight of his entire field is obviously highly advantageous, but hardly always the reality.<sup>161</sup> Adequate vision of events is not however the same as actually commanding, and particularly so in Grant's case, where the issuing of orders from the summit during the battle was impossible.

Technically the real commander at Sandfontein was Lukin, as he had originally despatched the force, but was relegated during the battle to the role of a "Chateau General." Indeed one could extend the argument and trace the line of command through to DHQ and Defence Minister Smuts, who had urged the forward advance onto Lukin. Although the four German attacking forces were lying at observable distances, Grant could not see all of his own position, and he remained little more than a spectator rather than an active participant in controlling the UDF attempts to resist. The artillery dual fell exclusively under the command of Adler, while the fire control of the SAMR riflemen and machine guns was barely under the orders of their troop leaders. Despite the practical impossibility of directing operations, Grant still attempted to view the developing battle. But in referring to "effective command," in reality this meant purely observation, and it was while performing this that he suffered wounding. Viewing the events below him would have required standing up, and for certain angles and positions, entirely leaving the protection of his koppie summit sangar, thereby creating an ideal target.<sup>162</sup> Besides Grant's wound ensuring he could not walk,<sup>163</sup> we know little else of its severity. Nevertheless, the shock would have disturbed his staff, leaving them grappling with uncertainty as command devolved upon somebody far away from the summit. Although Grant had not "commanded" as such during the battle, his wounding removed the steadying presence of a veteran from younger officers and troops close by. Because of the German firing, Welby could not ascend to the top after hearing the shouts from above indicating a change in command.<sup>164</sup> However, news of the Colonel's injury would have eventually reached the ears of other defenders around the position, particularly during the early afternoon lull, with the resultant negative impact upon their perceptions and morale.

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<sup>161</sup> Keegan, *Mask of Command*, pp 326-329.

<sup>162</sup> Personal examination of the koppie summit.

<sup>163</sup> NA of Namibia, Sandfontein photo collection, photographs of Grant being carried, sitting upright on a stretcher after the battle, also see photographs L'Ange, p.32 and p.35.

<sup>164</sup> Collyer, *The Campaign*, p.42.

## The final battle stages

By 1pm, the German artillery in the southwest ceased firing upon the UDF position, momentarily creating hope amongst the defenders that a shortage of ammunition had developed.<sup>165</sup> According to von Oelhafen this had indeed been the situation, an odd statement considering that hundreds of shells were still to be expended on the koppie during the afternoon.<sup>166</sup> Attempting to take a firmer control on the battle, von Heydebreck faced the additional problem of transmitting orders to elements of his widespread force. Developing thunderclouds reportedly prevented the operation of heliographic equipment,<sup>167</sup> and communication was difficult amongst his four force components, spread as they each were, at approximately ten kilometres apart. Contact was attempted by a combination of the portable wireless units and heliographs, although quite evidently without much success. Lack of water and uncertainty regarding Lukin's next move, suggested to the German commander that he had to force a speedy decision in his men's favour, and his artillery was re-sited to this end.

Von Heydebreck understood himself being confronted with some stark realities that could have swung the battle advantage out of his grip. He was inducing therefore to push for a prompt favourable outcome, but without sustaining heavy casualties. There had already been two attempts at the relief of Grant's force, and uncertainties remained regarding the rest of the Lukin's resources, or what additional UDF forces were still en route from Steinkopf. There were the limitations imposed upon the attackers by the remaining daylight hours, and the doughty resistance the Germans had experienced so far, which by early afternoon still held them at bay. Another vital logistical limitation facing the German commander, further prompting his urgency of wanting to ensure a quick victory, was the critical need of water for his troops. The wells were in front of the koppie, and therefore denied to both sides during the battle duration, and in consequence, thirst amongst von Heydebreck's troops had also become a major problem.<sup>168</sup> Evening could have brought a number of situations, including further relief attempts, or simply a chance for the UDF

<sup>165</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," p.186.

<sup>166</sup> Von Oelhafen, *Der Feldzug*, p.41.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," p.186. Scott remarks how the troops from the two sides raced to the wells and drank alongside one another, directly upon the acceptance of the UDF surrender.

SAMHML, A.416, Sandfontein, Battle of, letter dated 10 August 1936, written by Wakefield to Grant. Wakefield's comments specifically regarding the German's having to push for a conclusion to the battle because, "they needed the water."

Von Oelhafen, *Der Feldzug*, p.41, also noted how exhausted and thirsty the German troops were at the conclusion of the battle.

men to rest. Despite some of his younger officers urging that the position be stormed once the THA artillery was out of action,<sup>169</sup> von Heydebreck was unwilling to risk a bayonet charge at this stage on the koppie. The odds and potential casualties would have been accepted without hesitation by his contemporaries in Europe, and von Heydebreck like any professional German army officer of his generation would have been trained according to contemporary European military thinking, which in siege situations demanded reckless courage by attackers, that was largely impervious to the human cost.<sup>170</sup>

Projected into the unique situation of Germany's first full conventional colonial battle against troops representing Britain, von Heydebreck adjusted the textbooks to his own circumstances. The thin ranks of the colony's *Schutztruppe* and *Landswehr* were not the mass mobilised reservists and conscripts of densely populated Germany, packed into narrow fronts against an enemy of equivalent massive resources. They were far more limited in number, and also personalised entities, in contrast to their home country's demographics and military bureaucratic impersonality. The German troops were integral and identifiable components of a tiny white colonial population, and they could not be managed like the legions of anonymous cannon fodder on the Western and Eastern Fronts, by an officer barely middle ranking in relation to the German senior Officer Corps in Europe. A good proportion of von Heydebreck's troops available within the entire colony were present on the battlefield that day. There could be no mini-Verduns or Sommes in this tiny corner of a European struggle for overseas empires, and von Heydebreck gave orders for his artillery to be moved closer towards the koppie. Although von Oelhafen states that Major Bauszus regiment was at some point ordered to move forward without regard to casualties,<sup>171</sup> it is obvious that von Heydebreck's tactics were to completely defer to his overwhelming firepower, and batter Grant's force into surrender.

The bombardment had ensured that German infantry from the southwest and northeast had closed to within three hundred yards of the koppie slopes, intensifying small-arms fire onto the position. By 5pm Scott inferred that much of the garrison's will to resist had completely waned. He cited that "matters became critical for the besieged," and "complete superiority of fire had been gained by the Germans." The 3rd Mountain Battery advanced up to within 1200 yards (600m according to von

<sup>169</sup> Ungleich, *The Defence of GSWA*, pp 69-70, quoting Hennig, *Deutsch Sudwes*.

<sup>170</sup> Keegan, *The Mask of Command*, pp 247-248.

<sup>171</sup> Von Oelhafen, *Der Feldzug*, p.41.

Oelhafen) from the northern slopes and pounded the summit.<sup>172</sup> (see photograph no. 23) Scott provides a picture of how the top of the koppie appeared:

the summit appeared like an active volcano. The shells burst in salvos of four at a time, emitting flames and smoke of various colours in such quantities that portions of the summit were quite invisible to those below.<sup>173</sup>

The sheer ferocity of the shelling of the summit, identified by the German commander as a means of rendering the UDF survivors in the position leaderless, resulted in additional hazards for those in the sangars down below:

Rocks of enormous size were flung in all directions and dozens of boulders were sent rolling down the slopes, placing the defenders at the base of the kopje in every danger of being crushed to death.<sup>174</sup>

From the German vantage point, the “artillery induced” avalanche upon the UDF sangars “boosted the morale effect very much” (translation), giving some indication of how impregnable the position was perceived by the equally weary attackers.<sup>175</sup> The wounded Grant re-assuming command “at a later hour,”<sup>176</sup> although Welby was oblivious to this, hence the confusion as to who was in command when the 6pm surrender was offered. The Colonel ordered the raising of a white flag by a junior officer, who was purportedly shot by the Germans while doing so. Neither was the UDF surrender immediately seen or accepted by the surrounding Germans, with firing continuing for 15 minutes, not least upon the position of the flag itself.<sup>177</sup> Grant states that he had consulted with his Staff, which included three other wounded officers, regarding the surrender decision, and that they had been “strongly of the same opinion.”<sup>178</sup>

<sup>172</sup> Scott, “The Story of Sandfontein,” p.186.

Von Oelhafen, Der Feldzug, p.41.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Von Oelhafen, Der Feldzug, p.41.

<sup>176</sup> SAMMHL, A416, Sandfontein, Battle of, Grant, written battle account.

<sup>177</sup> Rayner & O’Shaughnessy, How Botha and Smuts Conquered GSW p.45.

<sup>178</sup> SAMMHL, A416, Sandfontein, Battle of, Grant, written battle account.

## The immediate aftermath of the battle

The total exhaustion of both sides was apparent from Scott's descriptions of the moment directly after the cease-fire was heeded by both sides: "There was little or no demonstration on the part of the enemy."<sup>179</sup> The wounded Corporal Young who described the surrender being announced by the blowing of a whistle, was somewhat more blunt as to how he felt at the engagement's final conclusion;

We were now relieved and out of danger. We were dead tired and dejected, and above all sick with thirst. Our clothes, which we had not changed for a week, were dirty and lousy. We drank our fill of water, which was a pleasure after the day's grilling.<sup>180</sup>

Perhaps the most powerful image of all was Scott's description of the scene at the wells directly after the cease-fire, encapsulating the mingled relief, thirst, and fatigue of both sides, where the commonality of combat soldiers endurance and physical needs blurred away distinctions between friend and foe:

The last rays of the setting sun showed both sides making one dash for the well at the foot of the kopje, where British and Germans mingled as if never a shot had been fired.<sup>181</sup>

After the day long struggle for possession of the Sandfontein wells, which had cost nearly thirty lives and over a hundred wounded, von Heydebreck who was still uncertain as to the numbers and location of hostile forces nearby, decided to abandon the position with haste.<sup>182</sup> The German commander congratulated Grant and provided horses for the UDF officers. Within two hours, after the burial of the ten white South African and fourteen German dead in two separate common graves, the prisoners were marched away to Warmbad.<sup>183</sup> An unknown number of black and

<sup>179</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein", p.186.

<sup>180</sup> Young, Boot and Saddle, p.160.

<sup>181</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein", p.186.

<sup>182</sup> Young, Boot and Saddle, p.161.

<sup>183</sup> SAMMHL, A416, Sandfontein, Battle of, Grant, written battle account.

coloured men were buried some distance away in a separate common grave from their white comrades<sup>184</sup> (see photograph no. 19). The proceedings were eulogised by Rayner a few months after the successful conclusion of the entire campaign. He combined fact, popular myth, and hearsay into portraying the most flattering picture regarding the German recognition of their foes:

Throughout, the Britishers (sic) had shown nerve and grit as well as capable shooting, and their behaviour was undoubtedly worthy of the best traditions of the race...the Commander-in-Chief of the German forces, himself complimented Col. Grant on the gallant stand that he and his men had made, and specially referred to the work of the artillery. He had, as it may be assumed, no little admiration for the work of his own men; and from an order that we found at Tschaukaib early in November, we learn that no fewer than seventeen of them received Iron Crosses in token of victory. Still, Col. Von Heydebreck's admiration of the behaviour of the Union forces seemed to be sincere. There was some confirmation of it by the fact that by his orders the British dead were buried first, and their captured comrades were allowed to attend the funeral, while, after full military honours had been accorded, he himself delivered a short oration extolling their heroism.<sup>185</sup>

Scott confirmed that the Germans "gave every consideration to the prisoners that was possible under the circumstances."<sup>186</sup> Rayner's reconstruction, despite the patriotic bombast, probably had more than a grain of truth to it. Although whatever magnanimity von Heydebreck and his men may have shown, it probably had as much to do with their own sheer relief and the generosity of spirit that victors can afford, as it did any to any ideals of chivalry. Besides the comparatively small

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Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," p.186.

<sup>184</sup> NA of Namibia, PWD file, 24 2772 Soldiers Graves, Sandfontein, correspondence dated 18 July 1921, from the Public Works Office, Keetmanshoop, to the Director of Works, Windhoek, concerning the location of the soldiers' graves for the purpose of re-interment at Warmbad.

<sup>185</sup> Rayner & O'Shaughnessy, How Botha and Smuts Conquered GSW, p.45.

<sup>186</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," p. 186.

number of casualties, Sandfontein had in another respect not been a typical First World War battle. Some of the officers on both sides had actually met each other in earlier years,<sup>187</sup> and even amongst the ranks, familiarity of a different sort existed between men who had shared the experiences of soldiering and policing forlorn desert terrains. Young mentioned that after their capture, a German sergeant had told him that the attackers “expected to trap the whole of the ‘Cape Mounted’ - as they called us- in Sandfontein.”<sup>188</sup> Rayner’s version is thoroughly inadequate in terms of conveying the reality of the battle aftermath, which would have been far more characterised by shock, the agony cries and suffering of the wounded, the grief of those who had lost friends, intense fatigue, thirst and hunger. Geary who had been on the koppie summit and was one of the wounded, did not even attend the funeral proceedings.<sup>189</sup> The journalist’s writings also jars when it is contrasted with the lengthy controversies and bitterness the engagement engendered in the following years. Slightly more realistic was a poem by J. Redelinghuijs, of the SAMR, published in The Nongqui, one of the extremely few Dutch contributions in the magazine during the SAMR’s fourteen year existence.

### De Slag te Zandfontein

Wat hooren wij daar? Opsaal!  
 Wie spreekt daar? Zeg, Korporaal?  
 Zijn 't onze Officieren?  
 Ja! Zij brullen nu als dieren.  
 Wat is de order? Stijg op!  
 Volg mij in sekties! Trek op, Galop!  
 Flink trekken wij over berg en dal  
 Tot waar ons dierbaar vrienden val.  
 Halt! Was het bevel,  
 Voor manschap en voor Kolonel.  
 Wij namen schansen,  
 En vuurden op kransen-  
 Vijftien mijlen over Duitse lijn;  
 Vochten wij te Zandfontein.  
  
 Wij vochten zo dapper,  
 Doch de vijand noch knapper.  
 Onze Hoofdman sprak ons zoetjes aan,  
 En leerde ons die vijand te verslaan.  
 Hoe ons de zweetdruppels afrollen!

<sup>187</sup> Find footnote where Welby & German troops are standing together.

<sup>188</sup> Young, Boot and Saddle, p.161.

<sup>189</sup> NA of Namibia, PWD file, 24 277\2 Soldiers Graves, Sandfontein, correspondence dated 18 July 1921, from the Public Works Office, Keetmanshoop, to the Director of Works, Windhoek.

Weinig wisten wij van die patrollen,  
 Die ons alreeds omsingeld heeft,  
 En niemand weet of zijn maker leeft.  
 Ik zag alreeds gewonden liggen:  
 Kreunend, steunend, liggen zij,  
 Wetend hun Heiland is nabij;  
 Zij liggen daar met droge monden,  
 Zwakke harten, zware wonden.  
 Wij scheidden darr in smart en pijn-  
 Op die grote slag van Zandfontein.

Onze Hoofdman was nu diep bedroef',  
 Maar God stelde hem weer op de proef.  
 Wij zagen weer kans om te vlug',  
 En God gaf ons de vrijheid weer terug.  
 Ach! Aai!hoe zwaar het was  
 Toe men de tijding las,  
 Dat vele van ons heengegaan zijn,  
 Door Duitse kogels te Zandfontein.<sup>190</sup>

If there had been particularly marked consideration by the Germans it was extended to the UDF officers alone who received mounts for what Adler described as a painful night march by prisoners and captors to the Alurifontein waterhole.<sup>191</sup> This point lay some twenty-three kilometres along the road to Warmbad, a trying distance to cover after the horror of battle, and an additional ordeal experienced entirely differently if one had walked it rather than ridden. At Warmbad the officers were separated from the other ranks and immediately taken by horseback to Kalkfontein, where they were again congratulated by von Heydebreck.<sup>192</sup> On the evening of the 27<sup>th</sup>, Sandfontein was finally deserted by both sides, after further ambulance wagons had arrived from Warmbad.<sup>193</sup>

### **General Lukin withdraws the rest of his force from German territory**

On the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup>, Lukin retreated his own relief force back to the river drifts, not in any way possessing the manpower to pursue von Heydebeck's comparatively huge force to Warmbad. "A" Force was now even more scattered than previously, and still operating upon the most tenuous lines of communication and logistics. The General returned to the river, where according to one

<sup>190</sup> The Nongqui, December 1914, p.376.

<sup>191</sup> Adler, History of the THA, p.27.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> SAMMHL, A416, Sandfontein, Battle of, Grant, written battle account.

unacknowledged source, he ordered entrenchment on the German bank.<sup>194</sup> At 10pm, he ordered a full withdrawal to Steinkopf, including the 2nd and 3rd SAMR Regiments, who had just completed marching the tortuous fifty miles from the town up to Ramans Drift.<sup>195</sup> Lukin enforced the retreat because of the troop and artillery strength of the German Sandfontein force, and the speed at which it had operated.<sup>196</sup> He was particularly concerned that the Germans could have crossed the river elsewhere and cut off his force from their base camp at Steinkopf.<sup>197</sup> The sudden UDF retreat across the border was described by Sergeant A.E. Bishop of the 5th SAMR Regiment:

We captured a place called Sandfontein some miles inland after an all night ride to surprise them. Our regiment did not stop there though I am glad to say, as about a day afterwards the Germans came down in strong force and captured the place. After that we had to retire across the Orange River, we left hurriedly at night and many of us got wet wading over. It was a very rough crossing but I stayed on my horse and he carried me over safely without falling. It was a cold night and the third night we spent without any sleep as the two nights before I'd been with a convoy over to Ramans Drift. I remember what a job I had to keep from falling off my horse and we kept going the whole night.<sup>198</sup>

“A Force” continued to withdraw, until at the Vuurdoodberg, some ten miles south-west of Ramans Drift, Lukin decided to return his entire command back to the river five miles away, and new positions were taken at Carl Weidner’s Orange River Farming Syndicate concern at Goodhouse.<sup>199</sup> Another source suggested that Lukin once again split up his command, to cover all three drifts along the thirty-six kilometre river stretch where the UDF had operated.<sup>200</sup> The 5th SAMR

<sup>194</sup> SAMHML, folder A416, Sandfontein, Battle of, document entitled “Unrecorded details of Sandfontein. Some impressions of men who were there.”

<sup>195</sup> Collyer, The Campaign, p.48.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> SAMHML, folder A416, Sandfontein, Battle of, document entitled “Unrecorded details of Sandfontein. Some impressions of men who were there.”

<sup>198</sup> Memoirs of A.E. Bishop posted to me in March 1998 by his son E.J.B. Bishop of Summerstrand, Port Elizabeth.

<sup>199</sup> Collyer, The Campaign, p.49.

<sup>200</sup> SAMHML, folder A416, Sandfontein, Battle of, document entitled “Unrecorded details of Sandfontein. Some impressions of men who were there.”

Regiment returned early to Steinkopf because of “state of their horses,” and during the next three to four weeks, despatched scouting patrols back towards the border.<sup>201</sup> The General’s biographer grimly described the situation at Goodhouse as being “a post on the Orange River in a dangerously exposed position with no support within hundreds of miles.”<sup>202</sup> Lukin himself purportedly remarked: “The Germans could have eaten us up if they had made a bold bid.”<sup>203</sup> To exacerbate matters, two contradictory telegrams arrived for Lukin from DHQ, one on 27 September, ordering he completely withdraw “A” Force to Steinkopf, “on account of Maritz’s attitude,” and a second on the 28<sup>th</sup>, ordering him to remain at the drifts.<sup>204</sup> However, the reality was that the Sandfontein German force had long gone. The UDF were watching a border area virtually devoid of their enemy.

Correspondence suggests that during this period, an extremely strained relationship developed between Weidner and Lukin. On the night of 28 September, nearly two thousand military personnel descended upon Weidner’s farm, considerably more than the manager’s initial tolerance would allow. Within a day there was an angry altercation between Weidner and Lukin over several issues, including it appeared suitable accommodation for the General, and the intimation of a demand by the manager for compensation because of this huge military presence on private property. Certainly food and fodder were in short supply,<sup>205</sup> and demands for their requisition were probably also at the root of this civilian-military antipathy. The General was in no mood for any other kind of defeat. Severe pressure of some description occurred, eliciting a cringing apology from Weidner:

Sir, I would consider it a great favour if you would accept my apology for my behaviour towards you this morning and I can find as only excuse that living in a desert or working with natives, makes me forget how to behave towards a gentleman. I would also thank you if you considered my business letter of this morning as never written and I assure you that myself, personnel and property, are ready to render whatever assistance we can in our own humble way to make your difficult task a little easier in these parts. I will only consider my apology fully

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<sup>201</sup> Memoirs of A.E. Bishop.

<sup>202</sup> Johnstone, R.E., Ulundi to Delville Wood, Cape Town, 1929, p.120.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Collyer, The Campaign, p. 49.

<sup>205</sup> Johnson, Ulundi to Delville Wood, p.120.

accepted if you will make full use of my own house (leaving me one room) as if it was your own during your stay in Goodhouse. If I am not about please walk into my home as it is left open for you.<sup>206</sup>

The discord at Goodhouse between military and civilians continued later that night, when several nervous and over-zealous SAMR officers investigated Weider's subordinate manager, Crowley, and other company employees, regarding alleged "signalling" to the Germans across the river.<sup>207</sup> An SAMR captain and two lieutenants of the 3rd Regiment were called to observe a variety of flashes, different both in colour and duration, located from a building upon a nearby hill. A patrol was hastily despatched to investigate and upon their approach, Crowley had immediately extinguishing the lights on his premises. This act was unsurprisingly perceived by the soldiers as highly suspicious,<sup>208</sup> although the officers later acknowledged there had been "no answering flash from the hills." Crowley was arrested together with three other white company employees. A hastily assembled Board of Inquiry dismissed the allegations the following day, but the incident does nevertheless, reflect the collective tension amongst the "A" Force's personnel at Goodhouse, in the wake of the Sandfontein defeat. There was also quite clearly an immense gulf between the civilians, and the stringently insular police/military culture, with its rigidly understood set of priorities inherent in police background of the SAMR regiments. The isolated and individualistically inclined farm managers and workers had their world turned upside down by the Great War descending on the banks of the Orange River. The SAMR regiments had returned to assuming a martial law role, after their baptism of fire against the Witwatersrand strikers in January 1914.

In the wake of the Sandfontein defeat there was nevertheless a strong sense of fear regarding the threat of a German invasion across the border. African Political Organisation branch conveners in districts like Calvinia called for the issuing of arms to coloured men in the north-western Cape province to help combat the rumoured impending German invasion.<sup>209</sup> SAMR contingents continued patrolling the border area from Goodhouse and Steinkopf, and were involved in at least one skirmish where two prisoners and five horses were captured, and several other German soldiers

<sup>206</sup> SANDF, DSD, Box 15, GSWA, WW I, SAMK Proceeding to GSWA via Port Nolloth, Letter from Weidner to Lukin; 30 September 1914.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., Box 14, Court of Enquiry. Alleged signalling to enemy at Gudous Drift 1914, Oct 1.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., C.T. Crowley, Goodhouse, Report by Lt Fullard to the Adjutant, 3<sup>rd</sup> SAMR, C.T.

<sup>209</sup> Nasson, B., War Opinion, p.269.

from the same patrol later brought in.<sup>210</sup> The prisoners confirmed that the Germans had left behind a number of “observation patrols” after von Heydebreck's force had retreated. Water-holes were “destroyed” to the extent that the remaining German patrols struggled to ensure their own regular replenishment. Several surviving members of this patrol had almost died of thirst, before surrendering three days after they had first encountered the SAMR. Whatever acts of generosity may have occurred on the victor's side after the Sandfontein battle, the captured Germans had not expected the same treatment from their opponents. According to Nongqui, the survivors had initially been reluctant to surrender, fearing apparent summary execution, and “showed great gratitude for the kindly treatment, which they evidently did not expect.”<sup>211</sup> The prisoners' capture occurred on 5 October according to the captions underneath a set of “Kodak Snapshots.” With some irony considering the serious reversal at Sandfontein, Nongqui announced under the pictures: “A Popular Pastime: Hun-Hunting: ‘Everybody's Doing It’.”<sup>212</sup> (see photograph no. 18, Nongqui collage)

### **The SAMR and the rest of the GSWA campaign**

Nevertheless, the “hun-hunting” of the first phase of the GSWA campaign along the Orange River border was rapidly drawing to a close. The events of the Afrikaner Rebellion diverted the attention of the Union government and press, and the UDF's resources away from the Orange River drifts. The Sandfontein defeat's embarrassment was pushed aside by a new crisis that faced the country's white politicians in the form of the Rebellion. Manie Maritz's Afrikaner rebels and the South West Afrikaner Vrij Korps “invasion” of the Cape, together with limited German support, resulted in victories for the UDF at Upington and Karkamas, and several other skirmishes in the Northern Cape, between late 1914 and early 1915. “A” Force remained at Goodhouse until 23 October, from where they were summoned to assist in the crushing of the Rebellion.<sup>213</sup> The 2nd and 4th Permanent Artillery Batteries, drawn from SAMR personnel, served in the UDF Northern Force under General Louis Botha, being mustered into the 5th and 3rd Mounted Brigades respectively.<sup>214</sup> Lukin's SAMR regiments (excepting the 5th which remained in the south) returned via Swakopmund in May 1915<sup>215</sup> to participate as the 6th Mounted Brigade. They were part of the

<sup>210</sup> The Nongqui, November 1914, p.328.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> The Nongqui, December 1914, “Art Supplement,” “to face page 384.”

<sup>213</sup> Collyer, The Campaign, p.49.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., p.97.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., p.120.

final advance that ensured the surrender of all German forces at Khorab on 9 July 1915.<sup>216</sup> The SAMR Brigade formed the army of occupation as the thousands of other UDF volunteers returned to the Union.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid., pp 124-142, and 145-152.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., p.154.

## CHAPTER 6: SANDFONTEIN: HISTORIOGRAPHY, AND SOME NEW INTERPRETATIONS

### German Historiography: A very brief overview

Several campaign histories exist in German and some of the more prominent ones have been utilised in this dissertation. Two of these date from 1920: Deutsch-Sudwest in Weltkrieg by Richard Hennig<sup>1</sup> and Sudafrika in Weltkrieg by the former colonial governor Theodor Seitz.<sup>2</sup> These were patriotic descriptions of the struggle to defend the colony, intended possibly to remind citizens of the divided post- Versailles Germany of their country's lost Empire. "The Defence of German South West Africa during World War I" is an MA thesis by Thomas Ungleich.<sup>3</sup> It is a descriptive account of the campaign from a German perspective and referred regularly to the above sources. A fourth German work is Der Feldzug in Sudwest, 1914-15 by H. von Oelhafen,<sup>4</sup> written in 1923 and based on archival material, with an intention probably similar to that contended regarding Hennig and Seitz. Ungleich makes no mention of von Oelhafen's work, but it has been thoroughly utilised as a source in this dissertation. Ungleich's writing is primarily an explanation of German strategies that attempted to check the South African invasion and consists of a careful synthesis of several accounts, providing some insight into Hennig and Seitz for an analysis of the Sandfontein battle. Besides the above, there are also several very short accounts of the battle in a number of post-colonial German accounts on the history of GSWA, mostly completed in the first half of the last century. Much of the official German colonial documentation returned to Germany and was eventually destroyed by authorities in the old German Democratic Republic.<sup>5</sup>

### South African Historiography

South African campaign accounts appeared a few years after the Sandfontein battle and formed part of the beginnings of a UDF First World War historiography. These writers were not historians but journalists or army officers tasked with a scribe's function. They were supportive of South

<sup>1</sup> Hennig, R., Deutsch-Sudwest in Weltkrieg, Berlin: Verslag Susserott, GmbH, 1920.

<sup>2</sup> Seitz, Theodor, Sudafrika im Weltkrieg, Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1920.

<sup>3</sup> Ungleich, T.R., The Defence of German South West Africa during World War, MA Thesis, University of Miami, 1974.

<sup>4</sup> Von Oelhafen, H. Der Feldzug in Sudwest 1914/15/ auf Grund amtlichen Materials bearbeitet von Hans Von Oelhafen; herausgegeben von der Gesellschaft für kolonialen Fortschritt.- Berlin: Safari Verlag, 1923.

<sup>5</sup> Die Zeit to the author, 6 March 1998, in response to a request seeking assistance in obtaining German sources on the GSWA campaign.

African Party government policy and were products of an ultra-patriotic atmosphere, mirrored by the public support in 1914 for the UDF's advance into GSWA, and its stand at Sandfontein. Their writings reflected the one-sidedness of any wartime propagandistic writing, although they vary in quality and detail. The Official History,<sup>6</sup> Collyer's work<sup>7</sup>, an account by Rayner & O'Shaughnessy,<sup>8</sup> and relevant articles in The Nongqui,<sup>9</sup> all cover the GSWA campaign in varying detail, but their context and purpose requires clarification. Moore Ritchie's With Botha in the Field, omitted Sandfontein entirely and made its specific focus on the second and main phase of the campaign.<sup>10</sup> W. Whittall's With Botha and Smuts in Africa,<sup>11</sup> also completely ignored the pre-Rebellion phase of the campaign, as did J.P. Kay Robinson's, With Botha's Army.<sup>12</sup> Collyer's book has been considered the standard authoritative text by South African military history enthusiasts for nearly seven decades. A fourth book by Gerald L'Ange, Urgent Imperial Service,<sup>13</sup> also warrants mention, not least for the fact this was the first attempt since Collyer to write a full campaign history. There are also a wide range of biographies and regimental histories with very short reports on GSWA events in 1914-15. Specifically elaborated upon below are those sources where the focus is the campaign in detail, and more particularly where the Sandfontein events are covered. The Nongqui articles, the Official History and the Rayner & O'Shaughnessy account, appeared almost contiguous to the campaign, but contain no footnotes and references to assist in verifying specific details. Collyer, it appears, did consult some of his predecessors writings and official documentation, besides his own recollections. Where these publications show inadequacies for the university-trained historian are their authors objectives and omissions. To elaborate, we need to examine some of the limitations of these and other sources, and what follows in this chapter is a review to this end.

The initial reports on the events before and during Sandfontein appeared in local newspapers via terse officially sanctioned communiqués, while Nongqui published a range of articles. Only in 1916 was there an attempt by the UDF to research and write a history of the GSWA campaign, despite British and several other Empire countries long having made provision to ensure accounts of their

<sup>6</sup> Official History, South Africa and the Great War, 1914-1918, Pretoria, 1924.

<sup>7</sup> Collyer, J.J. The Campaign in German South West Africa 1914-1915, Pretoria, 1937

<sup>8</sup> Rayner W.S. & O'Shaughnessy, W.W., How Botha and Smuts Conquered South West Africa, London, 1916.

<sup>9</sup> Published by the UDF as an "in-house" magazine for members.

<sup>10</sup> Ritchie, Moore, With Botha in the Field, London, 1915.

<sup>11</sup> Whittall, W., With Botha and Smuts in Africa, Cassell and Company, Ltd., London, 1917

<sup>12</sup> Kay Robinson, J.P. With Botha's Army, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1916.

<sup>13</sup> Gerald L'Ange, Urgent Imperial Service, South African Forces in German South West Africa, 1914-1915, Rivonia, 1991.

own forces' military operations during the Great War.<sup>14</sup> Collyer intended to do so regarding the UDF in GSWA, but due to active service in German East Africa was unable to make progress. Smuts appointed instead Lt-Col H.A. Wyndham, the UDF's former Chief Intelligence Officer and member of Milner's pre-Union "*Kindergarten*."<sup>15</sup> In November 1918, Collyer instructed the Chief Intelligence Officer, Johan Leipold, to assist by examining German war diaries, the archives of the Windhoek German General Staff, and the records of South African wartime units. A draft manuscript on the GSWA campaign, completed by Wyndham, extended by Leipold, and combined with John Buchan's account of the Union Brigade in France, formed the basis of a history detailing South Africa's military contribution in the war.<sup>16</sup> Colonel Hendrik Menz, the Minister of Defence, consulted closely with Leipold before the publishing of the Official History in 1924, indicative of the fact that the government kept a careful eye on its content.<sup>17</sup> The final product was an anonymously authored book, and still the only work covering the entire South African war effort. Collyer received a request again, this time in May 1936, to write a detailed history of the GSWA campaign. This publication was intended to serve as both an historical account, and a textbook for students at the Roberts Heights Military College. Collyer quickly completed it for publishing in early 1937.<sup>18</sup>

### **The Union of South Africa and The Great War, 1914-1918, Official History**

#### **The publication's political context**

The preface of this book makes its objective explicit, and it also highlights the inadequacies of official histories of a military sort; specifically those on the GSWA campaign. The book's purpose was to serve an "inspirational end,"<sup>19</sup> meaning the official veneration of the South African contribution in World War I, via a single authoritative volume. The introduction concerning GSWA reads in a triumphant tone: "One of the most clear-cut and ideal campaigns in history."<sup>20</sup> This dissertation contends that UDF field commanders and DHQ made errors of judgement which contributed to the defeat at Sandfontein. Yet, as is shown from the quote below from the Official History, this failed "first phase" of the GSWA invasion is excluded from the campaign parameters.

<sup>14</sup> SA Military Academy website, [www.sun.ac.za/mil/mil\\_history/historians](http://www.sun.ac.za/mil/mil_history/historians)

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Collyer, The Campaign.

<sup>19</sup> Keegan, Face of Battle, p.18.

<sup>20</sup> Official History, Preface.

The actual German South-West campaign,...may be taken as having commenced after the Union Government had restored order within the Union-that is from 1915...Our chief concern here,...would be not to obscure what was simple and successful.<sup>21</sup>

Events involving the UDF in GSWA before 1915 are simply marginalized as “obscuring what was simple and successful,” and the rest of the campaign presented as a model success against others, that were more costly and tactically inconclusive. These would be respectively, the heavy tolls inflicted upon the South African Brigade in France, and the German East Africa campaign. To maintain this perception, the problems in the GSWA campaign first phase receive careful explanation, with contestable details either played down or simply ignored. Botha’s post-Rebellion invading force was congratulated for a “rapid and well-directed action,” in which the UDF “could obtain great results inexpensively,” and their overall feats in GSWA were favourably compared with other campaigns where SA troops served. The Official History’s verdict was “judged from the viewpoint of results, the rebellion and South-West campaigns must come first.”<sup>22</sup> This ultra-patriotic tone displayed a strong ring of denial concerning both the horrors of the Western Front and the considerable SA troop losses in GEA. Published six years after the armistice, when there had been time for reflection on the human consequences of the Great War, there is no inkling of regret within the publication, or any hint of recognition regarding the futile waste of lives. The GSWA campaign and others involving South African units, are juxtaposed in the following manner, and with this startling conclusion:

But if South Africa had shown that by rapid and well-directed action (In GSWA) she could obtain great results inexpensively, in France and East Africa she had been found no less ready to pay a high price, and had shown that the South African soldier had also the great military virtue of knowing how to die.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

This comment is better representative of the pro-war hysteria of 1914 than the aftermath ten years later, when memorials and cenotaphs commemorating the dead were prominent public features in the centres of most South African towns and cities. Maimed, crippled, and psychiatrically ill young men were an omnipresent reality in society, as were the thousands of pained memories of families and friends for those who never returned. The unemotional tone regarding the central human tragedy is unrealistic, partly because the publication's purpose was the uncritical political veneration of the UDF.

Wyndham and Leipold created an explicitly positive record of the South African First World War contribution, without any emotion or sentimental indulgence. The book's intention was the inculcation and reinforcement of patriotism and national pride amongst white South Africans. This celebration of the Defence Force's war deeds, honour and successes, was publicly promoted, while the Official History was also a boost to the ruling SAP, the government until 1924. Considering this party's political emphasis upon a united white nation and the fraternal association with the ideals of British Empire, the two authors' intentions and style are unsurprising. The UDF was potentially a powerfully visible unifying symbol for whites and during the war had drawn from the young manhood of both English and Afrikaans communities. With the SAP voter support dropping in the early 1920s, the government was concerned about the portrayal of the Defence Force during and after the war. Any possible controversies, such as the events leading to Sandfontein, needed careful explanation in official publications.

The case of viewing the military and government as one same, must not however be overstated, as Marian Lacey did in suggesting the UDF never actually followed the British model of civil-military relations.<sup>24</sup> Lacey's motive was writing history that uncritically presents the "workers" as victims, and she bolsters this by portraying the UDF as explicitly part of a class struggle against white miners, even using quotes from the Afrikaner nationalist Hertzog to endorse her views. It is true that Smuts had a strong personal interest and influence in the UDF, but his use of troops in labour unrest, was no different to that of the British Army in guarding key posts during the 1929 General Strike, or the US Army being called out against the "Bonus Army" in Washington in 1932. In an "authentic workers state" of the same era, namely Stalin's Russia, the Red Army enforced collectivisation with immense brutality. Her article fails to specifically identify what was unique about the UDF's relationship with the state.

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<sup>24</sup> Marion Lacy, "Platskietpolitiek": the role of the Union Defence Force (UDF) 1910-1924, in Cock, J. and Nathan, L., War and Society, The Militarisation of South Africa, Claremont, Cape Town, 1989, pp 28-32.

The Official History printing date was 17 October 1923, several months before the 1924 election, but close enough for contemporary political issues to have influenced its authors. Prominent in the publication are portrait photographs in military uniform of the Defence Minister Mentz, Collyer, Louis Botha, and Jan Smuts. Excluding Collyer, all these individuals were of the Afrikaner soldier/SAP politician mould, prominent then in the SA Government. A cabinet minister typical of such a description was Denys Reitz, whose autobiographies of the period provide insight into the political atmosphere of the time. Reitz would have endorsed the political undertones of the Wyndham/Leipold publication;<sup>25</sup> writing in the 1920s, Reitz explained the issues as follows:

On the other side stood the Nationalist Party led by General Hertzog, a formidable antagonist. He was supported by a large percentage of the Dutch whom we accused of intolerance and racialism but who knew their purpose, and their strong racial sentiment carried further than our humdrum appeal to common sense.<sup>26</sup>

The SAP claimed to oppose this very “racialism” between the two main white language groups and the war had exacerbated the phenomenon. By the end of 1923, Reitz was expressing anxiety for his party’s continued tenure of government:

at the various Cabinet meetings that I attended after my return to Pretoria I found that General Smuts and the other Ministers were perturbed at the political situation. We had lost a number of by-elections, our parliamentary majority had dwindled to vanishing point,...The South African Party had been in office since 1910. It had guided the Union through the Botha-Hertzog troubles, through the 1914 rebellion, the Great War and the 1922 insurrection, and its enemies had multiplied as time rolled on.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Reitz, D., Trekking On, (London, 1933), deals primarily with his life during 1902-1919, while No Outspan, (London, 1943), is concerned with the period, 1919-43.

<sup>26</sup> Reitz, D., No Outspan, pp26-27.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.72.

During the early 1920s the English/Afrikaans “racial” dispute and the divisions amongst Afrikaners were still the central issues within white politics. Intensification of these conflicts came from aggressive Afrikaner nationalism and white worker grievances, and the election pact between the Afrikaner National Party and English Labour Party, which positioned itself as a viable alternative to thousands of veterans from the Afrikaner Rebellion and violent industrial disputes since Union. The Nationalists vehemently challenged the government's anglophile orientated vision of a united white South Africa, and highlighted Smuts stern use of the UDF in crushing the 1922 Rand Rebellion. They portrayed the SAP as an agent of mining capital and English middle-class interests, with Smuts a contemptible lackey of the British Empire. The varied operational activities of the military between 1913 and 1922, directly connected to serious political disputes in white politics, reinforcing an Afrikaner Nationalist perception that the UDF was “English” and an open supporter of the government, collaborating enthusiastically with its decisions. The Official History attempted to partly address these perceptions through the publication of the Defence Force's war successes and promoting the good reputation of the military; but also ensuring the suppression of any controversies.

The government also utilised the UDF to endorse their mutual credibility in anticipation of the 1924 General Election, for example, the SA Air Force participated in publicity stunts to mesmerise sceptical platteland audiences. Reitz's description of an air display in Kuruman during the SAP's pre-1924 election campaign, where several civilians were killed during an accident, indicates clear evidence of spontaneous hostility by the Afrikaner audience towards both the military and government:

Defence officers were being mobbed and there were threats of shooting them out of hand and there were angry shouts that General Smuts and his government had done it on purpose.<sup>28</sup>

In the minds of its enemies, the SAP had an image of a *Hoggenheimer* tyrant, who declared martial law when faced with legitimate demands from Afrikaner nationalists and white workers. Such were the circumstances formed the political context to the writing of the Official History. Its authors were determined to show the UDF as a model of English and Afrikaner co-operation, thus reflecting the political vision of the government. This meant an emphasis upon the two white races

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp 74-75.

fighting side by side during the First World War and forging a truly united white nationhood. The bitterness engendered by the worker/state confrontation of 1922 provided further reasons for the SAP to present the UDF in the best conceivable light. Veterans of the First World War had found themselves on opposite sides during the industrial strife, resulting in substantial bitterness amongst the defeated workers. The UDF needed affirmation at a time when public funding was scarce, political divisions within white politics acute, and attitudes within sections of white society increasingly hardened towards them. Therefore, no public discussion of the mistakes like Sandfontein would have been entertained in a government publication, as a reading of the Official History clearly shows. The battle account in this source is thin and the comments on Sandfontein revealing in their defensiveness. It describes the participating German forces, a few details mirroring Grant's report, besides comments commending him and his men for their bravery and resilience. It adds nothing new to a revised Sandfontein account but certainly reinforces the need to write one.

A very short manuscript of Col. the Hon H. Wyndham's account, entitled: "History of GSW Campaign written by," was located in the SANDF Archives.<sup>29</sup> Wyndham purportedly used the diary of Lt Clements of 1st SAMR, one of Grant's junior officers at Sandfontein,<sup>30</sup> and his account is useful for understanding how UDF troops were dispersed around the koppie, besides covering the German advance on the position during the morning. It is much less useful regarding specific battle details. Clements and his men were positioned higher up on the slopes facing the north-east, putting him therefore closer to Grant's position, but well out of sight regarding much of the action during the day. Wyndham did participate in the campaign and is listed in a supplement to The London Gazette for "distinguished service in the Field."<sup>31</sup>

#### **Grant's 1915 report to Smuts, and his 1936 account to Collyer.**

Grant wrote two accounts on the battle, one completed in August 1915 for Smuts as the Defence Minister, and another at Collyer's request in May 1936 as source material to assist in his writing of a GSWA campaign history.<sup>32</sup> Collyer told Grant he had access to all of *Lukin's* papers, stating, "which as far as anything except the action (at Sandfontein) are complete," but "I have nothing

<sup>29</sup> SANDF, DSD, SAMR, Box 1044, File 51687.

<sup>30</sup> SANDF, DSD, SAMR, Box 1044, File 51687, letter dated 2 December 1916 from the Officer Commanding 1SAMR.

<sup>31</sup> London Gazette, Fourth Supplement, Tuesday, the 20<sup>th</sup> of August, 1918, p.9787.

<sup>32</sup> SAMMHL, A416, Sandfontein, Battle of, letter dated 23 May 1936, written by Collyer to Grant

(illegible) about the central fight.”<sup>33</sup> Collyer was cautious in requesting Grant to re-describe the battle:

I do not know if you are disposed to give me any information. If you are I will very much appreciate it....If you would rather not...I shall quite understand <sup>34</sup>

Collyer clearly did not want to tactlessly force a reopening of the issue the decision to surrender, which however justifiable, would have left its mark on the strongest of responsible officers, given the ingrained military ideals, patriotism and the powerful masculine ethos in the army. His request did not aim at obtaining Grant’s feelings, but rather battle details. It was concerned with information on what Keegan calls “a traditional battle piece”<sup>35</sup> Collyer was interested in Sandfontein details such as:

positions taken up, the method of attack by the enemy, times of different phases of the fight, the course of the latter, measures taken to protect the lines of communication and that of the force by its commander and Brigade Headquarters would be of special value...and of course anything which you yourself might think important.<sup>36</sup>

Collyer clearly placed an importance on Grant’s views above other potential sources, although this surely would have limited the scope and accuracy of his own work. In a second letter, he reinforced this impression by further remarking: “your account will give me all that is needed for a full and fair account.”<sup>37</sup> Although Collyer does not refer to Scott’s article, Grant’s former Adjutant, Wakefield, did remind him of it and suggested that Collyer “check it with his own.”<sup>38</sup> Collyer and Grant had soldiered for many years together; for example in April 1900, together with Lukin, they had been highly commended for their roles in the CMR’s resistance of Boer forces in the Free State. Grant and the future “A” Force commander each receiving the DSO while Collyer was

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Keegan, *Face of Battle*, p.34.

<sup>36</sup> SAMMHL, A416, Sandfontein, Battle of, letter dated 23 May 1936, written by Collyer to Grant .

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., letter dated 28 May from Collyer to Grant.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., letter dated 10 August 1936 from Wakefield to Collyer.

commissioned from corporal to lieutenant.<sup>39</sup> That there were close bonds between them all is hardly surprising, and these shared past experiences of camaraderie must have influenced Collyer when he wrote his Sandfontein account. Not even the mildest criticism is entertained regarding his opinions of Grant and Lukin during the GSWA campaign first phase. In a letter written to Collyer in October 1936, Grant responded to his former comrade after reading a draft copy:

It is hardly necessary to say that I have read it with the greatest possible interest. Its the first coherent account of events which I have hitherto had only a confined and imperfect knowledge...Your comments on the reasons I have given for my decision to surrender are deeply appreciated. I am most grateful.

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Grant's account added nothing new to his original report that had been requested by Smuts in 1915, except for the inclusion of an inaccurate map, which Collyer then went on to use in identical form, rather than several far more accurate versions readily available with Scott's article. This strongly suggests that neither Collyer nor Grant, bothered even to refer to Scott's account, which despite some imperfections, certainly outlined the physical terrain with accuracy in its diagrams. This detail is important because Collyer relied considerably on Grant's 1936 version of Sandfontein, which this thesis attempts to show, had several limitations.

Grant's 2400 word account<sup>41</sup> is an explanation of events from when he first received Lukin's orders to proceed to Sandfontein, to the treatment of the wounded during the evening after the battle. The report takes the reader through the march to the wells, the short ration and ammunition supplies which accompanied the men, the intense urgency in moving the column through the night in difficult conditions, and its arrival at Sandfontein the following morning. Regarding the eventual decision to surrender, his report is defensive and structured towards justifying the handing over of the position. It stressed is the hopelessness of the situation from the beginning, the resolute and brave defence, remarkable successes achieved against all odds, the toll of suffering amongst the UDF defenders, hunger and thirst, and the pointlessness of continuing after ten hours of gallantry against overwhelming odds.

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<sup>39</sup> Young, *Boot and Saddle*, p.115.

<sup>40</sup> SAMMHL, A416, Sandfontein, Battle of, letter dated 16 October 1936 from Grant to Collyer.

<sup>41</sup> SAMMHL, A416, Sandfontein, Battle of, Grant, written battle account, sent by him to Collyer, together with a letter dated 31 May 1936.

Shortly after his arrival at Sandfontein, Grant's perspective shifted to the koppie summit for the next ten hours of battle, which as explained in the previous chapter, was an exceptionally limited point for communication and command. For perhaps half an hour, he effectively commanded his men, thereafter rendered impossible by German fire sweeping the koppie. Regardless of the noise and danger, most of the UDF troops were well out of his earshot, and with the exception of those on the spur and part of the lower north slopes, were also outside of his field of vision. There are virtually no instances in his account where he reports actually issuing an order, besides the surrender after his wounding. His role was reduced to that of a spectator, although like his men he was fully exposed to all dangers. However, his restricted leadership role must be borne in mind when utilising his account. Neither Collyer, or Scott, or any other sources, acknowledged Grant's impotent position on the battlefield. By 1936, Grant was not inclined to contribute publicly anything new about Sandfontein.

### **The GSWA campaign account by J.J. Collyer**

J.J. Collyer's 1937 book, The Campaign in German South West Africa 1914-1915 was written some thirteen years after the Official History. Excluding Scott's work, its Sandfontein account is lengthier than other sources, far more elaborately detailed, and critical of DHQ planning and control during the events leading to the battle. It has long been considered the authoritative GSWA campaign text and attempts something of an explanation of the first phase, although it contains no footnotes or references. To a large extent, Collyer's work mirrors Keegan's description of a typical "General staff variety of official history," which often takes a:

peculiarly desiccated and didactic form, dedicated to demonstrating, at the cost if necessary of dreadful injury to the facts, that all battles fall into one of perhaps seven or eight types.<sup>42</sup>

With the tone of an authoritative instructor, Collyer meticulously describes the campaign course and offers opinions regarding leadership, planning, logistics, and other aspects where human decision and error could have played a role. The book is highly detailed in terms of participating units, strategic assumptions, battle strategies, descriptions of logistical arrangements, and

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<sup>42</sup> Keegan, Face of Battle, p.18.

particularly battles, where coloured maps set out the positions and movements of troops on both sides. Such a rich collection of empirical data must be utilised as source material, but also still closely scrutinised regarding its context. Like the Official History, Collyer's account has a powerful ring of military pride and an exultation of national patriotism over the campaign's success. He wrote the book on request from Smuts and published it through the government printer, at a time when financial reductions by government in defence matters cut deeply into the small South African military establishment. In a sense, Collyer's work also served as a kind of re-attestation of the UDF's relevance. Despite its shortcomings as a modern piece of military historical writing, removed as it is from a soldier's perspective, by not portraying a vivid picture of battle, and limited by its sources and conception, Collyer's work still remains the most comprehensive on the GSWA campaign.

The main strength of Collyer's Sandfontein account is his careful recording of available detail and his determination in establishing, albeit it very cautiously, some degree of responsibility for the defeat.<sup>43</sup> For all his thoroughness, however, he refrains from directly naming any individuals responsible for Sandfontein, nor does he plot culpability closely through events prior the battle, nor examine how prepared Grant's men, as ex-policemen, were for such a campaign. There is also no evidence that he consulted any German sources that would have challenged some of his surrender details, like his claim that the UDF's ammunition was exhausted. He did have at his disposal reports by Lukin and Welby,<sup>44</sup> and he sympathised with Lukin's critical decision to reinforce and contest Sandfontein with Grant and his force. Collyer intimates that there should have been better communication of the defensive tenability of Sandfontein, to the SAMR Brigade commander by Lukin's subordinates, and there should have been a more thorough appreciation of the actual aims and limitations of "A" Force by DHQ. His description of the battle details are, however, almost exclusively through Grant's eyes, with the exception of Welby's report, which is quoted in a reference to the THA gunners. Collyer places the same emphasis as Grant upon the extreme difficulties faced by the 1st SAMR/THA, outnumbered and outgunned, yet superbly courageous and resilient in their ten hour defence, explicitly obedient to duty and orders, and surrendering only when their complete destruction was inevitable and no military purpose achieved by further resistance.<sup>45</sup> As source material for an analysis of the actual battle, Collyer's account has

<sup>43</sup> Collyer, The Campaign, pp 44-49.

<sup>44</sup> Young, Boot and Saddle, p.114, Welby was also a brother officer of Grant's from the Cape Mounted Rifles, as shown by a group photograph of the units officers, dated 1900.

<sup>45</sup> Collyer, The Campaign, pp 40-44 (For details of the actual battle, not events before and after which are dealt with at some length in the entire chapter IV of his book).

considerable use, although it is limited by those priorities, contended in this thesis, that he had regarding ensuring the honour and reputations of the UDF and his old comrades.

### **Corporal P.J. Young's account**

Young's very short account forms part of his book Boot and Saddle, written in 1955 and dealing with his own experiences in the Cape Mounted Rifles (CMR). It is one of the few accounts obtained by this thesis author that describes Sandfontein from the perspective of a non-officer. His picture of a soldier's wholesome and ruggedly healthy existence in the regiment does at times seem exaggerated, however the short chapter based upon his Sandfontein experience has an entirely different tone, suggestive of battle stress and misery, besides anger and cynicism towards those he perceived as responsible. Young who was wounded, described the shelling which left the troops demoralised, exceptionally thirsty and hungry, and thoroughly relieved with the surrender.<sup>46</sup> He had been part of the Sandfontein garrison since 24 September and had, according to Scott's diagram, viewed the battle from either the koppie base at the north, or from its west side of the koppie.<sup>47</sup> Both these positions would have been in the line of extensive German artillery fire and entirely cut off from the fighting on the south side. Because he witnessed the fate of the THA gunners, he must have been well over to the northwest, the site of the heavy bombardment by German artillery during the late afternoon that prompted the surrender. His bitterness is evident more than fifty years later when he wrote:

There was a little cemetery lying a short way beyond the hill.  
Our dead and the German dead were buried there. Somewhere,  
somebody still remembers them.<sup>48</sup>

### **A journalistic history, 1916.**

W.S. Rayner and W.W. O'Shaughnessy's book, How Botha and Smuts Conquered German South West, was published in 1915, and purported to be: "A full record of the Campaign from Official information by Reuter's Special War Correspondents who accompanied the Forces sent by the

<sup>46</sup> Young, Boot and Saddle, p.160.

<sup>47</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," p.180.

<sup>48</sup> Young, Boot and Saddle, pp 160-161.

Government of the Union of South Africa.”<sup>49</sup> Unlike Collyer, and to a lesser extent the Official History, there was no concern here with explaining strategy or teaching lessons. The motive of this publication was the inspiration of patriotism by celebrating of the military’s achievements, and it was intended for the general public’s consumption. The title reflects hagiographic perceptions of both the Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, unsurprising perhaps considering the public worship encouraged by the English language press, and accorded to these politicians by the majority of the white English-speaking South African community in 1914-15. It is detailed, but devoid of footnotes, and provides some insight into the relationship between the press and the military. The Defence Department enforced press censorship and were initially not enthusiastic about journalists accompanying the troops. The authorities finally agreed that the news agency Reuter’s would represent the entire South African Press.<sup>50</sup> Even the campaign supporting newspapers had their information constrained by a cagey government. The first lengthy account of Sandfontein was prefaced with the following statement:

Reuter is authorised to state that a list of casualties sustained on September 26 by the Union Forces operating in the south against German South West Africa has been received at the Defence Headquarters.<sup>51</sup>

Working through the defence authorities, the government carefully controlled the reporting on events prior and after Sandfontein, while warily watching the brewing white political tensions within the Union. The military’s original intention was that four accredited journalists would accompany the UDF into GSWA, including Rayner and O’Shaughnessy, both of whom remained throughout the campaign.<sup>52</sup> After the mutiny by Maritz’s “B” force outside Upington in October 1914, only three journalists eventually followed the entire campaign, the third being Vere Stent, who was with Lukin’s force until its withdrawal shortly after Sandfontein.<sup>53</sup>

Rayner and O’Shaughnessy’s account was written from their field experiences, interviews, probably the political patronage afforded to them, and based finally upon news reports they contributed. Its detail therefore needs to be analysed with circumspection. Their account contains the only known

<sup>49</sup> Rayner & O’Shaughnessy, How Botha and Smuts Conquered GSW, p.3.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p.17.

<sup>51</sup> Cape Argus, 30 September 1914, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Rayner & O’Shaughnessy, How Botha and Smuts Conquered GSW, p.18.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

published full list of UDF dead for the entire campaign, which is useful in identifying hidden details of losses at Sandfontein and prior skirmishes. Besides one or two unverified comments purported to come from “survivors,” there is little original within their Sandfontein battle description. They essentially wrote a short and dramatic description that befitted a propaganda piece during the middle of a war. There are no comments at all on the controversy of the decision to occupy, and later reinforce Sandfontein, rather the emphasis is exclusively upon the doggedness and gallantry of the “British troops.” The account accurately reflected the battle’s heroic public image, and indirectly reinforced the decision by DHQ not to order an official inquiry. Its almost pompous tone projects an unrealistic picture of combat that is devoid of any heightened human emotion, commiserate with the stress of battle. It contrasts considerably with Young’s comments and Collyer’s first cautious attempt to establish whether the engagement should have occurred at all.

### The Nongqui, 1914-1916.

The Nongqui served as an “in-house” publication for the UDF and in particular the SAMR, Police, and Prisons Services. It was explicitly orientated towards the upkeep of morale, the promotion of these government services, and the war effort. “Special” Nongqui correspondents accompanied troops into GSWA and despatched reports for publication, while individual soldiers’ contributions were regular features as “on the spot” campaign reports. The magazine’s editors encouraged “unofficial correspondents” to make the magazine “as representative as is possible.”

The Nongqui intended disseminating a positive military image that was continually reinforced to its readers. The account on the Sandfontein battle in the October 1915 edition, written by a participating officer, Lt Donald Scott, portrayed the UDF men as having “fought the good fight.”<sup>54</sup>

An earlier edition described the engagement:

So far as the general public is concerned the incidents of that memorable affair are not quite clear, and it may as well, therefore, to place on record a few incidents from the lips of one of the prisoners, which will go to show that though it was a

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<sup>54</sup> Scott, D., The Nongqui, October 1915, “The Story of Sandfontein,” pp 179-186.

veritable Sedan for our troops, it constitutes the most thrilling and glorious phase in the history of the campaign.<sup>55</sup>

Despite the Nongqui's clear political purpose, its reports were often eye-witness accounts and still therefore constitute a valuable source. The Scott article is particularly useful for a detailed chronology of battle events, written as it was only nine months later, and including seven sketch maps. This article refers to incidents on and around the koppie, many of which must have been out of Scott's vision. The sketch drawings and maps, by virtue of their topographical accuracy (with only one exception), indicate that he did revisit and extensively examine the battle site. Further, it can be safely assumed that he debated the defeat *ad nauseam* with the other officers while they were all incarcerated for nine months in a prisoner of war camp. It is not clear to what extent the rest of the Sandfontein UDF participants' views influenced Scott, as he always mentions troops (platoons), squadrons, and events, in terms of the responsible officers. Sandfontein would have been a bluntly reductive experience for all because the most important issue was survival. Scott's article, although complimentary of the troops, seemed rather a tract for his brother officers, with not a single rifleman or gunner's name noted. There is just brief mention of three non-commissioned officers.

A feature of the battle, however, was that all officers faced exactly the same dangerous situation as their men. In any garrison situation, officers are more concerned with ceremonial aspects of military life, but in a combat situation, these distinctions are, "blurred...to an extent that officers allied themselves with their men."<sup>56</sup> By the time Scott wrote his account, any such "alliance" would have reverted back to the traditional military hierarchy, and this may have influenced his descriptions. Did the UDF direct Scott to ensure its reputation through contributing his report to The Nongqui, and thereby assist in precluding negative discussion about the defeat? The article appeared less than three months after the release of Scott and the other survivors from captivity, and it is meticulously structured to challenge any suggestions of the UDF's battle conduct being anything but determined, honourable, and competent. Scott confines himself to a factually loaded description, with occasional glimpses of his own and the other men's feelings. His obvious concern was conveying a vividly sequential account of the odds faced, and the UDF response, before an honourable surrender occurred. He communicated something of the Sandfontein battle horror,

<sup>55</sup> The Nongqui, September 1915, p.133.

<sup>56</sup> Kinzer Stewart, N., Military Cohesion, p.147, in Freedman, L., (Ed), War, Oxford and New York, 1994.

without violating the accepted stoicism expected from British Empire soldiers in 1914. This is what would have been acceptable in a UDF publication at the time.

What is missing however, in Scott's account, is a real acknowledgement of the vulnerability of human beings and a sense of reality concerning the battle that day. Men were trapped on the slopes of a koppie behind low, hastily flung up walls of rocks, while "shells arrived in series of four and sometimes six."<sup>57</sup> Most would have had their heads well down behind sangars, evading bullets, shrapnel, and flying rock fragments, and only momentarily observing events directly in front of their own positions. What were their thoughts and utterances, cut off as they were from commander and most of their comrades for the entire day? Deprived of sleep, food, and water, without reinforcements, tormented by the cries of the wounded, and uncomfortably aware of those already dead, what were their feelings and what kept them fighting back for so long? Scott implicitly answers that this was courage and a devotion to duty. Part of this dissertation's central purpose is to utilise his and other available evidence and "unpack" the Sandfontein battle records. This reappraisal attempts to reflect more familiar and predictable patterns of human behaviour and limitations, compatible with verified data regarding the reactions of men to combat, and the general paradigms in which military personnel and forces of the time operated. The shortest part of Scott's account describes the most trying part of the battle, between 2pm and the final surrender at 6pm, and it was during this afternoon period that the SAMR and THA men faced the full horror of a modern battle, and where Scott has the least to say.

Contained in Scott's account is an initial plan of the site showing the positions of SAMR troops, accompanying artillery, Grant's Staff, directions from which incoming German artillery fire emanated, various structures and the wells. There are four carefully labelled sketches of the battlefield, one viewing the koppie and SAMR positions as seen by the Germans advancing from the northwest, two giving the South African view of the German attacks from the northwest and southwest, and one giving the German view of their attack towards the koppie from the southwest. The sketches meticulously detail the positions of detachments at various times during the firing, carefully record phases in the battle, and indicate various features as reference points. The final two diagrams in the article are "birds-eye" views of the two forces' positions at the beginning and end of the battle.<sup>58</sup> As with the article's text, Scott must have relied upon colleagues for a good part of the information on the maps/sketches. Considering that most UDF troops would have remained

<sup>57</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," p.186.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., pp 179-186.

static in their positions during the encounter, their dispersions are in all likelihood accurate. It is also a fair assumption that because of the region's remoteness Scott would not have returned to Sandfontein alone, but with other veterans who would have assisted in the reconstruction. Personal inspection and photography has illustrated that Scott's maps, diagrams, and descriptions, are accurate as source material for an assessment of the terrain.<sup>59</sup> Even the most cursory glance at Nongqui diagrams suggests that a considerable amount of time and effort was expended by the military to ensure a thorough description of events at Sandfontein, and endorse a version compatible with UDF and government concerns.

Besides Scott, the other Nongqui journalist worth mentioning was Lt Lawson, a serving UDF officer and the "Special Nongqui Correspondent" who accompanied Lukin to the Orange River border.<sup>60</sup> He contributed a number of short accounts and wrote his third battle description "verbatim" through the eyes of wounded participant,<sup>61</sup> who was almost definitely Corporal Edwards of the THA. Besides giving a closer picture of how the THA gunners endured, there are a few brief reflections on the horror of the siege, but these are always couched amidst portrayals penned to enhance the reputation of the UDF's fighting ability. Lawson's accounts were somewhat tentative attempts to record details of Sandfontein in late 1914 Nongqui editions, while the UDF was quelling the Afrikaner Rebellion. Lukin and the SAMR Brigade were on active service against Free State rebels after mid-October, and the attentions of the Sandfontein survivors and DHQ were switched elsewhere. Thereafter the Sandfontein battle controversies began to recede from popular interest and memory, in the wake of the ultimately highly successful GSWA campaign in the first half of 1915.

### **Maj (then Lt) Fritz Adler of the THA<sup>62</sup>**

Lt Adler commanded the THA section at Sandfontein, which included thirty-two white men, and twenty-six coloured and "native" drivers for the transport teams.<sup>63</sup> His brief account which is part of a regimental history adds little new to the other sources, but does however provide a few additional insights to the circumstances of the gunners, before their weapons were disabled, and a

<sup>59</sup> Personal inspections of the Sandfontein battlefield site.

<sup>60</sup> The Nongqui, November 1914, p.325.

<sup>61</sup> The Nongqui, December 1914, p. 394.

<sup>62</sup> Adler, F.B., The History of the Transvaal Horse Artillery, Johannesburg, 1927, pp 24-28.

<sup>63</sup> SAMMHL, A416, Sandfontein, Battle of, document indicating the man and animal strengths, and entitled, "At Sandfontein."

disproportionate number of their crews killed or wounded. Adler had been with his section throughout the fighting and witnessed several acts of valour by both black and white members. As in the writings of Scott and Grant, the black UDF members at Sandfontein are completely silent regarding speaking for themselves, however Adler provides a small amount of useful comment on the collective black experience during the battle. By 1927, Adler commanded the THA and wrote his sanitised regimental history that emphasised its devotion to duty, nevertheless, he spoke with the authority as a participant in the artillery duel, the most decisive phase of the battle.

### **A more recent campaign account**

Gerald L'Ange's Urgent Imperial Service, South African Forces in German South West Africa, 1914-1915, published in 1991, was the first attempt in over five decades to write up an account of the campaign. Amongst other secondary sources, L'Ange made use of Nongqui, Collyer, Rayner & O'Shaunessy, Ungleich, and newspapers. He also drew off several personal diaries and created a narrative which although not particularly analytical, is informative and entertaining. Essentially he attempts a synthesis of the earlier historiography, together with a considerable number of anecdotes, which can be useful in modern military history, where the emphasis is on soldiers speaking for themselves, although it is up to the individual historian to interpret such writings in a proper context to ensure an accurate portrayal of a particular military experience. L'Ange explains his own motive for writing his account as an attempt "to tell the story in human rather than in military terms but at the same time to give an accurate account of the campaign."<sup>64</sup> A few of the diaries he refers to are utilised at isolated points in this dissertation. His work also provides a very useful reference in locating the chronology of events in the Northern Cape and Orange River border during late 1914 and early 1915.

### **Some new interpretations of the UDF defeat at Sandfontein**

The above sources are all used extensively used in this dissertation, but are also rigorously scrutinised. Attempting to create a more realistic appraisal of events at Sandfontein to enlarge our understanding of the battle, is the central and intended difference, between this thesis and the previous historiography. As John Keegan points out, the modern university-trained historian would be trying to detect, analyse, and establish, that which is different and unique about events,

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<sup>64</sup> L'Ange, Urgent Imperial Service, Author's Note.

individuals, institutions, and describe their relationships with each other.<sup>65</sup> The above brief historiographical reviews have attempted to summarise the uses and inadequacies of the most important secondary works used as source material for this dissertation. What can one say about the methodology and priorities of the modern military historian, and how would these be applicable to this dissertation, considering the available resources.

Having examined the South African historiography of the battle, this thesis tries to offer some new insights on both the men and events at Sandfontein, by examining more closely the UDF culture of the time, and using something of modern military history methodology in studying the battle. Firstly, we need to examine the British military and colonial police cultures integral to the SAMR. The divisions between the white groups in South Africa in 1914 were reflected strongly within the military, with the UDF perceived by most Afrikaners as “Khakis” and British. These divisions assisted the mostly English-speaking Permanent Force officers, like Scott, Grant, and Collyer, further backed by the English-language press, to shift with greater ease the responsibility for the Sandfontein defeat onto Maritz’s rebellion outside Upington. There is also an attempt to broach an aspect of Sandfontein that has never received any specific attention, namely the experiences of the black participants. Further, the dissertation outlines some new interpretation for the remarkable endurance of the defenders, and some of events regarding their leadership, prior to the eventual surrender.

### **The SAMR British colonial orientation**

The Nongqui magazine made it implicitly clear that one of its priorities was the endorsement of official government policy regarding reconciliation between British South Africans and Afrikaners. Even in the wake of the Sandfontein defeat, one of the publication’s journalists remarked on the UDF efforts in lofty tones, highlighting one of the SAP government’s main political concerns:

What happened then (at Sandfontein) displays the wonderful possibilities of the combined forces of the English and Dutch and the enormous difficulties of the country over which the force was operating.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Keegan, *Face of Battle*, p.21.

<sup>66</sup> The Nongqui, p.327, November 1914, “With the Namaqualand Field Force.”

Was Sandfontein actually a shoulder-to-shoulder struggle by white South Africans, British and Afrikaner? Together with fifty-seven black “agterryers” in a force total of over three hundred, there would have been to the observer little to distinguish the UDF men from an Imperial mounted column during the SA War. The khaki uniforms, pith helmets, Lee-Enfield rifles, and bugle calls sounding out orders to the troops, would have been reminiscent of thousands of members in the British Empire’s forces, who twelve years earlier had ranged across the veld in pursuit of the Boers. The observer would have heard English spoken in a variety of British and colonial accents, besides a smattering of South African Dutch amongst a minority of riflemen. A check of surnames reveals that English-speakers easily predominated in all SAMR ranks. On lists recording “killed in action,” “died of wounds,” and “prisoners,” the proportion of British surnames of those present at the engagement is 287, compared to 40 that are Afrikaans, some 88% of the total force.<sup>67</sup> This can be compared with figures from the volunteer South African Scottish Regiment, a component of the 1st South African Brigade which left for service in 1915 to do duty in Egypt and France, where initial figures of enrolment amongst Afrikaners were about 15%, rising to 30% towards the war’s end.<sup>68</sup> Considering that the largest portion of the force was drawn from the 1st SAMR Regiment, formally the CMR, together with elements of the defunct Cape Police, then the preponderance of British South Africans is comprehensible, because English-speakers were so much more numerous in colonial government departments.

The British character of the UDF force at Sandfontein is further emphasised by a considerable number of the officers and senior non-commissioned officers who were British rather than South African born. Lt Northway stated his next of kin as residing in Broadstone, Dorset, and Sergeant-Major Harris of the THA gave his home as Southfields, London.<sup>69</sup> Lt Wakefield’s next of kin address was Harrow, Middlesex,<sup>70</sup> Lt Scott came from Chelmsford, England, while Lt Gwatkin was originally from St Germain’s in Cornwall.<sup>71</sup> Lt Cowley had been born in Moradabad, India, although he had clearly lived in South Africa for a good part of his life, having attested in the CMR in 1889.<sup>72</sup> Grant and Lukin were also British born, although both had been in the military in South

<sup>67</sup> SANDF, DSD, SAMR, Box 647, “Casualties during War 1914-18.”

<sup>68</sup> Digby, P.K.A., Pyramids and Poppies. The First SA Infantry Brigade in Libya, France and Flanders 1915-1919, Rivonia, 1993.

<sup>69</sup> SANDF, DSD, SAMR, Box 647, “Casualties during War 1914-18.”

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., information drawn from individual personal cards of former UDF members.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Information contained within a researched, unpublished document written by G.J. Barker of Durban, a later relative of Cowley by marriage. A copy of this document was given to me by Barker in May 1998.

Africa since 1879/80.<sup>73</sup> All of the above were professional military men; the only non-professional officer at Sandfontein was Lt Adler of the THA, a thirty-two year old lawyer and one of the very few officers at this engagement who was definitely South African born, having originally come from Bloemfontein and educated at Gill College in the Eastern Cape.<sup>74</sup> Surprisingly, he received no decoration for his role in the battle, despite lavish accolades of bravery thrust upon him within the secondary accounts.<sup>75</sup> It would have been usual procedure for one of the senior officers of the day to make any appropriate recommendations regarding honours, however it seems there was a clear tendency in UDF circles to dispense with officially highlighting Sandfontein. A photograph in the shows Adler's father entertained the THA Sandfontein gunners at the South African Party Club in Johannesburg, indicate of the comfortable connection at the time between the UDF and ruling political circles (see photograph no. 4).

Although active service would have toughened the SAMR members; for men engaged in active service, mounted upon horseback and riding across vast distances in the difficult terrain of southern GSWA, several of the SAMR officers at Sandfontein were surprisingly old, particularly when compared with the juniority of their rank. Grant's second in command, Capt Welby, was forty-three, as was the intelligence officer, Capt Geary. Capt Hale and Lt Cowley were the oldest of those officers where details were located, being forty-seven and forty-nine respectively, advanced years for an activity and environment far more suited to the physical capabilities of younger men. Lt Northway was forty,<sup>76</sup> while Grant who had joined the CMR in 1880<sup>77</sup> was between fifty-two and fifty-four in 1914, and he was Lukin's contemporary, the latter being fifty-four in 1914.<sup>78</sup> Both Grant and Lukin held the rank of captain in the CMR during 1900,<sup>79</sup> however Lukin's career had surged ahead with promotion, and he commanded the regiment from 1903 with the rank of colonel. Lukin progressed to brigadier-general and commander of the UDF Permanent Force in July 1912, while Grant succeeded him as commander of the CMR, which as from April 1913 was renamed the 1st SAMR Regiment.<sup>80</sup> Amongst Grant's junior officers at Sandfontein, Lt Graham was the youngest at twenty-one, while Lt's Wakefield and Owen were thirty-one and thirty-two

<sup>73</sup> Uys, I., South African Military Who's Who, 1492-1992, Germiston, 1992, p.92, p.138.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1.

<sup>75</sup> According to medal collector and military historian Peter Digby, the British Army did not give decorations for defeats, and the British colonial orientated SAMR and THA would have fallen into this tradition. However, it was not a written rule, and Adler's role at Sandfontein was in this thesis author's opinion, pointedly overlooked in terms of official recognition, which requires further explanation.

<sup>76</sup> Age as indicated upon his gravestone in the Warmbad cemetery. I visited this location in late September 1999.

<sup>77</sup> Uys, South African Military Who's Who, p.92.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p138.

<sup>79</sup> Young, Boot and Saddle, p.118.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p.154.

respectively. Because of their ages, in 1914 a good proportion of the 1st SAMR's officers were seasoned soldiers from several minor and major South African campaigns, stretching back the previous thirty or more years. The majority had SA War experience, indeed amongst the Sandfontein officers, only with the noticeably younger individuals such as Graham would this not have been the case. The three "over forty" captains, namely Welby, Hale and Geary, all held the standard service decorations awarded for participation in the 1899-1902 conflict, and so did the Cowley and Owen,<sup>81</sup> however, experience from the 1899-1902 conflict, would not have been widespread amongst the riflemen and gunners, considering the twelve year gap and the short periods of SAMR/THA enlistment.

Recruitment for the colonial military and police units continued after the SA War and during the formation of the UDF. The five Permanent Force SAMR Regiments were formally gazetted in April 1913, and with the exception of the 1st Regiment, were constituted exclusively from colonial and post-Union police detachments.<sup>82</sup> The orientation and ethos of these units was British colonial, clearly illustrated by members' surnames, Nongqui article content, and captions to photographs. Although in each edition there was a formal invitation for the submission of articles from Dutch correspondents, it is rare to find an Afrikaans contribution in issues between 1914 and 1926, the latter year being when the last SAMR regiment was disbanded. One of the very few, quoted at the end of the previous chapter is the poem: *De Slag te Zandfontein* by J. Redelinghuijs.<sup>83</sup> The SAMR drew only a trickle of Afrikaners into their ranks and the official Dutch term for the mounted regiments, *Zuidafrikaanse Bereden Schutters (ZABS)*, was very seldom used in official correspondence. During the first phase of the GSWA campaign in August- September 1914, being as it was contiguous to the Afrikaner Rebellion, the SAP government was initially inclined to draw mostly upon its largely English-speaking Permanent Force contingents and the urban based citizen force units of British colonial origins, all of whom were already mobilised and raring to fight. Promptly calling out all the Afrikaner Citizen Force commandos was a longer process, and in mid-August 1914, an overtly political act requiring thought and caution. English Citizen Force regiments from the Transvaal comprised Beves's "C" Force at Luderitzbucht, although Maritz's "B" Force was a predominantly Afrikaner component. The latter formally rebelled outside Upington just after the Sandfontein defeat, and took the English-speaking members of their group prisoner, then joining the Germans over the border. As was mentioned earlier, the contemporary

<sup>81</sup> SANDF, DSD, SAMR, Box 659, list of SAMR officers with schematic details.

<sup>82</sup> Collyer, The Campaign, p.14 and p.18.

<sup>83</sup> The Nongqui, December 1914, p.376.

Afrikaner Nationalist perception of the UDF Permanent Force was that it was “English” and hostile. The embittered Maritz remarked years later in his autobiography that when General Beyers was appointed Commandant-General of the of the Citizen Force in 1912, it had been with an “English staff, that tailed and spied upon him.” (translation)<sup>84</sup>

Pre-campaign recruitment also showed something of this polarisation between whites, for example, an August 1914 advert in The Star calling for gunners to join the THA, described its intended purpose as needing: “Temporary Enrolment in the Artillery of the South African Mounted Riflemen (Permanent Force).” It specifically stated that: “Preference will be given to men who have served in the Royal Horse or Field Artillery since 1906.”<sup>85</sup> While it was obviously advantageous to recruit ex-gunners with practical experience, there is little suggestion that the newly created UDF Permanent Force deliberately cast its net wide amongst the white population. Established with an essentially British colonial ethos, the SAMR Regiments reflected the same, through their staffing and culture. It may not be a coincidence that in the regiment, during January 1913, one rifleman, Henry Jacobus Van der Westhuizen, received permission from Lt-Col Grant to change his name to “Henry West.”<sup>86</sup> Some young Afrikaner males during 1912-14, who were too young to have borne arms against the British Empire in 1899-1902, may have had fewer reservations compared to their older kin about being a regular soldier or policeman after the 1910 political dispensation. However, the evidence suggests that they were not very many, despite Afrikaner political leaders holding the most sway in the Union Government, supported at the time, by the majority of Afrikaner voters. Those Afrikaners drawn into the Permanent Force would have had to have adjusted to a strong British military atmosphere, with a South African colonial slant, and accept the authority of a virtually exclusively English SAMR Officer Corps. The formal structures, traditions and processes by which the regular UDF operated, drew directly from British military culture. Any Afrikaner appointed at officer or senior non-commissioned officer level, would either have been thoroughly anglicised, or of quite exceptional ability. Amongst the forty men at Sandfontein with Afrikaans surnames, only two held rank and both of these were corporals.

A broader sweep of SAMR records the Afrikaner minority in the Permanent Force even more vividly. A list of all officers in the five SAMR regiments compiled in late 1914/early 1915 for General Lukin, elaborates the following details: Amongst the officers were five lieutenant-colonels

<sup>84</sup> Maritz, M., My Lewe en Strewes, Johannesburg, 1938, p.62.

<sup>85</sup> The Star, 14 August 1914, p.1.

<sup>86</sup> NA CD, DD Volume 676, Regimental Orders No. 525 By Lt-Col R.C. Grant, Officer Commanding 1SAMR Regt., King Williams Town, 14 January 1913.

and five majors, all of whom had English surnames, twenty-three captains, one of whom had an Afrikaans surname, and eighty-four lieutenants, four of whom had Afrikaans surnames.<sup>87</sup> Amongst the lieutenants, there was at least one former professional Afrikaner soldier from the long disbanded Transvaal Republican Forces, namely Pieter Ernst Erasmus, previously a major in the Transvaal Staats Artillerie, and appointed from April 1913 to the SAMR at a lower rank.<sup>88</sup> During their operations on the GSWA border, Lukin's and his officers were intensely conscious of Maritz's "B" Force; specifically regarding the positioning and anticipated role of this force, and fears as to whether it would perform its duty, as originally intended by the 21 August plan agreed upon at DHQ. Smuts explicitly outlined details that involved direct co-operation between the "A" and "B" Forces, with a simultaneous advance intended by both towards German territory from the south and southeast respectively.<sup>89</sup>

Ironically, and particularly considering Maritz's betrayal and the Sandfontein defeat, the two detachments could not have been more different. One was the British colonial orientated UDF Permanent Force, and the other was a Boer commando, under an uncompromising Afrikaner rebel leader, who had no qualms about openly collaborating with the Germans. Indeed, in appearance and disposition, Lukin's and Maritz's forces could have represented any of the opposing groups of combatants during the SA War. When the Sandfontein defeat occurred, the press and UDF, together with all the press and other accounts, directly blamed Maritz for not engaging his share of the German force, thereby "ensuring" defeat for Grant's men. Despite the reality of Maritz treachery, it was easier for the British orientated UDF leadership to "red-herring" the Afrikaner rebel, rather than expose, by a formal inquiry, where culpability really lay for the defeat. As Maritz had also rebelled against the SAP government and its policies, thereby directly confronting the Afrikaner political leadership of Botha and Smuts, his refusal to obey orders and his contact with the German military, further ensured his unchallenged blame for the Sandfontein defeat.

### **The police origins and culture of the SAMR: How prepared were Grant's force for a modern conventional military operation?**

Virtually all the UDF officers at Sandfontein and a large proportion of the other ranks, were ex-members of the Cape Mounted Rifles (CMR) whose area of operation for several decades had been

<sup>87</sup> SANDF, DSD, SAMR, Box 659, File 2\2, "Strengths of SAMR"

<sup>88</sup> NA CD, DD 6\118, Permanent Force Order No. 6 by Brigadier-General H.T. Lukin, 23 April 1913

<sup>89</sup> Collyer, *The Campaign*, pp 133-134.

Maritz, *My Lewe en Stewe*, p.140.

the Eastern Cape, where they ensured the enforcement of the Cape Parliament's law. The 1st SAMR were after April 1913, still employed in exactly the same rural CMR policing duties, and within sixteen months of the various colonial police units' transition to military status, they were despatched in entirety on a campaign across the GSWA border. Here they faced an army comprised of experienced professional soldiers and reservists, seasoned in fighting the Nama, well acquainted with the territory in the south of the colony, and particularly well equipped with modern artillery.<sup>90</sup>

The CMR underwent something of a professional upgrade shortly after the SA War in 1903, when Lukin ordered every officer to undergo a refresher course of six months in the basics of military leadership. Interestingly, this provoked resentment from a number of members who had long years of service.<sup>91</sup> The skills revised included map reading, compass setting, field engineering, field sketching, and "horse-mastership." If such measures were indeed necessary, it could well have been indicative of a creeping malaise of apathy amongst the CMR's professional officer corps for the contemporary standards of the military profession. The above were all examples of formally taught military officer skills, although only some would have been used during frontier policing duties. Unsurprisingly for a colonial policing unit with a military designation, amongst the mounds of written orders emanating from Grant in 1913-14, there is no trace of any training schedules for officers concerning their duties when preparing for twentieth century conventional warfare.<sup>92</sup> There were plans to attach a battery of artillery to each SAMR regiment, and nascent batteries existed in Umtata, Pretoria, and Pietermaritzburg. However, only one battery of guns between all five regiments assembled at Potchefstroom for live-shell practise in April 1914.<sup>93</sup> Only the enrolling of the sole THA battery's members, further bolstered with additional recruits, ensured that Lukin had an artillery component at all.<sup>94</sup> Before 1914, training in the newly formed South African military equated that of other Western armies, and consisted more of discipline and drills,

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<sup>90</sup> NA CD, DD 1/45, C1129, Confidential Correspondence dated from January and February 1910 from the Colonial Secretary's office in Cape Town, to Col Lukin in his capacity as Commandant-General, Cape Forces. These were intelligence reports emanating from Secretary of State for the Colonies regarding German military strengths in SWA. By the above date there were already listed three batteries of artillery available to German forces, illustrating that Lukin was well acquainted with the growth of German military equipment in an area where the CMR may have been called upon to operate in the event of war.

<sup>91</sup> Young, Boot and Saddle, p.127.

<sup>92</sup> NA CD, DD 6/76-6/78, Regimental Orders, CMR and SAMR, December 1912-August 1914.

Also see Collyer, The Campaign, p.18.

<sup>93</sup> SANDF, DSD, Lt-Col A.C. Sparks personal file, letter dated 18 February 1935 from one H. Taylor, a former member of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Permanent Battery, SAMR, to Capt A.C. Sparks. Lt-Col Sparks was a member of the UDF Permanent Force, and this dissertation author's grandfather, hence the perusal of his file. He served in the GSWA campaign as a lieutenant with the 2<sup>nd</sup> battery of the SAMR artillery, which was part of Louis Botha's Northern Force from 4 April 1915 to 9 July 1915.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

The Star, 14 August 1914

the supposed intended purpose being “to ensure unity of action,” “produce a predictable response,” and “counter fear.”<sup>95</sup> Regular “square-basing” also ensured the parade ground skill that favourably influenced public perceptions of soldiers. Besides a few live shell “practise shoots” by the THA and SAMR batteries, and the policing duties of SAMR regiments, there is no record of “familiarization training” amongst Grant's force. As was typical of all Western armies in 1914, Grant's troops faced their first battle without any programme intended to, “prepare the soldier to face the operational and psychological realities of the modern battlefield.”<sup>96</sup> Any form of psychological preparation would have been non-existent amongst the Sandfontein defenders. As Kellet puts it, “there is a potential for demoralisation if the battle, when it occurs, differs from the soldier's mental image of it.” Soldiers should therefore, “be provided with as much information as possible about the purpose of fighting and the combat situation.”<sup>97</sup> However, like their thousands of counterparts on the European fronts, nothing vaguely related to this description would have been inculcated into the UDF, and bombardment by two full batteries of German artillery was for most of them, a first and terrifying experience.

Enforcing colonial laws and suppressing black uprisings therefore constituted the closest experience most of the SAMR would have had regarding familiarity with twentieth century conventional war. For example, both the CMR and Natal Mounted Police had been integral parts of the colonial forces that suppressed the 1906 “Bambata Rebellion.” The SAMR regiments' police origins are significant in several respects. Their experience principally concerned maintaining, enforcing, and administering the law in rugged conditions. As mounted police or alternatively soldiers, conducting policing duties in “native territories,” they operated either in small scale patrols looking out for law breakers, manned distant outposts, or attended to a myriad of other tasks not generally associated with soldiering.<sup>98</sup> The SAMR's dual “soldier/police identity” was a direct consequence of Smuts' 1912 Defence Act, which stipulated the incorporation of colonial police forces and the CMR as forming the fighting component of the UDF Permanent Force.<sup>99</sup> The Act explicitly stated that the SAMR would, “(maintain) order within such portions of the Union as may be appointed,” later clarified as border districts and black rural areas.<sup>100</sup> In their performing such functions, the SAMR members would be policemen, with their duties falling within exactly the

<sup>95</sup> Kellet, *The Soldier in Battle*, p.216.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p.217.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p.218.

<sup>98</sup> Young, *Boot and Saddle*, p.130.

<sup>99</sup> *Statutes*, Act No.13 of 1912, Chapter II, Section 44.

<sup>100</sup> Ploeger, Dr. J. *Uit die Voorgeschiedenis van die SAW (1902-1910)*, *Militaria*, 1\3\1969, p.35.

same legal structure of the South African Police.<sup>101</sup> The creation of the UDF's Permanent Force mounted infantry occurred in accordance with the Smut's exact design: 1st SAMR Regiment was formed directly out of the CMR,<sup>102</sup> and later also included former members of the Cape Mounted Police;<sup>103</sup> the 2nd SAMR was comprised from police in the former Orange River Colony and elements of the Natal Police; the 3rd SAMR came from the Natal Police; the 4th SAMR from the Transvaal Police; and the 5<sup>th</sup> SAMR from the rest of the Cape Mounted Police.<sup>104</sup> The police identity was not lost in terms of the SAMR regiments' regular equipment. In 1914, the 1st SAMR Regiment's white riflemen were still being issued with pistols as well as rifles, besides batons, handcuffs, and whistles. "Coloured," "Native" and Indian members received handcuffs, and "native constables" provided their own knobkerries, sticks, and assegais, the latter "when specifically authorised by Regimental Commanders."<sup>105</sup> The Nonggui magazines continued being published until the SAMR regiments disbandment in 1926 and were introduced as the "Illustrated Monthly Magazine of the South African Mounted Riflemen, South African Police, and the South African Prison Services." A history of the mounted police forces in South Africa, printed by the Natal Witness, referred to the SAMR at Sandfontein as being simply "police." The publication's introduction grouped the Natal Police, South African Constabulary, Cape Mounted Police, CMR, and SAMR, all under the title, "The Police Forces of South Africa."<sup>106</sup>

Why Smuts chose to ensure this instantly available dual role for SAMR, almost definitely connected to current industrial tensions that smouldered continuously over issues such as the application of the colour bar, wage and work condition disputes, and conflicting interpretations of prior Acts and agreements. The scale and potential consequences for economic disruption during the strikes of 1907, and more particularly in July 1913, had clearly induced him to legalise the instant supplementation of police ranks for anticipated future white worker unrest. During the period of the 1913 disturbances, occurring as they did while the UDF was still in the process of organisation, Smuts had to call upon the Imperial garrison to assist the police. After a great deal of damage to property, considerable violence, and the confirmation from local Imperial commanders

<sup>101</sup> Statutes, Act No.13 of 1912, Chapter II, Section 12 (4)

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., Section 12 (2)

<sup>103</sup> SAMHML, folder A.416, Sandfontein, Battle of, document entitled, "The action at Sandfontein", which also outlines details on the origins of the SAMR regiments, p.2, author unknown.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> NA CD, DD Volume 6/118, PF Orders 1913.

<sup>106</sup> Hursby Atwell, J., The Fighting Police of South Africa, printed by the Natal Witness, Pietermaritzburg, date of publication unknown, but a copy was donated to the South African Library in 1926.

that the disorder could not be contained, Botha and Smuts had personally conceded to the strikers demands, much to the silent fury of the Defence Minister.<sup>107</sup>

Smuts therefore intended the SAMR as one means to assist in putting down industrial disturbances, besides being that of a permanent military force. With all the time expended on policing industrial strife in early 1914, Collyer noted this had disrupted the preparation of the SAMR for military operations in August.<sup>108</sup> While performing their police roles, there had been inadequate time for the training of members in military tactics against potential external enemies, perhaps the most gaping deficiency being the SAMR's lack of training with artillery. As stated earlier, the Defence Act had clearly stipulated that a battery of field guns was to form a component of each regiment, with as many members as possible being trained as both gunners and mounted infantrymen.<sup>109</sup> However, this essential requirement for ensuring the effectiveness of the SAMR as a modern military force, was still incomplete by the commencement of hostilities in August.<sup>110</sup> This was despite the rising tensions between the Britain and Germany, and the known presence of significant artillery strength in the German forces in GSWA.

The SAMR regiments were not therefore by 1914 properly prepared for the varied demands of a modern military campaign, despite the undoubted physical toughness of their members, and the SA War experience of many officers. Besides Lukin's lack of a stronger artillery component, the most obvious deficiency, was clearly illustrated by the logistical failure in promptly and efficiently shifting a military detachment, the size of "A" Force, up to the Orange River border in late September. Lukin's force arrived at the drifts in fragments, with supplies and reinforcements always well behind the leading groups. Other units were still en route from Port Nolloth when the Sandfontein battle was already in progress.<sup>111</sup> Collyer repeatedly blamed the staff at DHQ for lack of pre-war planning, poor logistical arrangements, and inept communication of intelligence reports.<sup>112</sup> Lukin and his field commanders, although experienced soldiers, clearly struggled to coordinate troops at brigade strength, given the transport and communication difficulties and the distances over which the SAMR regiments deployed. The operation was of a size and complexity that the former colonial policemen had never experienced in their previous duties. However, "A"

<sup>107</sup> Ingham, K., Jan Christiaan Smuts, The Conscience of a South African, Johannesburg, 1986, p.69.

<sup>108</sup> Collyer, The Campaign, p.20.

<sup>109</sup> Statutes, Act No.13 of 1912, Statutes, Chapter II, Section 12 (3).

<sup>110</sup> SAMHML, folder A.416, Sandfontein, Battle of, document entitled, "The action at Sandfontein," p.2.

<sup>111</sup> Collyer, The Campaign, p.35.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17, pp19-21, p.48.

Force's top command must also have under-estimated their own logistical requirements, and being the Inspector-General of the Permanent Force, could Lukin himself, not have ensured more consultation with DHQ staff, regarding his own force's needs? The fact that "A" Force consisted overwhelmingly of ex-policemen, who were used to frontier duty and operating in small groups, must have exacerbated already existent difficulties in deploying such a large contingent of mounted troops, rapidly over vast distance to such a remote region, by ship, rail and horse. While it is true there were no other suitable troops available at the time for the job, the "police identity" and experience of the SAMR regiments, was not analysed as an issue in previous historiography regarding an assessment of "A" Force's fortunes along the GSWA border in September 1914. This thesis contends it should be, for the reasons outlined above.

## **The black members of Lukin's force**

### **Introduction**

The UDF was pre-designed according to almost the most conservative of white South African views in 1910, and in terms of the statutory limitations contained within the 1912 Defence Act. "Persons not of European descent" were excluded from the liability of being compelled to undergo military training, and/or serving in the event of war,<sup>113</sup> nevertheless, the Act was clear that blacks could at any stage be engaged by the UDF, "for service in any portion of the Defence Force in such capacities and under such conditions as are prescribed."<sup>114</sup> By mid- 1913, in the SAMR regiments, there were 2095 black members, consisting of 1971 "Bantu Constables," 92 "Indian Constables", 20 "Bantu drivers," and 12 "Bantu animal drivers and handlers," compared with the 2016 white members.<sup>115</sup> What were the actual capacities and conditions, under which these men served during the first phase of the GSWA campaign? Clearly, they were not utilised, as Gleeson suggests, "despite the restrictions and prejudices,"<sup>116</sup> but rather because of these. The UDF black members were integrated into the military as a simple extension of contemporary white South African culture, dictating the utility of easily obtained and employed servants and labourers. Blacks were tasked to perform manual work that white soldiers could avoid, or potential white recruits would have chosen not to do, and therefore avoided enlisting. By designating such duties out to the black

<sup>113</sup> Gleeson, *The Unknown Force*, p.9.

<sup>114</sup> *Statutes*, Act No. 13 of 1912, Article 7.

<sup>115</sup> Ploeger, Dr. J. Uit die Voorgeschiedenis van die SAW (1902-1910), *Militaria*, 1\3\1969, p.36.

<sup>116</sup> Gleeson, *The Unknown Force*, p.9.

members, the white soldiers maintained the promotion of norms inherent in the hierarchical social structure of colonial society. Thereby, white military men would have argued at the time, ensuring the efficiency of a military force that had such a significant dependence on animal-powered mobility, besides freeing the white troops from at least some of the time and energy sapping tasks, allowing them to concentrate primarily on soldering.

Therefore, the military authorities did not actually recognise the black UDF members during the first phase of the GSWA campaign as soldiers. Their functions were strictly that of labourer, servant, animal tender, wagon driver, batman and general odds job boy. In terms of rations, they ate according to “B scale” as opposed to the “A scale” for white soldiers. Some differences between these two scales included for the black troops, more mealie meal besides “salt fish” and rice, but they received less of most other foodstuffs, like fresh meat and nothing of the biltong, potatoes, butter, cheese, jam, condensed milk, bacon and a range of other commodities issued to the white soldiers.<sup>117</sup>

Black and coloured numbers in the 1914 South African military, were proportionally similar to the figures in the Imperial Forces during the SA War, however, in the UDF there was no issuing, at all, of firearms to black members in GSWA. Some 30 000 to 100 000 armed blacks were estimated to have served with Imperial Forces in the SA War,<sup>118</sup> while the equivalent official figures for the entire GSWA campaign was 35 000, although all were designated in non-combatant roles.<sup>119</sup> With its masses of animal drawn transport in 1914, the UDF recruited a lengthy “tail” of black “agterryes” to assist. The low status of the black component in the 1914 UDF, was also a consequence of the racial and rank hierarchy institutionalised in the military. Specific roles were assigned on racial criteria, therefore black and coloured “troopers,” “drivers,” “constables,” “corporals,” etc., fell right at the bottom of the UDF totem pole, and their non-commissioned officer ranks were utterly meaningless in terms of authority regarding the white riflemen.

### **Black reactions to the Union government’s decision to invade GSWA**

Considering the assistance that the black communities had given to Imperial military needs during the SA War, particularly from the Cape and Natal, it was in principle not at all surprising there

<sup>117</sup> SANDF, DSD, GSWA, WW 1, Box 14, Rations Field Services Scale, DSD, SANDF.

<sup>118</sup> Warwick, P. Black People and the South African War 1899-1902, Johannesburg, 1983, pp 3-4.

<sup>119</sup> Official History, p.212.

would be a similar response in 1914 to the government's call for them to again support of the British Empire. Delegates at a South African Native National Congress in Bloemfontein, temporarily put "native grievances" aside, and pledged their support and practical assistance to the Union government, including an offer of "5000 African infantry" for the anticipated GSWA invasion, as promised by a Cape delegate, Walter Rubusana.<sup>120</sup> As with the pro-war section of the white community, there were innumerable resolutions, addresses, and donations, although some pledges of allegiance from rural leaders of varying seniority, came according to Nasson, with deliberate obsequiousness for the statutory "renewal of authority" from local authorities.<sup>121</sup> There was also self-interest present with individuals such as Sekhukhune II and others, who hoped via their stations, and the skills within their own communities, to gain political or material credit from the war.<sup>122</sup> Contributions were offered from a wide range of Indian, Coloured, and Malay organisations, from professionals, businessmen, and artisans, and from as far afield as Gordonia and the northern Cape border areas. In the latter area, the Baster communities were to continue the lucrative military role performed twelve years earlier<sup>123</sup> by ensuring scouts for the Lukin's "A" Force. There were a similar range of responses from Cape Town's coloured community, for example, that as expressed by African People's Organisation leaders such as Abdullah Abdurahman and A.H. Gooi, who offered the government through "recruitment" via its newspaper, 10 000 men of the "APO Volunteer Corps" for service in the Cape Corps.<sup>124</sup>

It is quite plausible to suggest that part of the motivation of black political organisations such as the APO and SANNC, was an attempt to gain the recognition from their white counterparts, regarding black desire to be loyally identified with the symbols, and urgent priorities, of the greater political structure within which they were ruled. Hence the well attended meetings and enthusiasm demonstrated, such as that in the Cape Town City Hall on 31 August 1914, where much emphasis was placed by speakers such as Abduraman on the "sense of debt" which coloured people "owed" to the British Empire, and particularly the Royal Navy, whose "preponderance" ensured "that they were so secure in South Africa."<sup>125</sup> This kind of rationalisation could be coupled to a "transcending altruism,"<sup>126</sup> where political hurts and grievances sub-consciously motivated generosity such as financial donations.

<sup>120</sup> Nasson, War Opinion, pp 255-256.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p.259.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p.256.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., pp 256-257.

<sup>125</sup> Cape Times, 1 September 1914.

<sup>126</sup> Nasson, War Opinion, p. 258.

There were also in the Cape, more local issues related directly to the GSWA, where “Cape Boy” migrant workers and other labourers, were temporarily held captive by German authorities.<sup>127</sup> However, no doubt, as Nasson suggests, a good part of the APO and SANNC leaders motivation was directed to bolstering demands and grievances, regarding political rights that were denied to them by the 1910 Union settlement between whites. In this sense, the outbreak of war and the opportunities created by active service could potentially ensure a highly visible and emotive platform from which black politicians could re-approach such issues at the conclusion of hostilities. Abduraman compared his organisation's response to that of the Indians and Irish, in that the demands of “Country and Empire” needed to come first.<sup>128</sup> The SANNC supporting publication, Izwi la Kiti, went as far as severely censuring the Afrikaner Nationalist leaning towards Germany, contrasted it to “black identification to their ‘native Union.’ ” Together with other black publications, Izwi la Kiti anticipated the realisation of a hope that loyal and honourable war service would facilitate a fairer integration of blacks into the political and social structures of both the Union and British Empire.<sup>129</sup> Likewise, hope existed that the democratic and liberal ideals of the war, as personified in British propoganda, would in time be realised in South Africa, with regard to “the rights of oppressed nationalities.”<sup>130</sup> However not all black communities responded with enthusiasm and offers of support, and in some of the most isolated rural districts, the war’s causes and results were irrelevant and meaningless. There were even some Zulu communities that hoped a German incursion on the coast might result in land restoration.<sup>131</sup> Millennium type beliefs appeared in parts of the Transkei as the 1st SAMR Regiment was withdrawn for service in GSWA, and the advent of war began to negatively influence the black rural economy, both there and elsewhere. For the black people in this former frontier part of the Union, where so many of the Sandfontein participants had performed their pre-1914 peace time duties, the First World War had also provided an extra means of expressing desire for social change.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 257.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p.258.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p.259.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p.270, from A. Grundlingh, Fighting Their Own War: South African Blacks and the First World War, Johannesburg, 1987.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p.271.

### Proportions of "A" Force's black members compared to white soldiers

In order to further our understanding of how integral and essential blacks were for the operation of Lukin's force, it is instructive to examine the proportions of black members to whites in the SAMR Brigade. Of the original "A" Force camped at Steinkopf on 14 September 1914, 653 of the overall personnel tally of 3320 was black or coloured, constituting nearly twenty percent of the total.<sup>133</sup> In a returned "Field State" document two months later,<sup>134</sup> "A" Force consisted of 1623 white soldiers of all ranks and exactly 500 black members. Within the breakdown, the Brigade Headquarters had 19 whites and 20 blacks (officers servants, cooks, etc.), while of the five SAMR regiments, some were more depleted of white troops than others after Sandfontein, thereby making the "black tail" even longer. The proportions were: 1st Regiment, 182 whites to 23 blacks; 2nd Regiment, 293 whites to 29 blacks; 3rd Regiment, 251 whites to 32 blacks; 4th Regiment, 296 whites to 55 blacks; and the 5th Regiment, 228 whites to 20 blacks. The black component increased dramatically when coupled with artillery units and transport, because of the animal power involved in the towing of field guns, munitions, and other supplies. The 4th Permanent Force battery included 60 blacks to 81 whites; the THA battery; 79 blacks to 75 whites; and the ammunition column 80 blacks to 63 whites. The black/white proportions were also high in units such as signals for the facilitating the transport of cumbersome heliographic and field telephone equipment on the backs of mules. The ratio was even more marked with the telegraph unit, where the racial proportion was 50 blacks to 9 whites.<sup>135</sup>

### The use of black scouts and their role prior to Sandfontein

One of the particularly interesting roles given to blacks in the UDF, although they were still unarmed, was as scouts in the intelligence sections, a job where as already mentioned, they had been utilised by Imperial forces during the SA War. Within "A" Force's ranks at Steinkopf on 18 October 1914, there were 29 members of the intelligence unit, of whom 15 were black and 14 white. Earlier intelligence reports show that two weeks before the defeat, black scouts had penetrated deep into the south of the German colony, some details of which were related in Chapter four.<sup>136</sup> Collyer's account indicates that the Intelligence Officer, Capt Geary, had been at the wells

<sup>133</sup> SANDF, DSD, SAMR, Box 1044, File 5\6\55, Field State Force "A", 14 September 1914.

<sup>134</sup> SANDF, DSD, GSWA, WW1, Box 15, Correspondence, SAMK Proceeding to GSWA via Port Nolloth, Field State, Steinkopf- 18 October 1914, 1914-15.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, Intelligence Report dated 12\9\14 written by Capt. W.J. Geary.

from at least 25 September and the black scouts had been used thereafter to reconnoitre the surrounding terrain for German military movements.<sup>137</sup> Following Collyer, it is clear that “A” Force’s Intelligence Unit had recruited blacks from the immediate area where the UDF were operating during September 1914, with the scouts referred to as “local bastards.”<sup>138</sup> Collyer’s account suggests something of the confusion and frustrations resulting from the cultural and language barriers between the “bastard” scouts speaking their own version of Dutch, and the English-speaking SAMR officers, many of whom would have battled with the Northern Cape Afrikaans variant. Added to these would have been additional exacerbating factors resulting from the prejudices and perceptions of white South African soldiers in 1914. Collyer complained of the scouts unreliability, and indeed laid a portion of the blame upon them for the Sandfontein defeat.

It is well known that native scouts have two chief faults. They are unable to give any reliable idea as to numbers or to describe war material and they are at pains often to give the information which their questioner (who often suggests the reply by the form of his inquiry) appears to wish to have. But, allowing for their inherent defects, it would seem that such a large concentration (of German troops) as moved against the Sandfontein detachment should have been detected by the scouts, if they had carried out their reconnaissance properly.<sup>139</sup>

Collyer may have had a valid point concerning the scouts’ inadequate reconnaissance of the forward terrain prior to the morning of 26 September, but might have been less sympathetic to explanations regarding their caution. There is no doubt that German troops would have shot blacks suspected of spying for the enemy, something which the scouts would have been fully aware of in the wake of the failed Nama uprising. Although the scouts would have understood that the Union forces were at war, it is unlikely that they would have felt much incentive to risk their lives, being as they were, unarmed and expected to spend days gathering information, while desperately avoiding detection by German patrols. Exactly what financial or other rewards the scouts received for their services is unclear; some like Abraham Morris who led the Bondelswarts Uprising in

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<sup>137</sup> Collyer, J.J., *The Campaign*, p.37.

The presence of Geary’s intelligence unit from the 25<sup>th</sup> of September is also confirmed by Scott, “The Story of Sandfontein,” p.179.

<sup>138</sup> Collyer, *The Campaign*, p.36.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

1922, was appointed a chief scout in the South African Intelligence Corps in 1914,<sup>140</sup> may have believed that he and his fellow Nama Bondelswarts were fighting to regain their independence lost to the Germans.<sup>141</sup> Carl Weidner, the Goodhouse farm manager during the UDF's operations on the GSWA border in September 1914, mentioned shortly before Sandfontein, that Morris was "all over Goodhouse and our side of the river but not on the other. All the natives said they saw him."<sup>142</sup> According to one account, Morris was actually a guide to Grant's reinforcements as they marched up to Sandfontein, but fearing capture and execution had fled back to Ramans Drift during the first hours of the battle.<sup>143</sup> Language difficulties and the pressure placed upon scouts by overbearing intelligence officers, to immediately respond during debriefings, would have accounted for their constantly responding in the affirmative to questions not fully understood. Perhaps mindful that the intelligence unit at Sandfontein was not exclusively black, Lukin is quoted by Collyer as being less condemnatory:

it would be grossly unfair to throw blame on a body of men comprising the Intelligence Unit which had to overcome great physical obstacles, could obtain information from neither man, bird nor beast...since the country was denuded of all three.<sup>144</sup>

Collyer's rebuttal to the above was that the patrol area from Sandfontein was at its shortest radius ten miles, and that therefore "some negligence in the forward reconnaissance may be reasonably assumed."<sup>145</sup> The tone implicit in both Collyer's and Lukin's comments, suggests that the scouts were also apportioned a share of the official blame for Sandfontein; rather simplistically in an operation as large as what the UDF launched on the GSWA border, where so many far more complicated variables contributed to the defeat.

<sup>140</sup> Drechsler, H., *Let Us Die Fighting*, Berlin, 1966, p.248,

Freislich, R, *The Last Tribal War History of the Bondelswarts Uprising in South West Africa*, Cape Town, 1964.

<sup>141</sup> *Mail & Guardian*, April 30 to May 7 1998, article by J.A. Brown, "For Land and Freedom."

<sup>142</sup> SANDF, DSD, Box 15, Correspondence SAMK Proceeding via Port Nolloth, 1914-15, Report by C. Weidner, Goodhouse.

<sup>143</sup> Trew, H.F., *Botha Treks*, London, 1936, p.15.

<sup>144</sup> Collyer, *The Campaign*, p.36.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

### Segregation of "A" Force's black members from white soldiers

As has already been stressed, in an army that utilised such a large number of mule and horse power to transport equipment, the black members were absolutely fundamental to its operation.

Grundlingh articulates that with the division of labour already existent in South Africa on a racial basis, it was to be expected that this would also be reflected with the UDF. Black unarmed workers were accepted without reservations by whites as an integral part of GSWA campaign, provided they performed the menial work roles reflecting the broader, racial and social hierarchy of the country.<sup>146</sup> By the completion of the entire campaign and with the assistance of the Chamber of Mines, 35 000 blacks had served in GSWA.<sup>147</sup> There were within the umbrella term "natives," further sub-divisions in terms for specific roles, one being "native constables," comprehensible because the transfer of the colonial police forces to the UDF. With policing still the SAMR's main responsibility in 1914, the original police designation was retained for black members. Ordinary white soldiers received the rank of "rifleman," but this description could hardly have been applied to the unarmed black members. There may also have been a system of hierarchy created amongst the black members as a form of internal control, as existed on the mines. In a letter dated 24 June 1912, concerning the establishment of batteries of artillery to serve with the newly established SAMR regiments, written by Capt G.K. Hay of the THA, and addressed to the "Commandant-General Cape Colonial Forces," something of this kind of thinking is evident:

As regards the Native establishment of the Batteries, I would suggest that some chain of command is desirable for good discipline. This system also has the merit of rewarding good work by the native drivers, and is therefore an incentive to keenness.... These ranks should carry a proportional increase in pay. It is not desirable that the native ranks should be termed "Sergeant," "Corporal," etc. as the recipient is inclined to think of himself as on equality with the corresponding British ranks. Some suitable terms in the language of the Country should be used.<sup>148</sup>

<sup>146</sup> Grundlingh, *Fighting Their Own War - South African Blacks and the First World War*, p.40.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p.59.

<sup>148</sup> SANDF, DSD, SAMR, Box 659, File No.2.

There were also distinct differences in terms of issued clothing, for example separate stockings for the native drivers of the artillery batteries attached to each SAMR Regiments,<sup>149</sup> and different coats, namely, "Coats, Grey," rather than "British warm."<sup>150</sup> Indeed if the clothing listed was intended as field dress, implied by the documentation examined, then the black members of the UDF would have taken on a somewhat inappropriate blue appearance for active service against an African environment. Blue jackets were issued to "Coloured, Indian and Native Police of the SAMR and SAP," "Native Drivers" of the SAMR batteries received a blue jersey,<sup>151</sup> while blue puttees<sup>152</sup> and blue trousers<sup>153</sup> were also issued. "Native Constables" could also be quickly reassigned to becoming servants to officers, as is indicated in an official message from the "A" Force Staff Officer, Capt B.C. Judd, dated 9 November 1914, to the officer commanding the 4th SAMR.<sup>154</sup> In accordance with the contemporary racial practices, black members were separated as far as possible from whites during field service and noted separately in official documentation. In the "Field Returns," their job descriptions were indicated as "Native Constables," "Wagon Drivers,"<sup>155</sup> or as "Officers Servants," "Native Drivers" or "Leaders" (of transport animals), or "Otherwise employed."<sup>156</sup> Practical segregation of facilities extended down to matters such as their use of the hastily excavated camp toilets. A written order in this regard from the Capt Judd, dated 18 October 1914, pointedly reflects the racial attitudes of the era:

Natives being naturally dirty are to be paraded and carefully instructed in this branch of sanitation.<sup>157</sup>

Black members on errands continued to be subject to the military equivalents of the segregationist policies prevalent in the Union. On 11 September 1914, "Native Constable Peter" had a pass written out by Judd before travelling with the officer's two horses from Port Nolloth to the "A" Force's camp at Steinkopf, in the company of a battery of the THA.<sup>158</sup> Another order, dated 20 September 1914 and from the same source, suggests that summarily dismissal was a de facto

<sup>149</sup> South African Library, CFA Records (Cape Field Artillery), M.S.C. 29, Box 40, (on the inside front page, "Instructions for the equipment & clothing of the Permanent & Citizen Forces of the Union of South Africa"), p.172.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p.174.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p.186.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p.202..

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., p.208.

<sup>154</sup> SANDF, DSD, GSWA, WW1, Box 16, Correspondence book, A Force, 18/10/14-9/12/14.

<sup>155</sup> SAMMHL, folder A.416, Sandfontein, Battle of, document entitled, "The action at Sandfontein",

<sup>156</sup> SANDF, DSD, GSWA, WW1, "Daily State Reports."

<sup>157</sup> SAMMHL, folder A.416, Sandfontein, Battle of, document entitled, "The action at Sandfontein."

<sup>158</sup> SANDF, DSD, GSWA, WW1, Box 18, Capt. B.C. Judd, Staff Captain, "A" Force, (Message Book), Entries of 20 September 1914.

condition of service for blacks in the UDF of 1914, as was overall impersonal identity of the black UDF members in 1914, that still hides so many of their experiences from the researcher:

“Native boy ‘Gordon’ I presume has been discharged, if not discharge him at once.”<sup>159</sup>

### **The black UDF members at Sandfontein**

One of the black scouts who was part of the force at the battle of Sandfontein was Jacobus Vries, who was recruited by Geary at Steinkopf in August 1914, and enrolled the same day and at the same rate of pay as Abraham Morris.<sup>160</sup> It would be interesting to ascertain how many other southern GSWA Nama, travelled to the northern Cape to assist the invasion of the German colony. After a year of service in the UDF, Vries was released from a German prisoner of war camp and succeeded in getting to Cape Town, where military bureaucracy tried to pigeon-hole him for discharge. Vries found himself at the Army General Depot where the commanding officer advanced him five pounds, discharged him from service, and placed him on a ship back to Port Nolloth. A note intended for forwarding to the Pay and Accounts Department for the Secretary for Defence in Pretoria, requested that the scout be paid off. This was a somewhat less traumatic process than Vries would have endured after Sandfontein, where the Germans separated the black and white UDF prisoners, and thereafter marched the blacks away in chains.<sup>161</sup> With some irony, a number of the white prisoners later found themselves guarded by troops of the German Baster Corps, at a camp near Rehoboth in February 1915. These SAMR/THA soldiers, angry at this inversion of contemporary racial norms, threatened the Basters with prosecution once the South Africans military forces were victorious over the Germans. The irony of the situation was further extended by the fact that the Basters had already been reluctant to assist their German allies from Nama War days, in defending the colony against the UDF.<sup>162</sup> This interaction between the white Union soldiers and the GSWA Basters, emphasises once again the very strong views held by UDF white soldiers regarding the arming of blacks. Although UDF soldiers of all ethnic groups were to collectively suffer considerable deprivations in the prison camps, reports were made of particularly savage atrocities perpetrated by the Germans on black UDF prisoners.<sup>163</sup> A South African

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> SANDF, DSD, SAMR, Box 1044, File 5\6\84, letter dated 7\8\1915 and addressed to, “The Secretary for Defence (Pay and Accounts) Pretoria, File 5\6\84, “Released Prisoners of War General.

<sup>161</sup> Adler, F., *The History of the THA*, p. 28.

<sup>162</sup> Oostuizen, G.J.J., *The Military Role of the Rehoboth Basters During the South African Invasion of GSWA 1914-15*, *Scientific Militaria*, 28(1)1998.

<sup>163</sup> Grundlingh, *Fighting their Own War- South African Blacks and the First World War*, p.87.

Commission of Inquiry into the treatment inflicted upon prisoners of war held by the Germans, confirmed that black prisoners had suffered appallingly compared to their white counterparts.<sup>164</sup>

The black members of Grant's force played an integral part of the Sandfontein defence, with perhaps the most significant being their involvement with the artillery. Adler reported on the gun limbers (the detachable front of the gun-carriage consisting of wheels, axle, pole, and ammunition-box seat), the ammunition wagons and animal teams, being moved from one position to another, one hundred yards, to get them out of view of the German gunners.<sup>165</sup> Specific mention was made of the bravery shown by both black and white THA members, who shifted "five or the six teams and vehicles...under a continuous rain of gun and rifle fire." A white soldier, Acting Bombardier Key, suffered a mortal wound at this stage, although fatal casualties must have occurred amongst the black members too. Unfortunately, their contribution was described somewhat laconically by Adler as: "with the assistance at times of some of the coloured drivers of the vehicles concerned."<sup>166</sup> During an earlier period, a German machine gun on a ridge to the east fired directly into a mass of UDF animals with their black holders who were sheltering on the southern slope. The panic stricken holders released the unfortunate animals, and when Scott recalled the incident, he did so with the following description, revealing something of the little regard he held for the black members:

The majority of these animals were held by native horse holders, and stood in a compact group when, without warning, an enemy machine gun...applied a sharp burst of fire on what must have been a splendid target. The effect was immediately disastrous as the natives abandoned the animals, and with a head-long rush sought cover on the western face of the kopjie, where they remained concealed during the rest of the day. Several of them must have been hit, as a shower of bullets could be seen striking the rocks at their feet, and a number were observed to fall in their, but picked themselves up again and succeeded in gaining

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Adler, The History of the THA, p.26.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

their objective. The unfortunate group of animals were left in a parlous condition...<sup>167</sup>

In both the above accounts, that give just a slight inkling into the participation of blacks at Sandfontein, nothing was really acknowledged of their having faced common dangers with whites.

Using the surnames of the wounded THA black members at Sandfontein, there was an equal spread of African and Coloured men, ranging from Umfana Zenzela to Reuban Dale. They had felt the full brunt of the German attack with nineteen listed casualties. The "Native Corporal" amongst them, was a coloured by the name of Andries Goosen, while each man's name was recorded according to their job description and a two digit number. Several had only their "white" first name indicated, for example: Native Driver, 18, "John."<sup>168</sup> The significance is that they were registered separately with a different "army number" format to the white soldiers who generally had not less than four digits, a rudimentary bureaucracy indicative of the black members temporary status. Records of the black members do not always correspond perfectly with secondary sources, for example "Native Driver" Maartens was indicated as wounded in a prisoner of war list, but "killed" in Adler's account, which also shows "Native Driver" Mfana as a fatality, who is not on the official list at all.<sup>169</sup> According to a letter written by the military to the Acting Magistrate in Komgha, dated 20 October, "Native Driver" Ndotshonta of the THA died from wounds at Port Nolloth.<sup>170</sup> He may well have been the wounded driver who returned with the ambulance after the battle. Adler also noted that the water cart driver "Paul" apparently escaped from Sandfontein and drove to Upington, although a "Paul" is amongst the list of wounded prisoners.<sup>171</sup> "Native Driver" L. Notshonkovo is recorded as having died of wounds, and "Native Transport Driver" George Curulia from "heart disease."<sup>172</sup> Both of these details also not noted in THA records, although these men may have been in service with the 1st SAMR.

Clearly, in the post- Sandfontein aftermath, the military bureaucracy battled to make full sense from their records of the black members, and in ascertaining their exact fates. The army did attempt to inform family of deaths through the magistrates in the Eastern Cape, and directly, where next of

<sup>167</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," p.183.

<sup>168</sup> SANDF, DSD, SAMR, Vol. 4, Box 753, "Native Casualties."

<sup>169</sup> Adler, *The History of the THA*, pp 73-74.

<sup>170</sup> SANDF, DSD, SAMR, Box 888, File No. 516\54, Casualty Enquiries No. 1

<sup>171</sup> Adler, *The History of the THA*, pp 73-74.

SANDF, DSD, SAMR, Vol. 4, Box 753, "Native Casualties."

<sup>172</sup> SANDF, DSD, SAMR, Box 888, File No. 516\54, Casualty Enquiries No.1

kin addresses had been recorded. The Hann brothers, Lawrence and Ashton, were both taken prisoner, the former being Welby's batman, "captured with his Master" and the latter a driver with the 1st SAMR. They also had their names passed on the Komgha Acting Magistrate for further conveyance to their father. There was some confusion over the unit of William Cross, another driver killed in the battle. Adler recorded him as a member of the THA, while a letter from the military noted him as a member of the 1st SAMR.<sup>173</sup> Cross's father at 57 Robins Road, Salt River, had written to Grant as 1st SAMR commander on 1 October, attempting to locate information as to the fate of his son. He received a response dated 17 October, reporting:

with the Ministers regret, ...it has been definitely ascertained that the William Henry Cross reported from the field as killed in Action on 26<sup>th</sup> was your son. He was given a soldiers funeral, with full military honours.<sup>174</sup>

The reality of the black members' burial at Sandfontein was sadly, less dignified than this letter suggests, with one body not being buried at all, and noted by the local farmer, Johannes Visser in July 1916:

Last year in July month I found a human skeleton on the kopje near the well where the fight between British and German troops took place...The skeleton is that of a kafir and some papers written in Kafir (sic) were found close by. A bullet had passed right through the body.<sup>175</sup>

Little wonder then that military records were so incomplete; correspondence from 1917-22 between the SWA Public Works Offices in Windhoek, Keetmanshoop and the military concerning the eventual reburial of the white UDF dead in Warmbad, confirmed that black and white members of Grant's command were specifically buried separately. Some confusion initially existed about the location of each group lay, with the local mounted police later inadvertently placing iron crosses on

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<sup>173</sup> Adler, p.74,

SANDF, DSD, SAMR, Box 888, 516\54, Casualty Enquiries No. 1

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> NA of Namibia, PWD file, 24 277\2 Soldiers Graves, Sandfontein, copy of sworn statement by Johannes Hendrik Visser.

the black soldiers' common grave instead of the other. In one such letter between public works officials, the clear concern in identifying and marking the white grave is evident:

Mr McDonald (the brother of a dead white soldier) made a statement that a mistake had been made the crosses and fences having been put round native drivers graves, and the white troopers left... this statement is correct as it is not likely German troops would bury natives next to their own men.<sup>176</sup>

There is no mention in any correspondence of the black members being re-interred with their white comrades. When the reburial eventually took place took place at Warmbad on 1 November 1922, with an elaborate military ceremony, attended by 250 people from the district, there was no acknowledgement in a newspaper report of the black fatalities.<sup>177</sup> Only in 1999 was a stone erected next to the white soldiers graves in Warmbad by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission bearing several names of black UDF members, indicated as having "no known resting place."<sup>178</sup> This is not entirely correct as their common grave lies today, still completely unmarked, a few metres south of the kraal by the koppie, where most of them died serving the THA guns.<sup>179</sup> (see photograph no. 19) The black UDF members at Sandfontein and their battle experiences have been virtually invisible for nearly ninety years. This dissertation has attempted, albeit briefly, to give them something of a respectable place in the history of the first phase of the GSWA campaign, and the battle of Sandfontein.

<sup>176</sup> NA of Namibia, PWD file, 24 277\2, Soldiers Graves, Sandfontein, letter dated 19 April 1921 from the PWD Keetmanshoop to the Director of Works, Windhoek.

<sup>177</sup> Cape Times, 25 November 1922.

<sup>178</sup> Noted at the Warmbad cemetery in October 1999, during which a resident informed me the monument was very recently erected. The names were derived, as this author remembers, from those in the casualty lists at the back of Adler, History of the THA.

<sup>179</sup> NA of Namibia, PWD file, 24 277\2, Soldiers Graves, Sandfontein, diagram sketched by PWD officials of the grave locations.

## The experiences of the UDF troops at Sandfontein: Some new interpretations

### Analysing the methodology of modern military historical writing and its pertinence to re-interpreting aspects the first phase of the GSWA campaign.

It is a feature of military history that its writing lends itself to antiquarianism, because its practitioner will inevitably find it at some stage necessary to accurately describe small details relating to the arms and equipment carried by soldiers, the logistical organisation which supports them, and the organisation of the forces under survey. The military historian who is attempting a seriously analytical narrative of his subject will nevertheless subordinate this kind of detail to its proper place, this being an enhancement of his attempt to accurately portray the soldier's experience in battle. The descriptions within "buttons and badges" publications are likely to reside in copiously illustrated coffee-table books, published for the interest of such enthusiasts. Nevertheless, any military historian would still require a degree of familiarity with such data, just as he would need to bring to the fore intangible issues, such as morale and strategic assumptions. The point is that the military historian must have as wide a grasp as possible on a variety of evidence types before he can confidently proceed to use acceptable generalisations when constructing his own narrative.<sup>180</sup>

Following Keegan, military history essentially combines the analyses of different topics, all of which relate to different facets of understanding the practise of soldiering in the past. For example, the study of generals and generalship, that "too often dissolves into sycophancy or hero-worship."<sup>181</sup> In this same way, several of the writers used as sources for this dissertation were heavily influenced by the public veneration of prominent leadership figures in the campaign. Rayner & O'Shaunessy are cases in point, while the South African Press idolised Louis Botha in particular. Too often such sources focus upon exclusively upon the leadership, which whether at political or field level, is usually remote from the centre of conflict. This distance was obvious during the Sandfontein battle between Smuts/DHQ and Lukin, between Lukin and Grant, and between Grant and his men during their defence of the position. Keegan elaborates: "Battle for the ordinary soldier, is a very small-scale situation which will throw up its own leaders and be fought by its own rules."<sup>182</sup> Such are the dynamics of combat as experienced by the ordinary soldier in the battle environment, who will have hurled into his face situations of extreme personal danger, or

<sup>180</sup> Keegan, *The Face of Battle*, p. 21.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, p.25.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, p.47.

face the constant possibility of these occurring, often completely without warning. This is an entirely different reality to that facing the politician or staff headquarters based commander, who being well away from these immediate dangers, perceives the battle usually within a win/lose paradigm. The commander is primarily concerned in an abstract manner about fighting successfully, despite the limitations imposed by the availability of resources, the sheer limits of human endurance and resilience, and those other impeding factors created by time and the environment.<sup>183</sup> Keegan makes the point that a gulf exists between the commander's approach and battle priorities, and the far simpler perception his men may have of their own involvement. A soldier's thinking will ultimately revolve around the most fundamental issue of personal survival. The commander's concern with attaining a victory or sustaining a defeat, may prove entirely irrelevant to the soldier's immediate concern, or may indeed be in direct contradiction to it.<sup>184</sup>

The soldier's perception of the battle is also "much more complicated than the commander's."<sup>185</sup> He does not view his position from the perspective of arrows and symbol notations on a map, secure within the comparatively ordered and stable environment of a general staff headquarters, usually well set from the location of actual physical combat. In contrast, the soldier is placed in a "wildly unstable physical and emotional environment," where he may experience a range of emotions and proximities to immediate danger, and where "his perception of community with his fellow soldiers will fluctuate in equal measure."<sup>186</sup> If confronted with an extreme threat to his life he will not necessarily respond in a way that would conform the commander's needs or wishes. Our analysis of Sandfontein must reflect a realistic and verifiable description of how men react in the midst of modern battle. The basis of verification must utilise the available sources, but also that of quantified studies undertaken regarding behaviour in combat. Use has been made therefore of research commissioned during the Second World War, to compile the first ever set of data and analysis regarding the behaviour of troops during battle situations.<sup>187</sup> These are amongst others: S.A. Stouffer, A.A. Lumsdaine, M.A. Lumsdaine, R.M. Williams, Jnr., M. Brewster Smith, I.L. Janis, S.A. Star, L.S. Cottrell, Jnr, Studies in Social Psychology in World War II, The American Soldier: Volume 2, Combat and its Aftermath, published in 1949. According to Kinzer Stewart, Stouffer and his collaborators work "is still a landmark and forms an important part of the basis for

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., p.45.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., pp45-46.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p.46.

<sup>187</sup> Kinzer Stewart, Military Cohesion, p.51.

military psychology and sociology.”<sup>188</sup> The research in these studies was based upon the responses and experiences of both battle veterans and novices.

The events at Sandfontein occurred during the high noon of European nationalistic patriotism, popularised within British culture by, for example, Rupert Brooke poetic imagery, and mass read literature that romantically sketched and endorsed the concept of fighting and dying for King and Country. Sandfontein involved men in the UDF, historically indoctrinated into the culture of armies and war, and probably more so than the well equipped, but essentially amateur US soldiers, who served as the subjects of the above studies by Stouffer and his collaborators. An important criteria applied to battle is that it is, “a mutual and sustained act of will by two contending parties, and if it is to result in a decision, the moral collapse of one of them.”<sup>189</sup> This must to be qualified in that one cannot say how intense such an act must be, or how total the actual collapse that transpires. Few battles will display either a continual, or total commitment by one side, or the complete moral and physical destruction of the other.<sup>190</sup> At Sandfontein, the secondary sources argue that both sides made such a supremely sustained act, although the Germans conducted their battle effort at most times, in such a way as to ensure minimum casualties to themselves. German artillery eventually forced the final decision, before the required supreme effort in storming the koppie became necessary. Once the Sandfontein secondary sources are re-scrutinised, the contradiction between them and a more scientific analysis of modern battle are clear, particularly regarding the level of trauma, that must be felt by the men.

Keegan’s conclusion is that what “battles” have in common is not something strategic, technical, or statistical, but rather a human dimension where men who are in the midst of coping with their instinct for self-preservation, try to achieve a military aim, or ensure their honour, by acting in accordance with the expectations of military personnel and the society that they are a product of.<sup>191</sup> As he states, an examination of battle will always be:

a study of fear and usually of courage; always of leadership, usually of obedience; always of compulsion, sometimes of insubordination; always of anxiety, sometimes of elation or catharsis; always of uncertainty and doubt, misinformation and

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., pp 47-48.

<sup>189</sup> Keegan, *The Face of Battle*, p.302.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., pp 302-303.

misapprehension, usually also of faith and sometimes of vision; always of violence, sometimes also of cruelty, self-sacrifice, compassion; above all, it is always a study of solidarity and usually also of disintegration for it is towards the disintegration of human groups that battle is directed.<sup>192</sup>

The dilemma of the individual on the battlefield still has to be determined in terms of the amount of physical and mental strain the individual soldier can endure, despite whatever technological advances have achieved to increase the effectiveness of weapons.<sup>193</sup>

Given the above extended definition, Sandfontein makes for an ideal model, for although not all of these points can be addressed in our analysis, considerable emphasis has been placed upon the battle events, in terms of creating a realistic reconstruction, by critically utilising the secondary sources. Sandfontein qualifies itself as a classically defined battle piece, occurring as it did within “the dramatic unities of time, place and action.”<sup>194</sup> Keegan uses this statement to differentiate between skirmishes, “the small change of soldiering,” and “a battle,” an event “worthy” of the description. During a battle, commanders attempt to utilise immediate means at their disposal to ensure a decision within a particular time limit, a situation that particularly applied to von Heydebreck’s urgency to force a favourable decision to the Germans before dark.

### **The reality of combat for the THA**

The relatively heavy losses suffered by the THA constituted in the overall UDF casualty list, eight of the sixteen dead, and twenty-one of the fifty-one wounded.<sup>195</sup> From the THA’s original fifty-eight men, of twenty-five blacks and thirty-three whites, the section sustained a fifty percent casualty rate,<sup>196</sup> bearing testimony to this inexperienced group’s remarkable endurance. Von

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., p.303.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., p.304.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., p.14.

<sup>195</sup> SAMMHL, A.416, Sandfontein, Battle of, letter with an attached list of casualties, dated 19 February 1915, written by Capt Welby to Lt-Col Grant at Outjo while both men were German prisoners of war.

<sup>196</sup> SAMMHL, folder A.416, Sandfontein, Battle of, document entitled, “The action at Sandfontein.”

Adler, *The History of the THA*, p.74, in Appendix VI, Adler gives the following figures: Wounded twenty; Killed or died of wounds, eight; Captured, forty-five. This would translate into a thirty eight percent casualty rate. The additional figures of what must have been additional black members, could quite conceivably been part of the relief supply column which the Germans had ambushed and captured later that day. All the white members appeared to have been accounted for. Adler lists the names of thirty-six, from which a gunner and corporal are said to have “got back to Raman’s Drift.” This would leave thus thirty-three white THA men given on the above document.

Oelhafen and Rayner were incorrect in suggesting that the entire artillery detachment, excluding the commander had become casualties,<sup>197</sup> and that this was the reason why it ceased operating. There were still a number of both black and white members unwounded, although not all of them were necessarily trained in gunnery. More than two full gun crews were down before the survivors abandoned their weapons, and only after withstanding for over three hours the most unnerving experience which modern warfare could offer in 1914, namely the enduring of continuous and accurate shelling and small arms fire, without any cover. From where did the THA men draw the strength and nerve to serve their guns, rather than flee?

One of the most ready explanations is that the SAMR troops on the koppie would have perceived the THA as their best hope of survival. The guns were both audibly and realistically, the most impressive weapons available to the UDF force, and there was no other way whereby it could have countered the German artillery. The THA gunners would have been fully aware of this. Unlike the SAMR members, the THA were not professionals, but Citizen Force soldiers who had either enlisted for the campaign, or been called up as part-time members of the regiment. Their SAMR comrades keenly watched this stage of the engagement from the relative safety of sangars, and had high expectations of their artillery, and the THA's initial accurate counter-bombardment must have raised the mounted infantry's hopes. After assembling at various places in the Union and travelling through to GSWA, the two units had already been together for some six weeks, and something of the professional distinctions between regular and amateur units would by 26 September have already broken down. A strong sense of comradeship between gunners and riflemen would have been one critical factor alone, in ensuring that the THA stood by their guns. As John Ellis explains: "A camaraderie is the only human recompense for a threatening sense of importance in the face of death."<sup>198</sup> Besides their being placed in a situation where they were heavily depended upon, the artillerymen occupied a position that gave the SAMR a grandstand view of their battle performance. In the midst of exploding shrapnel, with dead and wounded men and animals increasingly strewn around the foot of the koppie, the camaraderie between the THA and SAMR was supremely tested. The THA's stark choice was to remain and fight, or abandon their guns, and flee against orders and expectations to the koppie sangars. This certainly would have resulted in the Citizen Force gunners facing the scorn of the SAMR regulars, not to mention several potentially serious consequences for violating military discipline. Like any military unit of its era and since,

<sup>197</sup> Rayner & O'Shaughnessy, *How Botha and Smuts Conquered GSW*, p.44.  
Von Oelhafen, *Der Feldzug*, p.40.

<sup>198</sup> Ellis, J., *The Sharp End. The Fighting Man in World War II*, London, 1980, p.340.

there was behind the regimental esprit de corps, the implicit coercion of the military. Stouffer and his co-writers drew the following conclusion about the individual soldier's ultimate hard legal relationship to the broader organisation:

the best single predictor of combat behaviour is the simple fact of institutionalised role: knowing that a man is a soldier rather than a civilian. The soldier role is a vehicle for getting a man into the position in which he has to fight or take the institutionally sanctioned consequences.<sup>199</sup>

This would have constituted one explanation as to why the THA endured; they would have already been socialised not to act in a manner contrary to military norms, by immediately seeking their own survival. N. Kinzer Stewart points out that there is a well researched and documented proof of a "strong relationship between cohesion, soldiers' level of morale, and combat efficiency." Amongst these ties are, "friendship, affection, good humour, machismo, sense of honour, or sportmanlike behaviour."<sup>200</sup> While it is obviously difficult to quantifiably prove, exactly to what extent these factors existed within the THA, or as a result of their contact with the SAMR, the likelihood of them being part of the artillery force's collective psyche is obvious. They were a volunteer artillery unit, and a team approach in operating their equipment was paramount. They had embarked on their first campaign, in the most isolated of environments, while the unit's ethos included a strong culture of masculinity, where "proving oneself" held immense importance. In 1914, there were "existing assumptions about proper combat behaviour," not even vaguely challenged in Britain, until after the 1922 Enquiry into Shell Shock.<sup>201</sup> Research shows that soldiers are extremely concerned about their reputations and the perceptions of their comrades, and this factor alone can ensure them taking extreme risks, or at least not backing away from generally expected performance and conduct.<sup>202</sup> Therefore, no other scenario existed for the THA gunners other than to fight, despite the ferocity of the German attack and the extreme terrors of that morning. Against the patriotism and enthusiasm of the 1914 British Empire soldiers, with most having no experience of battle, prior socialisation and military expectations had shaped the gunners' psyches.<sup>203</sup> Little of this reality is however evident, when reading Grant's nonchalant account of the artillery's stand:

<sup>199</sup> Kellet, *The Soldier in Battle*, p.220, quoting from Stouffer, et al.

<sup>200</sup> Kinzer Stewart, N., *Military Cohesion*, pp 147-148, in Freedman, L. (Ed), *War*, Oxford and New York, 1994.

<sup>201</sup> Kellet, *The Soldier in Battle*, p.215.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 224-225.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

The THA fought their guns with admirable steadiness, but the contest was too unequal, as the enemy brought a converging fire to bear from front (north-west), left (south) and left-rear (north-east). (directions in brackets mine) At about 11am, Lt Adler reported to me that one of his guns had been disabled and that he had not sufficient men to work the other. I thereupon directed him to cease fire and withdraw his men into the perimeter.<sup>204</sup>

Welby expressed himself with a little more feeling in his own report:

I must pay these gunners the compliment of expressing my admiration at their behaviour under fire, for it must be remembered that most of them were boys hardly out of their teens, who had never seen an angry shot before, and they behaved like veterans.<sup>205</sup>

Such were the contained views of two participating officers, but how did the gunners themselves experience the action? Besides Adler's brief and reserved remarks in his 1927 History of the THA, only Corporal Edwards gave a more personalised utterance:

I am glad to have had the experience but I pray to God that I may never have another.<sup>206</sup>

Edwards implicitly reveals society's approval for the soldier's experience of combat. Because of his serious wounds, the Germans allowed him to return to Ramans Drift with an ambulance wagon.<sup>207</sup> There is no explanation why this particular favour was accorded, except the obvious assumption that he was assessed as a hindrance to move. Besides the SAMR casualties, and considering that there were twenty-one other wounded white and black THA members, one of whom, Sergeant H.G.

<sup>204</sup> SAMMHL, A416, Sandfontein, battle of, Grant, battle account.

<sup>205</sup> Welby quoted by Collyer, The Campaign, p.41.

<sup>206</sup> The Nongqui, November 1914, p.327.

<sup>207</sup> Adler, History of the THA, p.73.

Till, had a leg amputated, and another, Native Corporal Alec Sondana, who died of his wounds,<sup>208</sup> it is not entirely clear why Edwards was perceived as critical.

Concerning the artillery section's final destruction, their exposed position was swept by small arms and shell fire, and the gunners in addition to their physical vulnerability, also had to deal with enemy weapon effect factors such as noise and lack of warning regarding incoming fire. These latter two in particular would have exacerbated the physically destructive effects of the German weapons,<sup>209</sup> manifested by dead and wounded men and animals. The artillery section formed a combat "primary group," and would have increasingly throughout the morning had its cohesion worn down by fear and the sight of rising casualties. As Stouffer explains, "men in combat are closely bound together by mutual dependence and affectional ties," and are in consequence "correspondingly shaken by the loss of comrades."<sup>210</sup> Harris's presence at one of the guns, as the Battery Sergeant-Major, would have had an important bearing on the morale and confidence of a group of young men. The specific shock of his death, together with the slaying and wounding of so many other comrades, would have certainly amplified fear symptoms in the rest.<sup>211</sup>

#### **Inside the UDF laager during the afternoon: How did the soldiers endure?**

After changing positions the German artillery recommenced the attack with three hours of bombardment, and within the UDF garrison this period saw fatigue, thirst, and hunger significantly starting to tell.

many (of the men) who had experienced a sleepless night, and were now feeling the pangs of hunger and thirst; the action had commenced with such suddenness that many had no time to refill their water bottles. The heat of the sun, reflected off the ironstone rocks, was something terrific and, as there was no shade, it made the situation almost unbearable.<sup>212</sup>

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Kellet, *The Soldier in Battle*, p.223.

<sup>210</sup> Stouffer, etc., *Studies in Social Psychology in World War II*, Volume 2, *The American Soldier: Combat and its Aftermath*, Princeton, New Jersey, 1949, p.80.

<sup>211</sup> Kellet, *The Soldier in Battle*, p.223, referring to Stouffer, etc.

<sup>212</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," p.186.

In reflecting upon the barren and unforgiving landscape and the Sandfontein UDF troops lack of water, sleep, and sustenance, it is a well researched phenomenon that the motivations and behaviour of soldiers are adversely affected by physical conditions. One of the most obvious hardships for combat soldiers in the field during war, results from their living out roughly in the open for long periods is constant and cumulative fatigue.<sup>213</sup> The troops of "A" Force had been campaigning for over three weeks, and much of this since mid-September in the unsettled mode of transit circumstances and marches through the desert. Field conditions and rations such as corned beef and army biscuits, had been the order of the day throughout the entire period. After several weeks of such conditions, they were embroiled in a fully pitched conventional battle, where by the afternoon, circumstances had swung well in the German's favour. Taken together with the extreme conditions at Sandfontein the situation would have certainly ensured, "intense emotional strain, deficient caloric intake, loss of sleep and strenuous physical exertion." In addition, there existed the seriously exacerbating reality of the heat and lack of water, all factors directly contributing to fatigue, a condition which will have a highly detrimental effect upon the performance of soldiers in battle.<sup>214</sup> Despite the professional toughness and youthful vigour of the SAMR troops, they would have displayed all the above mentioned symptoms, a point reinforced by Scott's above quoted remarks. Indeed the perceptions of the defenders would now have undergone a radical turnabout from those earlier during the day. The entire battle was precipitated and fought largely as an artillery engagement, with this weaponry having the greatest audible, visual, and killing effect of that available to both sides. By the afternoon, the UDF no longer had their own field guns to respond, and as the number of shells striking the koppie increased, so too would have risen correspondingly, the levels of fear and impotency amongst the defenders. Corporal Young, positioned at a point on the koppie behind the THA position, and in direct line of the German fire, described the terrors of combat as follows:

We were battered to pieces by artillery, and peppered with machine-guns. The Germans gave us no rest all day. It seemed like an endless day to me, for I had been wounded during the morning, and by midday my heart pumped painfully, my throat was parched, and my chest afire.

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<sup>213</sup> Kellet, *The Soldier in Battle*, p.222.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

All the afternoon there was an incessant booming of guns mingled with the rattle of musketry. We lay about among the rocks sucking pebbles and intermittently firing. The German bombardment raged without abatement.<sup>215</sup>

By 1914, field guns were mounted upon recoil-absorbing gun-carriages, which enabled crews to fire continually over considerable distances and at significant rates, because the gunners did not have to re-sight their weapons after each shot.<sup>216</sup> The recoil mechanism worked on a hydrostatic buffer and recuperation system,<sup>217</sup> and this meant that at an engagement like Sandfontein, once the German gunners had found and set their artillery pieces to the desired range, they could pump shells upon the UDF positions as fast as the crews reloaded. The efficiency and destructive power of modern arms, and the complete German monopoly upon artillery, was singularly the most demoralising feature of the UDF's experience at Sandfontein. In September 1998, pieces of German shrapnel still littered the koppie slopes. In his description below of the afternoon period, Scott does not elaborate upon the inner details of rapidly deteriorating morale, although he sombrely reported upon the German gunners strategy, with some contradictions between the quantities of shells fired and his almost dismissive remarks as to their effects.

The very crude and inconspicuous character of the sangars now proved the salvation of many on the defending side, as the enemy artillery were unable to detect the positions of the various troops, compelling him systematically to search the whole of the kopje on this side from end to end and from top to bottom, in the hope of demolishing the sangars that were known to be there...The shells arrived in series of four and sometimes six, first of the percussion variety, which explode on contact, and then the time shrapnel. It is estimated that they enemy must have thrown between two and three thousand shells on to the position during the course of the day. The results, so far as casualties were concerned, were extremely meagre, the enemy only

<sup>215</sup> Young, *Boot and Saddle*, pp 159-160

<sup>216</sup> Parker, G. (Ed), *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Warfare: The Triumph in the West*, Cambridge, New York and Melbourne, 1995, p.243.

<sup>217</sup> Doughty, R.A. and Gruber, I.D., *Warfare in the Western World*, p. 498.

scoring two direct hits on the sangars, thereby killing two men outright.<sup>218</sup>

The initial German artillery ranges of between two and four thousand metres, did not stop von Heydebreck's gunners from dropping hundreds of shells onto the UDF position, inflicting shock and damage around the locations of the nearly three hundred men huddling behind rocks. Scott's silence regarding the damage this must have wrought to emotions and morale is simply not realistic. Given the intensity of the shelling, use can be made of comparative studies done upon reactions of soldiers to such conditions, proving some insight into the prevalence of fear during battle, what factors would most likely precipitate it, and how it would generally be manifested. Stouffer and his co-author's 1949 pioneer work in combat analysis, showed conclusively that artillery was the most feared enemy weapon type.<sup>219</sup> They contended that the paramount negative effects of specific weapons upon soldiers were, "psychological factors such as noise, lack of warning, and vulnerability." These are the most important in reinforcing within soldiers' minds, the destructive effects of enemy weapons.<sup>220</sup> All of the above factors applied completely to the defenders at Sandfontein. The 77mm German mountain guns used at Sandfontein had a maximum range of 5,75 kilometres,<sup>221</sup> were 1908 models<sup>222</sup> and typical of a light field gun concept first introduced by the French in 1897<sup>223</sup> (see photograph no. 29). The essential innovation was that the weapons could be dismantled, and the components carried on the backs of animals for transportation over difficult terrain, hence the term "mountain guns." They fired a 5,3 kilogram shell<sup>224</sup> and a trained crew would have dispatched at least six in one minute.<sup>225</sup> At minimum, eight of these weapons were fired for over three hours against the easily discernible Sandfontein koppie, well within the gun's range capabilities. Even with all eight guns, firing at just a third of their maximum rate for the said duration, the concentration of fire on the comparatively small land surface would have been frighteningly intense. Towards the end of the battle, some of the mountain guns were operating at ranges of between six hundred, to one and a half thousand metres,<sup>226</sup> with a

<sup>218</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," p. 186.

<sup>219</sup> Stouffer, etc. Volume II, Combat and its Aftermath, pp 231-241.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., p.223.

<sup>221</sup> Information obtained from Hamish Paterson at the South Africa Museum of Military History in Johannesburg; his sources being, Kofar, F., Pocket History of the Light Field Gun, London, 1974, and Bidwell, S. & Graham, D., Firepower, London, 1982.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Doughty & Gruber, Warfare in the Western World, p.498.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Hamish Paterson.

<sup>226</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," diagram, p.185.

Von Oelhafen, Der Feldzug, p.41.

consequent improvement in their accuracy, proved in retrospect by their deliberate and successful targeting of the summit at the end of the afternoon.<sup>227</sup>

Because a very large proportion of the UDF troops at Sandfontein were experiencing their first battle, they would have encountered the accepted “initial surprise,” which combat engenders for inexperienced troops, and the sheer confusion inherent in “the fog of war, associated with battle.”<sup>228</sup> In describing the contrast between the novice's mental picture and the reality he usually encounters, S.L.A. Marshall pointed out that rather than fulfil any of the usual grandiose images, the soldier “finds himself suddenly alone in his hour of greatest danger.”<sup>229</sup> There would have been exactly this gap between the uncritical patriotism, naive enthusiasm and expectations of the UDF troops, and the reality of a full day's entrapment on a koppie under heavy fire. Young explained precisely this in his wistful descriptions of 1st SAMR soldiers a month before the battle, and his later reflections about how he actually experienced it:

Young men looking for adventure and highly ambitious, but without understanding, were happy. They took it for granted that war was a form of sport; difficult and dangerous perhaps, but nevertheless pleasant.<sup>230</sup>

by noon Sandfontein was a hell on earth. I had visualised many possibilities, but I had never foreseen anything like what happened that day at Sandfontein.<sup>231</sup>

In further attempting to analyse the issue of fear amongst the SAMR/THA, through the methodology of Stouffer and his collaborators, the latter illustrate that the majority of men who participated in the combat situations investigated, admitted to feeling “ever present” fear. Following their research findings, 83% from a sample of 1766 American combat veterans reported seeing a man overcome by fear, and those who had observed this, reported being upset and deeply concerned when witnessing examples of loss of self-control amongst their comrades.<sup>232</sup> In another

<sup>227</sup> Scott, “The Story of Sandfontein,” p.186.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

Stouffer, etc. Volume II, Combat and its Aftermath pp 83-84

<sup>229</sup> Quoted in Kellet, The Soldier in Battle, p.222.

<sup>230</sup> Young, Boot and Saddle, p. 157.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., p.159.

<sup>232</sup> Stouffer, etc. Volume II, Combat and its Aftermath, pp 208-209.

finding, 65% admitted to having had at least one experience in combat where they were unable to perform adequately, directly as result of intense fear.<sup>233</sup>

Juxtaposing these kind of findings onto the experience at Sandfontein is an imperfect exercise, but for historical research, entirely legitimate as an analytical tool, because the most critical variables of Stouffer's research remain constant. These variables include human beings with their consistent deep fears of death and wounds, soldiers inexperienced in combat conditions, fatigue, a twentieth century battle which involved medium and light weaponry, the besieging of a position where men were entirely trapped, and a powerful, authoritarian military culture which dictated rigid expectations. Finally there were the explicit punitive sanctions that would be faced any group or individual, perceived as being guilty of non-conformism within the context of the specific military situation. Stouffer's work is the product of social scientists' methodology, which by nature is entirely different to the historian's approach, where the latter is concerned with events, the particular, and change,<sup>234</sup> basing his conclusions upon verifiable evidence. More specifically in Stouffer's research, we are drawing from the findings made by a group of social psychologists, where the research methods involved the use of numerous detailed questionnaires that were completed by samples of relevant individuals. History as a discipline has its own autonomy, but as Geoffrey Elton reminds us, this is not the same thing as exclusivity, or complete self-sufficiency.<sup>235</sup> A link between the Sandfontein sources and Stouffer is based upon the premise that where evidence is biased or incomplete, verified social psychological data can assist in an accurate reconstruction of the soldiers' anxieties. This thesis is essentially an investigation of the particular events which occurred that day, and how a transition occurred between the UDF's resolution to initially defend the wells in the morning, to the final collapse of the Grant's force's collective morale during the late afternoon, resulting in their unconditional surrender. Stouffer's research helps highlight the inner nature of battle, in terms of the predictable combat soldier's response to the terrors of combat. In referring to social psychology as an aid to historical research, Elton explains its use as follows:

to construct wholes out of patchy evidence by teaching the general rules governing the behaviour of forces, crowds and individuals...Since men's experience in the past, as at all times, was clearly influenced by what happened inside them, between

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid., pp 201-202.

<sup>234</sup> Elton, G., *The Practice of History*, Glasgow & Sydney, 1967, p.21.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., pp 36-37.

them and around them, every form of inquiry which touches on these circumstances is of use to the historian; and this may include not only the sciences of man but also the sciences of nature. Provided the instruction received is turned to historical use, provided it is used to consider and explain change in the human past, these borrowings can be nothing but fruitful.<sup>236</sup>

While there is certainly no intention to postulate universal laws about human behaviour, or attempt some kind of rudimentary synthesis, it is suggested that there remains a significant compatibility between the questions asked of the Sandfontein accounts, and aspects of the selected results drawn from Stouffer's work, the most comprehensive psycho-sociological analysis ever compiled regarding soldiers experiences in modern warfare. In essence, the central question is, to what extent would the UDF men at Sandfontein have experienced or observed within their ranks, examples of "shell-shock" and extreme fear, which would in turn have negatively affected them to a significant extent, considering the intensity and duration their ordeal? The SAMR/THA personnel, just like the subjects of Stouffer's analysis, would be "confronted with the task of mastering their own fear,"<sup>237</sup> and as the conclusions drawn from the 1949 research show, not all of the UDF defenders could have been successful in this. This was certainly not the kind of subject matter broached by direct participants, such as Scott or Grant, or authors like von Oelhafen or Collyer, with their patriotic or instructional agendas, nor could this have been realistically expected, given these works historical contexts and purpose. This thesis attempts to revisit the engagement with a far more critical perspective, based upon some semblance of what would have been predictable and realistic, when compared with expected human behaviour. In such conditions with nearly three hundred men on the Sandfontein koppie, Stouffer's statistics strongly suggest that some of the men would certainly have cracked up under the strain. 83% of Stouffer's sample of 1766 combat veterans had witnessed "a man's nerves crack up," and other soldiers would typically be demoralised, when observing such "extreme fear breakdown." 70% of the above quoted sample reported negative feelings like "nervous," "jittery," "felt like cracking up myself," or "lowered my morale" when asked to respond to the question: "What effect did seeing a man's nerves 'crack up' have on you?"<sup>238</sup> It goes without saying, this trend would also have also occurred at Sandfontein, given the circumstances experienced by the UDF men during the battle.

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid., p.37.

<sup>237</sup> Stouffer, etc. Volume II, Combat and its Aftermath, p.208.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., p.209.

Physiological fear symptoms amongst soldiers in Stouffer's study ranged from: "Violent pounding in the heart" (84%); "Feeling sick at the stomach" (55%); "Vomiting" (27%); and "Losing control of bowels" (21%).<sup>239</sup> While no such Sandfontein statistics were ever compiled, it is reasonable to assume, based on the reconstructed battle circumstances, that such highly visible and expressed fear must have occurred, and been manifested by various physical symptoms, including some, if not all of those listed above. The UDF men had no freedom of movement during the German artillery bombardment, a combat situation researched as producing the severest incidents of fear.<sup>240</sup> As with the British Army in the First World War, any psychiatric casualties during the battle did not officially exist, indeed "shell-shock" was not recognised as a medical condition in the British army until 1918.<sup>241</sup> During the Second World War, such casualties ranged from up to twenty percent in specific theatres,<sup>242</sup> and Allied military psychiatrists deduced that in the very first hours of combat as much as ten percent of a fighting force was psychologically disabled.<sup>243</sup> It stands to reason therefore that given the nature of the Sandfontein battle, some psychiatric casualties would have been definite factors amongst the SAMR and THA.

Factors at Sandfontein amongst the UDF troops, that would have increasing the chances of their experiencing a high degree of fear, included there being no recognition of "shell-shock" as some kind of medical condition, and no acknowledgement of that expressing fear was normal, so long as it was kept under control. There certainly have been nothing like the comparatively permissive attitude towards the whole concept of combat fear, as was adopted by US Armed Forces during the Second World War. The UDF would have had no formal program akin to US Army policies in 1941-45, where psychological casualties were withdrawn for a few days rest and medical care, with hospitalisation prescribed in cases showing persistently incapacitating fear symptoms.<sup>244</sup> On the contrary, the men in British Empire armies in 1914, could have been shot for behaviour perceived as cowardice. This is indicative of just how powerful the individual's own constraints would have to be, in order to control his fear. The extreme battle situation for the Sandfontein defenders would have made a consistently stiff-upper lip deposition highly improbable. Fleeing the battlefield risked punishment and disgrace, and was impossible anyway after the destruction of their horses, and with

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid., p.201.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., p.83.

<sup>241</sup> Keegan, *Face of Battle*, p.334.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., p.335.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., p.341.

<sup>244</sup> Stouffer, Volume II, *Combat and its Aftermath* pp196-197.

the German forces covering all the exits back to the drifts. Having no real choice the UDF men fell back on resisting as their only option. As Kellet puts it:

The instinct for self-preservation can persuade a soldier to fight, or at least remain in the front line, if he is convinced that he has little social, legal or physical alternative.<sup>245</sup>

And following Stouffer's findings, Kellet concludes:

self-preservation is not a sufficient motive for persistence in combat, but in combination with other factors it becomes a major element in combat motivation.<sup>246</sup>

Other dynamics that assisted the containment of panic and fear at Sandfontein concern the relationship between the morale and the motivation of soldiers, and the bonds existent between soldiers within small and large formations. In the 1st SAMR and THA, the unit sub-components were squadrons and troops. On the koppie during the battle, smaller groups of individuals located themselves behind different sangars. The critical questions concern to what extent the soldiers in these groups bonded at Sandfontein, what evidence is of this, and how did these bonds finally disintegrate, to the point that surrender was welcomed? As the 1st SAMR was a professional military force, the troops would have grown acquainted with one another over months or years of shared duties, thus ensuring strong bonds of camaraderie. The THA was comprised of volunteers and recruits for the campaign's duration, and would also have quickly moulded into a cohesive entity, particularly given the month long build-up before Sandfontein. Stewart explains how research conducted in military psychology and sociology in Western armies, has reaffirmed the "interrelationship of small-group ties, loyalty, bonding, esprit, and combat performance."<sup>247</sup> Like any modern battlefield there was forced dispersion of soldiers at Sandfontein, but during the First World War, an increased emphasis occurred upon the section of ten men as the intrinsic element of organisation, or the so-called "primary group". In the SAMR, "this primary group" was the troop of twenty men, one of four or five sub-divisions of a squadron. In order to satisfy the need to promote loyalty to a military organisation larger than this group, a regimental esprit de corps also existed,

<sup>245</sup> Kellet, The Soldier in Battle, p.230

Stouffer, Volume II, Combat and its Aftermath, p.169.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Kinzer Stewart, Military Cohesion, p.147.

with all the primary groups having a common loyalty and identity to this entity. Here we recall Young's earlier remarks about how the 1st SAMR was expected to acquit itself well in the hostilities, by all the members who gathering in King Williams Town on the outbreak of war. Research has shown that soldiers can maintain strong primary group bonds and loyalty to a unit, without necessarily an equivalent enthusiasm to the broader demands imposed by the army.<sup>248</sup>

This raises the question of what significance the primary group held for maintaining morale at Sandfontein, where lieutenants commanded each troop, all of whom were distributed across the koppie, once the German attack was imminent. During the day's battle events the 1st SAMR men would have been unable to move around, with gunfire restricted them to those sangars they initially occupied. These ranged from long lines of rocks concealing an entire troop, to individual sangars that hid a few or only one man. Just as Grant was out of touch with virtually his entire command during the day, so too were large numbers of soldiers regarding contact with each other. Research further illustrates that "a strong relationship between cohesion, the soldiers' level of morale, and combat efficiency."<sup>249</sup> Implied throughout this chapter is that these factors were under considerable strain at Sandfontein, where by the afternoon, the UDF's ability to fight back had been gravely reduced by the loss of their artillery. The South Africans view of events was limited entirely to what they saw directly in front of them when they dared to look up from behind their sangars. "One of the more surprising, and potentially demoralizing, features of battle," states Kellet, "is the sense of isolation it frequently engenders."<sup>250</sup> Sandfontein must have been the most alienating experience for the troops. They were thinly scattered and for the most part entirely removed from their officers, and pinned down for the entire day. What other established ties could have held them together and prevented widespread panic? Stewart suggests the following features as contributing regarding research completed on men in combat:

friendship, affection, good humour, machismo, sense of honour, or sportsmanlike behaviour. Whatever those ties may be, they bind and entangle a man's psyche in such a way that he will not run away, will not curl up in his foxhole and cry, and will not climb into his sleeping bag and feign sleep in the middle of an artillery barrage...he endures and goes forward. He stays in the

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., p.148.

<sup>250</sup> Kellet, *The Soldier in Battle*, p.222.

swirl and din of combat because to run away would be worse than death itself. He would know himself as a coward- and worst of all his comrades would know that awful truth as well.<sup>251</sup>

For the SAMR and THA men, some of the above would have been the final collective phenomena that held their endurance together, amidst the circumstances quoted below by a “survivor” who refers to noise of the Sandfontein battle:

it seemed like hell let loose. I know it wasn't France or Flanders, or Russia. If I were in one or the other of those places I should simply be unable to describe what goes on there at all adequately. I know that at Sandfontein there was an infernal din of shrieking, splitting, sickening shells, an interminable rat-a-tat of machine guns, a cracking of rifles that rose in waves but never quite died away entirely. All this noise was intensified beyond measure because it was caught in the hollow of the basin and reverberated again and again until the echoes in there clash almost threatened to drown the original noise! I thought my head would burst, and if it had done so it would only have been in harmony with the song of the day.<sup>252</sup>

The comments on the war in Europe are interesting in that they suggest how some UDF members perceived where “the real fighting” was. Given the ridge and koppie strewn topography, the noise levels would certainly have been exceptionally high and unceasing during the fight, particularly towards the end of the day. This must have been one of the most unnerving and completely unpredicted features of the battle for the inexperienced soldiers. According to Kellet, “Noise on an unanticipated scale can be another surprising characteristic of combat.”<sup>253</sup>

It has been suggested that the UDF men at Sandfontein were essentially compelled to endure the onslaught as escape was simply not an available option, although earlier surrender would have been. Grant had still been uncertain of Lukin’s plans regarding an attempted relief, and as he stated

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Rayner & O’Shaughnessy, How Botha and Smuts Conquered GSW, p.44.

<sup>253</sup> Kellet, The Soldier in Battle, p.222.

in his report, had in fact hoped that some change of events would work to the advantage of his force. Therefore, the UDF men must have consciously or unconsciously turned to at least some of the other palliatives drawn as they are from Stouffer's research. These specifically concern the issues of regimental "esprit de corps" and leadership, while mention is also made of the need soldiers have in trusting the medical care they believe will be offered to them on being wounded. It has been contended there would have been a high degree of loyalty amongst the troops for their regiments, resulting in strongly developing bonds of loyalty to the smaller "primary groups." Nevertheless, these mutual ties of camaraderie, would have been remorselessly ground down by the fatigue factor during the battle, the sense of hopelessness to their situation, and the terror that accompanied the fighting. The degree of cohesion that remained amongst the men would have had its limits. Kellet describes this cohesive force as: "the common spirit existing in the members of the group...inspiring enthusiasm, devotion, and strong regard for the honour of the group."<sup>254</sup>

In threatening situations, people will often simply tend to copy the behaviour of others, and consequently one of the most common forms of leadership is setting the example.<sup>255</sup> One obvious point of combat leadership relates to the importance of soldiers looking to their officers for practical inspiration. The officer who holds back from taking any personal risks, would be inviting a similar response from his men, while the converse is equally true. To assess situations of how military officers helped their men feel confident in a tough or frightening situations, a range of leadership practises were researched by Stouffer and his collaborators. These included, leadership by example and personal courage being mentioned by 31%; 25% were encouraged by means of pep talks, jokes, and information; 23% mentioned the demonstration of concern for the men's safety and welfare; and 5% noted friendliness and informality on the part of officers.<sup>256</sup>

How did the UDF members perceive their officers at Sandfontein? Something of the "camp gap" between ranks should have dissipated on active service. Troop leaders like Northway had played out their roles with bravado, while Adler had certainly performed with considerable courage and determination. Grant and his Staff were isolated from command, but still faced the same dangers as their men. According to Scott, the SAMR soldiers' rifle fire was under the direction of their officers, although given the conditions, this was probably an exaggeration. Could the SAMR officers have tried more to lead by example at Sandfontein? Their options were limited as most of

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid., p.217.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., p.224.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., p.224.

Stouffer, Volume II, *Combat and its Aftermath* pp124-125.

involved crouching down behind sangars, while Grant and his Staff did their hazardous “observing” from the summit. The men probably wondered about the Colonel’s thoughts regarding defending the position, but when his leadership was not been forthcoming, they would have shifted their focus to the next strongest personalities, regardless of rank, for inspiration and courage.<sup>257</sup>

The mid-afternoon artillery pounding would have done much to inflict casualties and break the spirit of the defenders. The fatalities amongst the SAMR by the end of the day comprised 6 riflemen and 1 civilian scout, while the wounded included 7 officers, 7 non-commissioned officers, 14 riflemen, 2 native constables, and 1 civilian scout.<sup>258</sup> Calculated from the 1st SAMR’s overall strength, namely some 239 white and black members, its casualty rate was some 16%, as opposed to the THA’s 50%. While the figures are not staggeringly high for a whole day’s battle, the German shelling was continuous throughout the afternoon, thereby greatly exacerbating the stress and psychiatric casualty factor. Casualties are the most visible and forceful manifestations of danger to other troops in battle. They have a strong negative impact upon cohesion, with primary groups heavily affected, in that casualties “threaten the sense of group support and protection.”<sup>259</sup>

Stouffer’s research indicates that where units suffered heavy casualties, or the members observed their friends killed, they reported more “fear symptoms” than those not subjected to such stresses.<sup>260</sup> The afternoon’s bombardment of the koppie, the THA’s numerous dead and wounded, Northway’s death, and the horse slaughter, ensured there were several highly visible violent incidents. All available accounts concur on the intensity of the final bombardment; Corporal Edwards described it as follows: “The firing to the kopje was so hot that they (Edwards and the other wounded in the kraal) imagined lying in the kraal, that they would be the only ten men left alive.”<sup>261</sup>

Grant by his own admission, did not know the extent of his force’s casualties but had surmised them to be severe, stating that most of the wounded had remained exactly where they had fallen, “it being found impracticable to remove them.”<sup>262</sup> There was nothing of the medical support that gave vital confidence to the troops in Stouffer’s research.<sup>263</sup> The quality and accessibility of medical care

<sup>257</sup> Ellis, *The Sharp End*, p.228.

<sup>258</sup> SAMMHL, A.416, Sandfontein, Battle of, attached list of casualties, with letter, dated 19 February 1915, written by Capt Welby to Lt-Col Grant at Outjo, while both men were German prisoners of war.

<sup>259</sup> Kellet, *The Soldier in Battle*, p.223.

<sup>260</sup> Stouffer, Volume II, *Combat and its Aftermath* pp 80-82.

<sup>261</sup> *The Nongqui*, December 1914, p.395.

<sup>262</sup> SAMMHL, A.416, Sandfontein, battle of, Grant, battle account posted to Collyer

<sup>263</sup> Stouffer, Volume II, *Combat and its Aftermath* pp 144-145.

available has an important bearing on the morale of the entire unit, not just the injured.<sup>264</sup> At Sandfontein however, the SAMC detachment was completely isolated from the koppie, and the “kraal field hospital” could not assist the SAMR casualties, a reality that was surely not lost upon the defenders, who endured the strain of seeing and hearing their own wounded comrades, and the grim realisation that medical assistance was impossible. The THA men in the enclosure with the SAMC staff, remained there until the surrender. The South African seriously wounded still had to spend at least one, possibly two nights waiting on the battlefield after the engagement, during which they were attended by the doctors and Lt Cowley.<sup>265</sup> All the available transport was first utilised by the Germans for the conveyance of their own wounded to Warmbad.<sup>266</sup>

Of the various wounds suffered by UDF troops at Sandfontein, artillery fire almost definitely accounted for most of them. Amongst the THA wounded, eleven of the fifteen injured members listed had shrapnel wounds.<sup>267</sup> The wound statistics from the entire First World War, in the British Army, were about 70 % shell induced, compared to about 30% which were a consequence of bullets.<sup>268</sup> Keegan tells us that: Wounds from artillery “were the most to be feared, because of the multiple effects shell explosion could produce in the human body.”<sup>269</sup> They ranged from complete disintegration of the human body, to causing internal rupturing, vacuums, over-pressures or haemorrhages which would kill but leave no visible mark, to the most commonly occurred effect, namely wounding or killing by splinter and shrapnel balls.<sup>270</sup> Shell splinters are irregular in both shape and size, and would therefore create “a very rough wound with a great deal of tissue damage,” and “frequently carried fragments of clothing or other foreign matter into the body, which made infection almost inevitable,” while large fragments could amputate, mutilate or decapitate. Regarding the effects of small-arms, a high velocity bullet spinning rapidly upon its own axis might go directly through a body. Should it however, “tumble” inside, it would cause considerably more damage due to striking and creating bone fragments as secondary projectiles, with the resultant extensive damage to surrounding tissues.<sup>271</sup>

<sup>264</sup> Kellet, *The Soldier in Battle*, p.223.

<sup>265</sup> Scott, “The Story of Sandfontein,” p.186

SAMMHL, folder A.416, Sandfontein, Battle of, document entitled, “The action at Sandfontein.”

<sup>266</sup> SAMMHL, A.416, Sandfontein, battle of, Grant, battle account posted to Collyer.

<sup>267</sup> Adler, *History of the THA*, pp 73-74.

<sup>268</sup> Keegan, *Face of Battle*, p.269.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, pp269-270.

Although the severely wounded UDF members did not get priority treatment over their opponents at the battle's conclusion, von Heydebreck reportedly congratulated Grant for the defence.<sup>272</sup> A third UDF medical officer, Major Hamilton, was despatched by Lukin to assist with the wounded, arriving at Sandfontein the morning after the battle, and permitted by the Germans to return to Ramans Drift 48 hours later<sup>273</sup> with Edwards and a "badly wounded native driver."<sup>274</sup> Lukin had made a request for a cease-fire on the evening of the 26th, presumably through a mounted messenger, to allow for the collection of all the UDF dead and wounded. Unsurprisingly, this was refused by von Heydebreck, who was still concerned with his own plans of withdrawal, besides the future intentions of his opposite commander.<sup>275</sup>

### The surrender: a reinterpretation

Two issues need to be raised regarding the surrender: Firstly, the entire UDF leadership group on the summit was wounded, and under extremely heavy bombardment, that threatened at any minute to obliterate their sangar. Secondly, this specific predicament they experienced entirely alone, cut off from the rest of the force. Grant's surrender occurred within the context of the demoralisation of himself and his Staff, after their wounding, and the final deluge of shells upon the summit. It seems extremely likely, that given the sudden horror of being personally pinpointed by the German Artillery, and after already suffering wounding, the Colonel reached the end of his own tether. He did however receive official approval eleven later for his surrender decision. This occurred when he returned to the Union from captivity, and Smuts as Defence Minister, responded to his official report of the battle.<sup>276</sup>

Welby expressed surprise at the decision and purportedly demanded an explanation on what authority the surrender came from; being well away from Grant, located at a position lower down the south slope.<sup>277</sup> He is all probability queried the decision after the ceasefire became effective.<sup>278</sup> His physical location on the koppie, as indicated by Scott, may well have given him some shelter

<sup>272</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," p.186.

SAMMHL, A.416, Sandfontein, battle of, Grant, battle account.

<sup>273</sup> SAMMHL, A.416, Sandfontein, battle of, Grant, battle account.

<sup>274</sup> Adler, *History of the THA*, p.28..

<sup>275</sup> Von Oelhafen, *Der Feldzug*, p.44.

<sup>276</sup> SAMMHL, folder A.416, Sandfontein, Battle of, Official Response to Grant, which would have been sent in September 1915. (Grant's report to the Minister was dated 24 September 1915, and the reply indicates, "...the report on the action at Sandfontein submitted by you on the 24<sup>th</sup> ultimo.")

<sup>277</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein" "Plan of Sandfontein", p.180.

<sup>278</sup> Collyer, *The Campaign*, p.42.

from the full effects of the final bombardment, and while some confusion occurred amongst the officers about the surrender, there is no evidence of anybody else questioning the decision. Concerning Welby's feelings, Collyer curtly notes: "The misunderstanding, however, had no effect on the course or outcome of events."<sup>279</sup> Nevertheless, the sensitivity of a UDF force surrendering in its debut battle, rankled in military circles, whatever the intolerable circumstances of the engagement were. Correspondence twenty-two years later between the Colonel and his former Adjutant, Wakefield, suggests that the decision and the different opinions at the time between Grant and Welby, were identified as needing careful explanation in any official account. Grant despatched a draft of his own account to Wakefield, before forwarding it on to Collyer. The Colonel received some very careful suggestions as to its structuring from Wakefield, who by then had risen to the position of the UDF's Deputy Chief of Staff.

I attach thereto suggested amendments and I remember the account written by Scott which you may want to check with yours.

I was not wounded until late in the afternoon about 1½ hour before the surrender. The point you want to make quite clear is I suggest that when you were convinced that further resistance was useless and that there was no chance for you to consult Welby or Hale the next senior officer you decided to resume command and raise the surrender. Welby from his position could not see what the ground situation was and although he may have intended carrying on with the Defence it could not have lasted another ¼ hour in a final assault. You and the officers with you were probably out of harms way being on top of the hill, but the large majority of the troops lower down would have suffered badly and useless sacrifice of men's lives would have taken place.

I believe Welby was of the opinion the Germans would have drawn off, but they had to have the water and they could have

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

taken it, no doubt of concern with further casualties to themselves, but they could plaster the position with artillery and rifle fire at close range.<sup>280</sup>

Although not implied in the documents, It seems reasonable to speculate, after examining and reflecting upon the evidence, that the wounding and sudden artillery barrage directed at the summit, must have finally eroded Grant and his Staff's will to continue. For example, Scott from his position on the southwestern spur, described the effects of the shelling as being so concentrated that:

the high explosive shells on the summit of the kopje was so great that in a short space of time the appearance of the kopje was quite altered. There is little doubt that if this bombardment had continued for any lengthy period, most of the summit would have been removed piecemeal.<sup>281</sup>

There is the clear implication contained within Wakefield's letter to Grant, that Welby had disputed the surrender. Wakefield carefully adds that he was precluded from making a proper assessment of the soldiers' plight, and he suggested that Grant in his book, direct attention onto the condition of their men. However, to what realistic extent could Grant and his Staff have properly assessed conditions on either the koppie or the battlefield below during the final desperate stages? Right from the first events in the morning, Grant had been bewildered by the distribution of the German forces, and besides the number of German field guns in operation, the opposing troop numbers would not have been obvious, because of the distances they lay from the koppie, and their wide spread deployment across the landscape. In any event, Grant and his Staff were forced to remain under cover, and there were other battle conditions to contend with besides the fear and noise, for example, the koppie and its slopes would have been enveloped by smoke and dust clouds, greatly reducing visibility. Wakefield found it necessary to urge that Grant describe with absolute certainty, his justification of the surrender decision. Grant did exactly that by correctly pointing out that had a bayonet charge upon the hill ensued, the UDF men on the slopes, exhausted as they were, would have been grievously put upon by superior numbers.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> SAMMHL, folder A.416, Sandfontein, Battle of, letter written by Wakefield to Grant, dated 10 August 1936.

<sup>281</sup> Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," p.186.

<sup>282</sup> SAMMHL, A.416, Sandfontein, battle of, Grant, battle account posted to Collyer.

When Collyer finally wrote his formal campaign history, he unreservedly supported Grant, as had all the other Sandfontein accounts before. This thesis contends that in short, Grant reassumed the commander's hat once his own position became untenable, and thereafter surrendered, quickly overruling Welby who disputed the decision. The letter and the accompanying evidence utilised in this analysis, bears testimony to the horror of the battle and its effects upon brave men. In the aftermath of the decision, the battle effects were still borne by the participants, when military bearing and norms amongst the participants had re-asserted themselves and a critical public, ignorant of war's reality, could have passed unkind judgements. Stressed as the circumstances were, and given the documents examined, it is entirely realistic to suggest that Grant's wounding and vulnerable position by late afternoon, significantly influenced his surrender decision. Many of his attempts to rationalise the decision, written in his reports, could not have been priorities once the summit suffered intense shelling. Grant was determined to validate his decision with the evidence of the unequal odds his men faced, and by publicly confirming that no other realistic choices were available. His supporters, including Collyer, had sought through the various battle accounts to make this argument watertight, almost as if they expected to encounter scepticism. Finally, Grant remarked upon his reasoning by the late afternoon, that he had expected no further serious attempts to assist the garrison.

From the first it had been only too apparent that the chances of relief were very small, as the enemy's force displayed before our eyes round the position was considerably greater than that at General Lukin's disposal. It was also known that there other bodies of the enemy were in the neighbourhood, ie. the one which engaged and repulsed the attempt at relief by the Homs Drift detachment, and another column had been seen in the morning in the west, moving from Norachab in the direction of Ramans Drift, apparently with the intention of preventing relief from that quarter. I had decided to hang on a long as possible in the hope that some unexpected turn of events might help bring relief, but as evening drew on, it became obvious that all hope of succour must be abandoned and that ultimate surrender was

inevitable. Our ammunition was running low, more than half my command had been without food since the previous day and were exhausted through lack of sleep. The great majority of the wounded were lying where they had fallen, it being impossible to remove them. Though unaware of their actual extent, I knew that our casualties must be severe.<sup>283</sup>

Besides his claims about the ammunition shortage contested by von Oelhafen and Hennig,<sup>284</sup> Grant again confirmed his isolation during the battle from the men under his command. While his remarks about the condition of the UDF troops were entirely accurate, he was also no doubt reflecting upon his own bleak situation, when he and his Staff were trapped within their sangar, wounded and contemplating annihilation. The limit of a Western soldier's will to resist occurs at that point where he feels his individual honour has been satisfied.<sup>285</sup> This was certainly a good part of the explanation for surrender, that Grant and his officers would have preferred, and such was the record that he, Scott, and the other authors of Sandfontein battle accounts between 1915-20s, set out to ensure for posterity. Scott, Grant, Rayner & O'Shaughnessy, and Adler's accounts, were to be the main future references, and were utilised as such by Collyer, together with Lukin's papers and Welby's report, for the "final" authoritative work on the entire GSWA campaign. Collyer further ensured Grant's reputation by pointing out that on his arrival, the Colonel had immediately declared the position as untenable for defence.<sup>286</sup>

In a sense, the Sandfontein veterans virtually controlled the battle record, with their credibility assured by their own participation. Young's battle description written in 1955 was one of a minuscule number of alternative first-hand accounts located. Von Oelhafen and other German accounts, remained largely unread by their former foes, and concerned themselves primarily with the mechanics of how von Heydebreck attained the victory. Finally, regarding the surrender, it is questionable how much issues of honour would have meant to the UDF men during the final battle minutes. Severe German casualties was something which von Heydebreck had been unwilling to authorise all afternoon. Grant was utterly reluctant to fight it out to the last man, neither had he any reason to do so. Such a fanatical end to a military encounter was certainly not the norm amongst

<sup>283</sup> SAMMHL, A416, Sandfontein, Battle of, Grant, written battle account.

<sup>284</sup> Von Oelhafen, *Der Feldzug*, p.43.

Hennig, *Deutsch-Sudwest in Weltkrieg*, pp97-98, from Ungleich, *The Defence of GSWA*, p.73.

<sup>285</sup> Kellet, *The Soldier in Battle*, p.225.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, p.40.

Imperial troops during the SA War, and there was no precedent amongst veterans like Grant for allowing it at Sandfontein. In his account to Collyer over two decades later, he described with the contained emotions of an elderly and honourable military officer, the terrors during the final minutes of the battle of Sandfontein, through the plight and courage of his men:

The enemy had now (5.30pm) drawn very close, and although we had beaten back successive attempts to gain a foothold in the position, it was evident that with a firing line originally very weak and further attenuated by casualties, there would be no hope of repelling an assault delivered under cover of darkness. The men had displayed great fortitude for 10 hours under most trying conditions and I felt that to commit them to a hand to hand struggle in the dark against overwhelming numbers would mean their certain annihilation and a useless sacrifice of life, as no military object was to be gained by further resistance...As to the bearing of all ranks I have nothing but praise. The fact that we were able to offer a successful resistance for so long as we did, was due entirely to the steadiness and fortitude of the men under most trying conditions and their excellent fire discipline which never got out of control by there officers.<sup>287</sup>

When one brief, but highly controversial view, appeared through an ex-THA member three and a half decades after Sandfontein, this individual, Capt. J.R.A. Kelly, was ferociously rounded upon by Wakefield. Kelly in a letter published in the Gwelo Times of 4 August 1950, made a number of serious allegations regarding both the battle events, and some of the participants conduct,<sup>288</sup> including that Grant's force had been "treacherously surrendered" by "4th SAMR members." One of the latter had allegedly shot Grant in the leg when the Colonel ordered the lowering of an "unauthorised white flag"; raised, according to Kelly, by the same SAMR members, in response to a German request for the South Africans to surrender, verbally conveyed late in the afternoon by von Heydebreck's men under a flag of truce. After Grant's "shooting," "numerous white flags were

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> SAMMHL, A.416, Sandfontein, battle of, document entitled "First Troops in S.W.A., "Capt. J.R.A. Kelly writes," and article from the Gwelo Times, 19 January 1957, entitled, "'Cruelly False' Story of Sandfontein Battle- General Refutes Gwelo Officer's Charge." These are located at the back of "Unrecorded details of Sandfontein" within the same folder.

waved and so the force was treacherously surrendered.” Kelly further stated that Grant had refused to surrender on account of the “good position” he held, and had trusted Lukin to come to his assistance, something which had not been occurred because “no move was made (by the General at Ramans Drift) until night fell.”

Kelly’s background included that he was a volunteer in the THA between 1906 and 1922, and had served with the regiment during the GSWA campaign,<sup>289</sup> while his letter explicitly infers that he had been a member of Lukin’s “A” Force. He was not present at Sandfontein, but remained with the rest of the THA battery at Ramans Drift. Under Lukin’s command during the late afternoon, Kelly had moved out with the THA half-section, two guns, and 130 SAMR members towards the battlefield, this constituting the third failed relief attempt that day. This detachment had finally reached Sandfontein Nek some two and a half miles southwest of the wells by 1am, where Capt King and his 4th SAMR squadron were still held up by German troops.<sup>290</sup> Kelly alleged that Lukin’s own relief attempt had been unsuccessful because of the delay in it moving out too late, despite the urgency suggested by the intensity of artillery fire that was clearly audible at Ramans Drift. Lukin’s column had marched all night and reached some point “on the hills above Sandfontein.” He made no mention of the German troops, originally been posted across the Ramans Drift/Sandfontein road and Houms River bed to thwart reinforcements. According to Kelly, the Sandfontein battlefield was viewed from afar by the relief column, and was deserted by that stage. Utilising Lukin’s report, Collyer confirmed this latter part of Kelly’s story, stating that the General had made a “distant observation” of the battlefield on the morning of the 27th.<sup>291</sup>

Wakefield pointed out that Kelly’s account had contained several inaccuracies, particularly the presence of the 4th SAMR at the wells, besides the implication that Lukin had possessed sufficient numbers of troops at Ramans Drift to have saved Grant’s force. The ex-Adjutant in a letter published in the Gwelo Times on 19 January 1957, nearly seven years after Kelly had made the original accusations, angrily corrected these and other alleged factual errors. Most of Wakefield’s wrath however, was reserved for the Kelly’s slander of Lukin, and the allegations regarding the conduct of the SAMR riflemen at end of the battle. Wakefield also completely refuted any suggestions that further resistance would have served a purpose, or that the Germans had called for

<sup>289</sup> Orpen, History of the THA, Appendix 12, Muster roll of the Regiment 1904-1926, Kelly served in the THA during 1906-08, 1910-12, 1914-15, and 1922.

<sup>290</sup> Collyer, The Campaign, p.44.

Ungleich, The Defence of GSWA, p.72, quoting from Hennig, Deutsch-Sudwest in Weltkrieg.

<sup>291</sup> Collyer, The Campaign, p.44.

the South Africans to surrender. He reiterated at length the familiar details regarding the complete exhaustion of the men and heavy casualties sustained, and that the lengthy defence of the wells had prevented the numerically stronger German force from overwhelming the rest of "A" Force at the river drifts.

Kelly's account is of course unsubstantiated, and may at best have reflected some of the gossip in THA and military circles that continued over the years. In his angry rebuttal, Wakefield referred Kelly to Collyer's "authoritative book," and was clearly very concerned about protecting the reputations of Lukin, Grant, and the SAMR troops accused of "treachery." Wakefield's strong reaction to Kelly was to "set the record straight." However, his response is interesting, as is the deliberate lodging by either himself, or somebody of the same opinions, with the South African Museum of Military History library, copies of Kelly's letter and the documents pertaining to it, ensuring, the depositor had no hoped, that an answer to the allegations would always be available for future researchers. The sensitivities of the Sandfontein veterans clearly ran very deep, and perhaps the most that can be derived from Kelly's letter, is an endorsement of the existence of a muted, but ongoing controversy, regarding the battle circumstances, and the fact that the events prior to the engagement were never officially investigated, or the issues over culpability satisfactorily resolved. The result was the promotion and circulation of a variety of different stories, and Kelly may have been echoing some of the resentments of comrades, who blamed high-ranking officers such as Lukin for Sandfontein. Rumours would have proliferated about culpability for the defeat, and there would have also been bitterness regarding the UDF deaths and injuries, as well as hardships suffered by the prisoners of war. Some of this was reflected in Corporal Young's short account. Kelly remained a member of the THA until 1922 and would have been privy to the mutterings amongst its members in the years directly after the battle. His details also suggest the confusion of the last moments in the battle, embellished by ill-feeling and myth, as old soldiers like himself, now in their sixties and seventies, needed to rationalise, artificially boost, or make sense out of past disappointments and grievances. Although the truth of Kelly's allegations is questionable, the fact remains that the UDF Sandfontein officers and their scribes remained the self-appointed custodians of the Sandfontein Battle history, an issue that this dissertation attempts to challenge.

We need now to turn finally towards an examination of the Defence Minister, and DHQ's roles, in relation to the orders and communications sent to Lukin and his field commanders before the battle,

and the “A” Force commander’s subsequent decisions that led up to Sandfontein. Our final chapter therefore attempts some explanation of culpability for the Sandfontein defeat, in contrast to previous accounts that are either incomplete or tentative, or shifted the responsibility.

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## CHAPTER 7: SANDFONTEIN: CULPABILITY

### Introduction

If we work from the premise that the disaster at Sandfontein could have been avoided, there remain considerable inadequacies in the secondary source accounts of both the battle and its prior circumstances. Firstly, there was never any realistic analysis of how the soldiers experienced the battle, as was attempted in the previous chapter on new interpretations of the historiography. Secondly, there was no specifically pointed affixing of culpability and such is the intention of this chapter.

In view of the political sensitivities within white politics in 1914 it was understandable that Scott limited his account to the placement and shifting of troops, besides the overall combat details of the Sandfontein battle. Collyer wrote a detailed factual outline of campaign events, and made a tentative attempt at explaining why the 1st SAMR and THA had come to be so effectively trapped and outgunned at Sandfontein. Grant was primarily concerned with his own perspective of the battle course and justifying why he surrendered. These and other sources recounted much regarding the resilience and bravery of the UDF troops; outnumbered ten to one, they withstood an attack for ten hours that included close-range artillery fire, with exacerbating factors being that more than half the defending troops had been without food and sleep since the previous day,<sup>1</sup> suffered grievously from heat and thirst, and according to Collyer and Grant also experienced an ammunition shortage.<sup>2</sup> However, the questions implicit in an accusatory statement written in 1955 by a SAMR survivor, received little attention in these earlier writings, which as the previous chapter contended had effectively controlled the historical record of Sandfontein.

As far as the general public is concerned, the incidents of the Sandfontein tragedy have never been made known. And it may be as well to chronicle a few facts which will go to show that the Government of the day was rashly impolitic in sending a handful

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<sup>1</sup> Collyer, *The Campaign*, p.43.

Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," p.179

<sup>2</sup> Collyer, *The Campaign*, p.43.

of men to hold Sandfontein. It was a critical time on the German border.<sup>3</sup>

Young could not have been alone in his frustrations; for years the Sandfontein controversy received no open investigation, and there were still murmurs of discontent in the early twenties in military circles. A Nongqui article, reporting upon a police squadron's trek in July 1922 during the Bondelswarts' Uprising, remarked the following on the detachment spending a night at the Sandfontein wells:

From Raman's Drift we trekked via Sandfontein where everyone had the opportunity of visiting and inspecting the scene of the debacle in 1914<sup>4</sup>

An obituary written after Lukin's passing away in 1925 gives further inkling of the controversy that Sandfontein had generated:

It was an engagement that easily lent itself to criticism. First, on the grounds that this small detachment should not have been thrust forward into enemy territory, and secondly, that Colonel Grant had shown bad tactics in allowing himself to be pinned down to an action with greatly superior numbers. There was even a suggestion for some time that General Lukin had received orders from Pretoria to make the advance even at the risk of disaster, so that the eyes of the country would be opened to the danger of the situation.<sup>5</sup>

There was justifiable criticism in the same article for the brazen manner in which the 1923 Official History had glossed over Sandfontein by describing virtually nothing of the battle, and rather simply praised "A" Force's officers and men for their devotion to duty. Collyer in his 1937 publication, The Campaign in German South West Africa 1914-1915, exonerated Grant and Lukin and directed his criticism at "DHQ" and its "staff officers," but without directly pinpointing any

<sup>3</sup> Young, Boot and Saddle, pp 160-161.

<sup>4</sup> The Nongqui, September 1922, p.502.

<sup>5</sup> The Cape Argus, 16 December 1925, p.5.

culpable individuals. One needs to therefore begin this analysis of culpability, by examining what these two “official” works said in this regard.

**The Sandfontein defeat: A critique of some of the previous accounts’ interpretations of culpability.**

Once again we need to briefly reiterate the political context against which the Official History and Collyer’s account were written. The Official History, written in 1923, placed a strong emphasis in promoting the honour and efficiency of the UDF, at a time when both this institution’s and the SAP’s fortunes and reputation were on the wane and in need of reassertion. Against a backdrop of rising Afrikaner Nationalism, recent violent industrial strikes, disillusioned veterans, white poverty, unemployment, and general political uncertainty, the Defence Force had on the eve of the Pact Government’s 1924 election victory published their own formal and sanitised account of South African military exploits during the 1914-18 War. In the minds of many of the SAP government’s opponents, the UDF had since its inception in 1912, become synonymous with being the implementation tool of several critical and controversial decisions in the country. Prominent SAP politicians, including Louis Botha and Jan Smuts, had donned uniforms with other prominent party figures during the Afrikaner Rebellion, the 1914-1918 War, and the 1922 Rand Revolt. There occurred a purported blurring between the traditional British Civil Service distinction between party politicians and the government defence agency. Some critics like Lacey suggested that South Africa adopted the Boer Republic approach, where military leaders drew directly from the popular and successful of civil society, and civil-military relations almost fused as one, rather than promulgated along British lines separating the two.<sup>6</sup> It does not follow logically that the UDF was not subordinate to politicians and the Constitution; however, the direct involvement during the 1914-22 period by prominent former Boer Generals such as Botha, Smuts, Coen Brits, and Jaap Van Deventer, unavoidably compromised the Defence Force in the eyes of many SAP opponents. The military had been central in the politically divisive invasion of GSWA, dealing with the Afrikaner Rebellion in 1914, and putting down worker strikes on the Witwatersrand. Military operations were launched against the Namibian Bondelswarts in 1922 while the crushing of the Bulhoek “Israelites” in the same year attracted unfavourable attention from the League of Nations. The government’s ambitions for the full incorporation of SWA into the Union suffered a setback in consequence, giving further impetus to criticism of the SAP by domestic white opponents. Because

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<sup>6</sup> See Lacey, “Platskiet-politiek”

the UDF had also acted decisively during the violent events on the Rand in 1922, the causes and consequences of this unrest contributed to the SAP losing political power in 1924. It was a reality that the UDF had invoked unfavourable perceptions from Afrikaner Nationalists and the white working classes represented by the Labour Party. It was unsurprising therefore that in its official publications, the Defence Force retreated to its laurels, endorsed government policy, and ignored any admission or analysis of what had been unsuccessful or embarrassing during the GSWA Campaign.

Regarding its explanation of culpability for the Sandfontein defeat during the first phase of the GSWA campaign, the Official History, as with other accounts, threw the entire blame upon Maritz and his treasonous activities outside Upington in late September/ early October 1914. The allegation was that his rebellion had freed up considerable German troops and resources for use at Sandfontein, because it ensured there was no immediate threat to the German Colony's eastern border,<sup>7</sup> and statements made to SAMR prisoners by their German captors, published later in The Nongqui, further endorsed this.<sup>8</sup> The Rebellion had been the government's highest priority in late 1914 and early 1915, and in the aftermath of its suppression, a united SAP/UDF front appeared together with a strong condemnation of Maritz. Some of the soldiers' families strongly echoed this, for example, Johanna Kruger of Nylstroom, writing to an injured Sarel Kruger of the SAMR remarked: "We are very indignant at the act of Maritz for such an act is shameful and an abomination in the sight of God."<sup>9</sup>

With the completion of the rest of a highly successful GSWA Campaign in mid-1915, it would have been politically expedient for the SAP to play down the Sandfontein defeat and controversies, detracting as these were from the gloss of final victory. The failures by "A" force along the Orange River border during September-October 1914 would have given political opponents ready ammunition against Smuts, the UDF, and the SAP government. It therefore made sense, as far as the Smuts' government was concerned, to paint as black a picture of Maritz as conceivable, and divert the entire blame for Sandfontein onto him. Considering that his behaviour had been traitorous in the opinions of many from both the Afrikaner and English-speaking white communities, such a projection of sole responsibility was not difficult to achieve, despite muted

<sup>7</sup> Official History, p.14.

Scott, "The Story of Sandfontein," p.179.

Rayner & O'Shaughnessy, How Botha and Smuts won GSW, p.46

<sup>8</sup> The Nongqui, September 1915, p.133.

<sup>9</sup> SANDF, DSD, SAMR, Box 888, Casualty inquiries from Defence No. 2.

mutterings and rumours concerning alternative explanations for the defeat. Lukin, Grant, and the other Sandfontein UDF officers who had endured with such courage at the battle, were “establishment men,” and whatever private feelings they may have had, they were not prepared to break from their clearly understood positions as serving or former military officers, subordinate to civil authorities. Therefore they would not have related radically alternative accounts of the battle's prior circumstances, but accepted the defeat as a “misfortune of war.” This was the very expression conveyed to Lukin by “Pretoria” when the General dug his men in at Goodhouse directly after the battle. It came in response to a communication by Lukin to DHQ suggesting the holding of an inquiry into the Sandfontein defeat.<sup>10</sup>

Smuts and his advisers in Pretoria had in conjunction with an overall first plan to invade GSWA, envisaged an early UDF advance from the drifts towards Warmbad, and this is what was signalled from ministerial level at DHQ on 22-23 September and recorded as such in Collyer's account.<sup>11</sup> It suggested an impatience by the top brass in Pretoria to get to grips with the Germans quickly and secure an early victory, the motive being, this thesis contends, to bolster public confidence in government and the UDF, given the acute domestic political tensions partly caused by the decision to invade GSWA. The Official History is of course silent in this regard and the researcher needs to delve deeper into those clues available.

In accordance with the broader invasion plan, Manie Maritz's “B” Force was only semi-assembled at Upington on the above date, consisting as it did of Citizen Force members who had been called up for a training camp, while “C” Force was intended to land and advance from Luderitz. After deliberate procrastination, Maritz finally announced his rebellion in early October at Vanrooi's Vlei outside the town. However, there must be doubt as to the extent to which his force was capable of rapidly influencing events over one hundred and forty kilometres away at Sandfontein, particularly considering Maritz had no professional soldiers or artillery. Most pertinently, this question never received any attention in the historiography. All of the previous accounts including the Official History, are adamant that Maritz and his men would have made a critical difference in drawing German attention and military resources away from Sandfontein, a contention not shared by the author of this dissertation. Considering the troop and artillery resources available to von Heydebreck by 26 September, both the UDF forces under Maritz and Lukin were no match for the

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<sup>10</sup> SAMMHL, A416, Sandfontein, Battle of, “Unrecorded details of Sandfontein. Some impressions of men who were there.”

<sup>11</sup> Collyer, The Campaign, p.32

Germans. This was so because of the territory expanse between the two South African forces, the long and difficult logistical lines already created between Steinkopf and the river drifts, and the fact that there no clear plan on the Union government's part as to how the invasion would actually proceed in the south. Maritz Maritz was, according to Collyer, signalled by DHQ on the 23rd of September to assist with the anticipated advance by "A" Force on Warmbad. He was requested to divide his men into two groups, with one detachment advancing upon Schuit Drift some eighty miles north-west of Kakamas, while the larger balance would march towards the border in the direction of Ukamus, and this group it was anticipated, would directly cooperate with Lukin.<sup>12</sup> Yet Collyer remarks, quoting from the Joint Commission of Inquiry into the Rebellion, that this had been "to test his loyalty rather than with any hope of a practical result."<sup>13</sup> The telegram confirming Smuts' motivation for "A" Force to move on and occupy Warmbad as quickly as conceivable, translates as follows:

The Minister wants to know if you can move a strong force from Kakamas to Schuitdrift, and take the Upington force to occupy the border in the direction of Ukamus. He believes that you can possibly co-operate in an advance on Warmbad with Lukin.<sup>14</sup>

The obvious question then is that if there were such grave and justifiable suspicions about his loyalty and motives in such a delicate operation, why was Maritz's help even requested, particularly as it involved the movement of troops over considerable distances towards an enemy of unknown strength, and where the rapid deployment of UDF reinforcements was out of the question. As both L'Ange and sixty years before, even the uncritical Rayner asked, why was Maritz, considering his vehemently anti-British and pro-German background, appointed to command such an isolated yet strategically important military zone in the first place?<sup>15</sup> Maritz's first and only command in the UDF was approved in 1913, and it must have been endorsed by Minister of Defence Jan Smuts under whom the rebel served in the Northern Cape during 1900-1902.<sup>16</sup> Was his approval of this

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.34.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Maritz, My Lewe and Strewe, p.140.

<sup>15</sup> L'Ange, Urgent Imperial Service, p.54.

Rayner, & O'Shaughnessy, How Botha and Smuts Conquered GSW, p.49.

<sup>16</sup> Smuts as the responsible minister must have had the final say in Maritz's appointment as the commander of the Northern Cape military district in 1913. It is difficult to judge whether this was to fully embrace the ideals of white reconciliation and integrate into the UDF even the most recalcitrant *bittereinders*, or a favour to an old SA War comrade, or simply to get him out of the way.

appointment actually a further complicating factor that Smuts wished to evade after Sandfontein by declining any official enquiry into the defeat?

The Official History is bluntly direct in its portrayal of Maritz's treachery as being the prime factor behind the Sandfontein defeat. It contends that the huge desert expanse made it "unlikely," "the enemy could deal a crushing blow to either of the three Union forces"<sup>17</sup> However this supposedly satisfactory deployment was "suddenly and gravely deranged by the Government obtaining information that the force under Maritz was on the verge of deserting to join the enemy."<sup>18</sup> Maritz had responded to Smuts' orders by suggesting that his troops were too inexperienced and ill-equipped to assist in the government's plans, and that he was personally unwilling to be part of an invasion force into GSWA.<sup>19</sup> Although Maritz had not yet formally declared his rebellion, he had harboured every intention of doing so once the correct circumstances transpired, and already secretly colluded with the Germans before the war.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, a critical feature of the initial plan drawn up at the 21 August meeting to invade GSWA was entrusted to an officer of uncertain loyalties. If we place the entire blame for Sandfontein onto Maritz, as the Official History and other accounts did, then culpability must actually rather lie with the men at that meeting, if they were aware of the Afrikaner rebel's demeanour.<sup>21</sup> They failed to ensure the despatch of reliable troops under a trustworthy commander for deployment in the Upington district. The bulk of Maritz's men were Afrikaners drawn from the immediate vicinity; many were republican minded with pro-German sympathies, and considering his formidable SA War reputation, strongly under Maritz's influence.

Communications passed in the weeks after the 21 August meeting between DHQ, Lukin and Maritz, conclusively confirmed the latter officer's unreliability for any significant role in a military operation against the Germans. According to Collyer, Lukin had contacted Maritz before "A" Force's occupation of the Orange River drifts, "asking (him) to co-operate by engaging his share of the enemy forces." Maritz had responded to the effect that "B" Force was not yet in a sufficiently organised state and later suspiciously requested Lukin to inform him of "A" Force's anticipated

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<sup>17</sup> Official History, p.14.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Collyer, The Campaign, p.34, quoting from the Joint Commission of Inquiry into the Rebellion, p.17.

<sup>20</sup> Maritz, My Lewa en Strewa, pp 62-64..

<sup>21</sup> See Collyer, The Campaign, p.27. On 21 August 1914, two days after the first press report on the German Nakob "koppie occupation," a meeting occurred at DHQ to plan the GSWA invasion. Attending were Smuts as the Minister of Defence, Brigadier-Generals Beyers and Lukin, Colonels P.S. Beves, Sir Duncan McKenzie, and Colonel P.C.B. Skinner, and Sir William Hoy, the General Manager of the Railways. (See Collyer, The Campaign, p 27.)

future actions.<sup>22</sup> Lukin who was in regular contact with DHQ, must, or should have, expressed to Smuts his concerns about Maritz. As already mentioned, "Pretoria" had telegraphed Maritz on 23 September "to test his loyalty," and was rebuffed by the rebel, yet Lukin was still instructed to proceed with a risky offensive operation in German territory despite clear evidence that no assistance would be forthcoming from Maritz's "B" Force, whatever impact such co-operation may have had. It is at this point that the Official History's arguments start to display flaws which are the consequence of the broader political context against which it was written, as outlined above; a written communication dated 18 September reads as follows:

Your 394 of yesterday.

Do not withdraw your border posts as Minister considers these to be important for observation but at the same time fully realises difficulty and dangerous duties at present being undertaken stop Object these posts to gain information and they should if possible avoid fighting falling back before superior numbers and generally carrying out duties of advanced outposts stop First duty of these posts is to ensure earliest possible notification our forces of any threatening move by enemy.<sup>23</sup>

The text concludes, "Gen. Lukin c/o Army Post Office, " and the implication of this communication is that it came directly via Lukin's immediate superior, the Minister of Defence at DHQ. It provides insight into Smuts' thinking, as it must be seen in conjunction with a later urgently telegraphed request from DHQ to Lukin on about 22 September, as reported by Collyer, ordering him to advance "A" Force on Warmbad as soon as possible. The Official History sums up these pressing directives in the following terms:

While the Government was as rapidly as possible mobilising other forces, the force under General Lukin on the Orange River had chiefly to bear the additional strain, and, to take pressure off Colonel Beves at Luderitz Bay, Headquarters had to request high-pressure to the verge of self-sacrifice on the part of General

<sup>22</sup> Collyer, The Campaign, pp 36-37.

<sup>23</sup> SANDF, DSD, GSWA, WW1, Box 15, SAMK Proceeding to GSWA via Port Nolloth 1914-15.

Lukin, to which he most loyally responded. An incident of this period was the unfavourable action at Sandfontein.<sup>24</sup>

Little wonder then that Lukin may well have been somewhat confused. What becomes increasingly apparent is the complete avoidance by the Official History of any suggestion that the Defence Minister and members of DHQ Staff failed to adequately plan operations on the southern GSWA border. By lavishing praise upon Lukin and his men for their resilience, the Official History authors obfuscated Smuts' and DHQ's mistakes. This point was not even lost on Collyer who writing some fourteen years after the appearance of the Official History remarked dryly on the above quote:

These are extravagant words to describe orders from superior authority to a soldier accustomed throughout a long professional career to obey such commands.<sup>25</sup>

The Cape Argus in its eulogy for the deceased Lukin endorsed the point made about ill-considered judgement at ministerial level even further:

The official history deals with the episode very unsatisfactorily and throws no light on the bare facts as commonly known. A military critic of history thus wrote on the point: 'What has never been made clear is how it came about that this small detachment advanced into the blue, right into enemy country, where the enemy was free to concentrate a considerable proportion of its strength on the invaders...It would be more to the point if copies of the orders which Col. Grant had received when sent out from Ramans Drift were published in the history. The phrasing of the passage in the history dealing with Sandfontein clearly implies General Lukin himself was in no way to blame. Rumour at the time had it that orders from much higher up in the scale of command prompted the hazardous advance.'<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Official History, p.14.

<sup>25</sup> Collyer, The Campaign, p.32.

<sup>26</sup> The Cape Argus, 16 December 1925, p.5.

We need now to refer to three accounts contained within a document located in the SA Museum of Military History library, namely, "Unrecorded details of Sandfontein - Some impressions of men who were there."<sup>27</sup> This undated and anonymous document quotes and was written in reaction to the above Cape Argus obituary. It is not clear exactly who the above mentioned "military critic" was, and despite the obituary writer's purpose being a record and celebration of Lukin's life and military contributions over forty-four years, it dwelt at length upon the circumstances of Sandfontein, demonstrating again the extent of the unresolved controversy. The concern of this document was to endorse the complete exoneration of Lukin from any blame, by suggesting his tactical handling of "A" Force after Sandfontein actually ensured that his entire command was not trapped and defeated, along with the possible capture of Steinkopf and Port Nolloth. There would have been the danger, so the writer hypothesised, of disastrous consequences if Lukin had originally advanced his entire SAMR brigade to Sandfontein, resulting in the possible capture of the entire fighting arm of the UDF Permanent Force. This would have had very serious consequences for the government, faced as they were at the time with the Afrikaner Rebellion, with many Afrikaners uncertain which side to choose. The document was written, or so it states, by "two correspondents (who) give their impressions of the Sandfontein disaster." The use of the personal pronoun "we" in description of the UDF occupation of Ramans Drift on 14 September 1914, suggests that one or both of the anonymous writers were 4th SAMR members.

Accurately dating this document is an imprecise exercise, but the most obvious would be around the time of the Lukin's death, 16 December 1925, because the above obituary had appeared "recently" according to the unknown authors, while there is reference to "the late General-then Colonel- F.S. Dawson," who had died in 1920. There is also mention of a "Captain (now Colonel) A. Hay, Royal Horse Artillery," who had been one of the officers that submitted a report in the field to Lukin shortly before the Sandfontein battle, stating the position was untenable for defence against a superior force with artillery.<sup>28</sup> Given that a British officer could have easily risen during the war from captain to colonel, and that Hay was still serving at the time of this article's writing, a period of ten to fifteen years from 1914, it seems reasonable to place the document being produced somewhere during the mid-1920s.

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<sup>27</sup> SAMMHL, A416, Sandfontein, Battle of, document entitled "Unrecorded details of Sandfontein."

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

The document further noted that despite DHQ being informed that Sandfontein was a poor position to defend, and that reserve supplies and troops were still at Steinkopf, Lukin was instructed to occupy the wells, and Maritz's force would enter from their point of mobilisation two hundred kilometres away, and also advance upon the same objective. The document also confirmed that all operations on the border were being monitored and controlled from Pretoria. This thesis has shown that the Defence Minister had pressed Lukin to make a forward advance into southern GSWA, and it is contended that this directive eventually encompassed the unsuccessful defence of Sandfontein, despite inadequate assessments of German troop strengths in the vicinity, or appropriate attention given to those reports which suggested real limitations regarding the position's defensibility.

Collyer's 1937 publication on the GSWA Campaign was considered the authoritative work by generations of veterans and South African military writers, but he would have been cautious to avoid linking direct culpability for the Sandfontein defeat with Smuts. Collyer was the product of an old English family and public school and had immigrated as a young man to the Cape Colony after failing to obtain admission into the Indian Civil Service.<sup>29</sup> He joined the CMR as a trooper in 1880<sup>30</sup> and by 1912 had become the first commandant of the Military College, founded to train the first officers of the newly established UDF.<sup>31</sup> In that same year the College held a six month course for fifty men drawn equally from British and Afrikaner backgrounds, to be trained collectively as the nucleus of an officer corps for the UDF, and also assisting the facilitation of white reconciliation. The students included several future 1914 rebels including Beyers, Kemp, Pienaar, and Maritz. Collyer had accompanied Louis Botha as his Chief of Staff during the Rebellion and the GSWA campaign. Thereafter he had served Smuts in the same capacity in German East Africa where he wrote a similar campaign history.<sup>32</sup> In short, Collyer devoted his life to his adopted country and for much of this a loyal servant of Smuts.

Collyer had also during his career been party to the inner circle of the most prominent government and military figures and this would have done much to shape his loyalties. It was inconceivable that this devoted former soldier and civil servant would have ever delivered personalised criticism to a politician as highly placed as Smuts, who by 1937 was Deputy Prime Minister to Hertzog in the United Party government. Besides his lengthy shared military experiences with Smuts, Collyer would have supported white reconciliation, and certainly refrained from public criticism of as

<sup>29</sup> Van der Byl, *From Playgrounds to Battlefields*, p.168.

<sup>30</sup> Uys, I., *South African Military Who's Who*, p.48.

<sup>31</sup> Van der Byl, *From Playgrounds to Battlefields*, p.168.

<sup>32</sup> Collyer, J.J., *The South Africans with General Smuts in German East Africa*, Pretoria, 1941.

eminent a proponent as the Defence Minister. Collyer therefore aimed his accusations of responsibility for Sandfontein at “DHQ,” unnamed staff officers, and Maritz, but was silent regarding the culpability of the political defence head, or the two most prominent field commanders namely Lukin and Grant. Collyer was concerned with documenting a textbook covering the whole of a highly successful campaign. He did not intend to conduct too thorough an investigation into an issue that would still have been contentious, given that most of the individuals involved were alive in 1937, and much of the volatile 1914 political context remained relevant in late 1930s white South African politics.

Utilising reports by Grant, Welby, and Lukin, Collyer’s central argument rested upon the question of why Sandfontein was occupied at all if the position had been deemed untenable for defence. Lt-Cols Berrange, Dawson, and Elliot confirmed it was essential the surrounding heights were also garrisoned, a point on which Welby had concurred and explained as such to Lukin telephonically early on the morning of 25 September.<sup>33</sup> An inspection of the battle site coupled with the details of the troops and equipment available to Lukin, makes it clear that such an arrangement would have been difficult to achieve satisfactorily.<sup>34</sup> As was mentioned in Chapter Five, Berrange had also informed Lukin via a telegram on 16 September of his view that Sandfontein was “well-fortified,” suggested its immediate occupation, and provided a brief plan to achieve this, basing his information on the report of the GSWA Afrikaner guide Griffenberg. It rested with Lukin as the senior field officer to give his assent and the first SAMR troops moved to camp at the wells on 19 September. Although the General only arrived at Ramans Drift on 24 September he had been in field telephone contact with his squadron commanders for several days.<sup>35</sup> There had been the time and means for him to weigh up the decision, badgered as he was by DHQ for a forward advance.

Collyer refers with disapproval to there being between 19 and 24 September no proper effort made to construct more sangars.<sup>36</sup> Here the responsibility must have rested with Capt King, the senior officer at Sandfontein until his relief by Welby on 24 September. However, the position had already been viewed as untenable and no amount or improved sangars could have prevented the defeat of Grant’s Force. Welby did order the construction of additional sangars,<sup>37</sup> probably in

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>34</sup> Personal inspections of the battlefield. There are numerous heights which surround and dwarf the Sandfontein koppie and wells. Lukin simply did not have the resources to properly defend the position.

<sup>35</sup> Collyer, *The Campaign*, p.39.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.38.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

response to German troop movements towards Houms Drift being reported at about 4 pm, and the anticipated increase in the numbers of defenders. Welby had apparently taken other steps to try and ensure an improved defence by occupying high ground to the east and south east, which his report states he considered “the key to the whole position”. He also placed troops to the west and northwest of the koppie,<sup>38</sup> suggesting that the decision had already been made to defend the position once it was clear reinforcements under Grant would be dispatched. Regarding this decision to contest the position, Collyer states:

in the circumstances the occupation of Sandfontein must be judged permissible if the Force Commander (Lukin) had reason to suppose it to be tenable.

he appears to have been assured that it was by someone in whom he placed confidence.<sup>39</sup>

There is no attempt by Collyer to suggest who this officer(s) may have been. However, there were only the regiment and squadron commanders mentioned throughout this dissertation, with whom Lukin as the senior officer should have regularly conferred. Collyer is saying by implication that Lukin made a mistake but was ill-advised by subordinates. Lukin in his report quoted by Collyer explains his reasons for occupying the position as follows:

It was an important point on the line of advance contiguous to and therefore commanding the recognised roads from Warmbad to Ramansdrift and Houms Drift. It embraced the principal water holes between the above-mentioned points. Its occupation would form a bar to the enemy's reconnaissance patrols and consequently a screen to the concentration of additional troops on the line Gudous-Raman's Drift-Houms Drift. It was in telephonic communication with Ramans Drift and at a distance in which it could be quickly reinforced or from which a small

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.39.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.45.

force could quickly retire in the face of greatly superior numbers.<sup>40</sup>

Circumstances were to prove Lukin substantially wrong regarding the assessments contained in his last sentence. He goes on to describe the intention to occupy Sandfontein as:

rather with a view to establishing an outpost there than with the object of obtaining a permanent footing, though the latter would be effected in the absence of powerful aggressive action by the enemy.<sup>41</sup>

Unfortunately the Germans did attack the position in force, and successfully for the reasons elaborated upon at length in this thesis: The impatience of the Defence Minister and his “forward policy,” the superior manoeuvring of the German troops into battle by von Heydebreck, the inadequate intelligence reports and poor use of those that existed, the shambolic logistical “stretch” from Port Nolloth through Steinkopf to the river drifts, and finally the decisions made by Lukin who advised by his field commanders had to respond appropriately to DHQ’s imperatives to penetrate the German colony. There is a feeling in Lukin’s report that although he made mistakes, as an honourable and loyal senior civil servant, he absorbed all the implied blame, a good portion of which should have gone higher.

There was sufficient reason to establish an outpost at Sandfontein, except that its members should have been instructed to retreat if faced by a large German force, just as the party of German troops had quickly retreated at the advance of the detachments from the 4th and 5th SAMR on 19 September. But the question still remains as to who had given the Lukin the idea that the position was tenable, and here Collyer remains silent, except to say: “The point should have been determined for senior officers were on the spot at the two drifts long enough to have cleared the matter up.”<sup>42</sup> Yet if all the officers had by Collyer’s own admission rejected the idea of holding the wells, and if this was a unanimous view communicated to Lukin, it was he who ordered Grant and his detachment up as reinforcements without any proper knowledge at all of the German troop strengths already present in the vicinity. Collyer exclaims that, “the decision to hold Sandfontein

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.46.

itself must be judged to have been a mistake.”<sup>43</sup> What then motivated Lukin to ignore the advice of his field subordinates? Did the pressure from DHQ and ministerial level to advance UDF troops into German territory effectively obliterate the opinions of Lukin’s officers, as the General tried to place his limited resources according to his own considered response regarding what Smuts appeared to expect? It is difficult to see how experienced soldiers would have committed themselves to such a crass risk without higher political intervention.

Using Lukin’s report, Collyer convincingly explains that little could have been achieved militarily by initially occupying Warmbad with the restricted troop numbers available, while the rest of “A” Force remaining in defensive positions at the drifts would have been even more vulnerable to attack with their already long line of communication considerably extended into German territory.<sup>44</sup> The DHQ “forward policy” quoted by Collyer, was not precisely defined. However, Lukin clearly understood it as an advance into GSWA, starting with Warmbad. The “Ministers” telegraphed to Lukin, “that the movement of supplies to Sandfontein would be hurried on so that a move to Warmbad would not be delayed,” after the General had stated that three weeks would be necessary to accumulate sufficient supplies on the river line before “A” Force could advance with confidence. The “Ministers” response was that they “hoped that this movement of supplies to Sandfontein would be hurried on so that a move to Warmbad would not be delayed.”<sup>45</sup> The responsibility for the battle occurring, therefore lay largely with the Minister of Defence, but also with Lukin, who as the responsible officer could have declined to reinforce Sandfontein immediately because of his own field appreciation, and duly informed Smuts as such. Collyer refrained from placing culpability on either men or any of the other officers. Instead he displaced his wrath on unknown staff officers at DHQ, whom he may well have trained himself, and had failed to telegraph information which had reached Pretoria on 24 September “from two sources,” concerning large numbers of German troops being entrained south to Kalkfontein.<sup>46</sup> Lukin received this by post at Goodhouse on 7 October and complained bitterly in his report that: “A clearer appreciation of the situation would have resulted and the outpost at Sandfontein withdrawn in ample time.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.47.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.32.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.48.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

## Summary

It remains a moot point whether Lukin would actually have been so bold as to respond to Smuts by virtually withdrawing from Sandfontein, and how thereafter would have coped with the relentless “forward policy” imperatives of DHQ, and not felt further pressured to implement the policy. In hindsight and defeat he was more able to report accurately what he would liked to have done, but remained silent regarding whether he, as the “A” Force leader could not have given the orders earlier, that would have prevented the Sandfontein defeat. The workings of military hierarchy, the internal white political conflicts in the Union, and the writings of the 1923 Official History and Collyer, suggest the larger culpability must still lie with the Minister of Defence and his impatience in pushing Lukin forward. Thereafter, we must consider the reality that Lukin did not fully use his own powers and initiative as field commander, the bungling of staff officers at DHQ, and the various subordinate officers in “A” Force, who did not press strongly enough their opinions on the Sandfontein position’s suitability for defence. The rest of culpability lies with the long list of issues regularly mentioned in this dissertation regarding intelligence and logistical organisation. At a deeper level culpability for the Sandfontein defeat appears to lie within the context of broader white politics in South Africa at the time, and a political imperative to push ahead quickly with the invasion of GSWA, and reassure white public opinion that the government was in control. Therefore, we must point to Smuts as responsible minister, despite the documents consulted not specifically naming him as ordering the defence of the wells. The inferences in accounts and archival material consulted seem clear in this regard.

However, Collyer, Grant and the other officers in late middle age and retirement by 1936-37 would not have aired publicly such views, nor been so inclined. Professional habits, the political position of Smuts, their broader support of government policy, and perhaps their own sense of humility shaped by years of eventful military careers would have tempered any outspokenness, or attempts to reopen an old controversy. One could speculate further as to what the German intentions were for moving such large numbers of their troop strength south at such short notice. Was their hope to overwhelm the whole of Lukin's Brigade at the drifts as they advanced? Did the Sandfontein occupation and reinforcement change their plans and spare the rest of Lukin's force from disaster, as was suggested in later years by his supporters? Did the Germans simply hope to draw in and defeat a sizable UDF force, and by doing so temporarily stem any further threat from the south, possibly giving further encouragement to the Afrikaner Rebellion?

Within the complexity of the duty the UDF soldiers were ordered to perform in the difficult circumstances thrust upon them on the Orange River border in September 1914, it would be reasonable to allow them all a generous amount of understanding. Nearly ninety years later it would be more useful to rather reflect with respect on the men who endured, fought, and for some gave up their lives, during a long forgotten battle at Sandfontein.

## CONCLUSION

Previous South African accounts of the battle of Sandfontein elaborated specifically upon the resilience of the UDF defenders before their surrender, while German writings demonstrate that the troops under von Heydebeck were better handled than the Union authors had chosen to mention. German sources also provide a more balanced picture of how the fight developed. The Official History, Scott, Rayner & O'Shaunessy, Adler, Collyer, and others, evidently did not consult German works, or if they did, very superficially. A number of South African campaign histories written in the afterglow of the eventual UDF victory in 1915, chose not even to include the GSWA invasion's first phase and Sandfontein. This endorsed the official government line of giving the battle minimal attention, and rather highlighting what was successful during the post-rebellion invasion and defeat of the German forces in the former colony. Those writings that did survey the September 1914 Orange River GSWA border events, did not seek to analyse the soldiers battle experiences or critically place culpability on why the Sandfontein battle occurred. Amongst other components within this dissertation's attempt to reappraisal the GSWA campaign first phase, there has been a considerable effort to both scrutinise and utilise these earlier writings, juxtaposing them with a thorough investigation of the battlefield's physical terrain, and an appreciation of the methodology behind theoretical military history writings penned long after Sandfontein with no conceivable link to the emotions of events in South Africa in 1914, or its white politics during the 1920's and 1930's. This author has concluded that neither the battle events, nor its prior circumstances, nor the UDF participants, received an historical record that was determined to distance itself from the broader political context, or portray Sandfontein as the men experienced it. This dissertation therefore set out to begin the process of re-interpreting events that have long disappeared from contemporary historical interest, based upon the contention that South African First World War military history requires a re-examination regarding its reliance on the explicit credibility of time-honoured sources.

The South African accounts between 1915 and 1937, while indispensable as records, were incontestably determined to portray the UDF's in the best possible light, and not

invoke any controversy around the GSWA campaign's first phase regarding the Sandfontein battle. Neither did their authors have any determined interest to vividly portray the battle horror, or attempt to quantify the soldier's perspective of how they endured the hell of Sandfontein, or explore when the breaking points came that eventually prompted the garrison's surrender. They appeared within a specific political context that directed their primary aim of enhancing the military's image, and given the realities of white political disputes between the SAP and its opponents, the authors of the South African historiography on Sandfontein, promoting the reputation of the Botha/Smuts government too. These authors were not detached in their evaluation of the UDF's operations on the Orange River border, being official reports or articles/chapter couched for official publications, they were inherently limited. In consequence they neglected any meaningful coverage of the soldiers viewpoints, and virtually ignoring the experiences of the black participants. This thesis has tried to make an original contribution by correcting some of the above, and through an examination of Sandfontein's historiography, locating these writings more accurately within the white political struggles of the day.

With a more academic analysis of Sandfontein, and with the assistance of social-psychological studies not existent in Collyer's time, more detail of the "inner nature of battle" is revealed in chapters five and six regarding Sandfontein. This is particularly emphasised by the analysis of the bombardment horror from the German mountain guns in the late afternoon, and conditions wrought upon the koppie, compared with the consistent vulnerability of human beings whose emotions and reactions have been accurately quantified in similar battle situations. The battle of Sandfontein developed as a terrifying ordeal for the UDF men, as different points during it remorselessly highlighted their plight. The most important of these stages were: the surprise and extent of the German attack in the morning which had revealed the folly of reinforcing and attempting to hold the position, and the poor judgement of the UDF field commanders; the collapse of the THA's resistance; the deliberate killing of the SAMR/THA animals by the Germans, the grandstand view of Lt Northway's death before the entire garrison, the German prevention of SAMR relief attempts, the impotent leadership and wounding of Lt-Col Grant, the lack of medical assistance, the helplessness of the wounded, and the final concentrated shelling of the

koppie. Flight from Sandfontein was not a plausible option in terms of the accepted norms of military behaviour, or the culturally approved expectations of how professional soldiers would react to imminent destruction or defeat. There was also very little guarantee that desertion would have ensured survival for the UDF men, considering that they were facing a mounted enemy who covered the koppie from every angle, were without water, and lay some distance from their comrades at the river. The choice of the men at Sandfontein was therefore to either fight on or surrender. In this sense, the SAMR and THA's esprit de corps conditioning was the only mode of behaviour to fall back upon. Put very broadly, this is what sustained the men for as long as they fought, however it required a closer examination, which the older accounts never provided.

Because of his location, Grant had been unable to command during the day, while the battle became an artillery duel that by midday was unchallenged from the UDF position. The German commander was reluctant to expend scarce manpower in a frontal assault, in contrast to conventional training and similar events in Europe where huge casualties occurred as a matter of course. The Nama Uprising experiences had conditioned the Germans to avoid frontal attacks on strong points, and artillery, researched as the weapon most feared by soldiers in modern conventional war was the instrument that ensured victory. Directly after the summit received specific targeting by the mountain guns, Grant surrendered the position, confusing his second in command Welby who momentarily questioned the merit of this decision. That this issue re-emerged when Collyer requested information for his book was indicative of some of the tensions Sandfontein had caused. The tone of all the correspondence between the old comrades and loyal civil servants twenty-five years later, showed nothing controversial about the battle would appear through these veterans. Although Collyer did suggest that culpability for the battle largely with DHQ Staff officers bunglings, he elaborated little on any individuals, particularly those in prominent roles referred to regularly in his work. Smuts, Lukin, and Grant's positions and responsibilities had been respectively, the overall GSWA invasion policy and strategic direction, the field command of "A" Force, and the senior officer at Sandfontein. This thesis concludes after weighing that evidence surveyed that the former two men should have accepted part of the blame for the engagement occurring.

Because the events of the GSWA first phase were either ignored or obscured, there were mutterings of discontent in the following years from veterans as to why the battle occurred, and revived in this thesis through several sources. Sandfontein received little attention at government or military level, and this was shown most bluntly by the brushing aside of Lukin's suggestion for the holding of a formal inquiry. In the wake of the rest of the campaign, the tumultuous events of the Great War, and within South Africa after 1914, Sandfontein drifted from collective public memory as a forgotten failure that had no consequence on the eventual result of the GSWA conquest by the Union government. While the SAP government in the 1920's felt politically constrained to protect the UDF, old comrades like Grant, Scott, Adler, Lukin, the Nongqui writers, the Official History, journalists like Rayner and O'Shaughnessy, and most significantly during the late 1930's, Collyer, effectively collaborated by controlled the Sandfontein public record. As battle veterans, campaign participants, accredited writers who accompanying the troops, or "official historians," their authority was beyond reproach for decades by anybody researching South African military history. This occurred despite the obfuscation of events by the Official History, the omissions in Collyer's writings, and the tone and content of Nongqui articles, military and private correspondence and documents, All lauded the UDF soldiers for their stand, but ignored the controversies preferring to push them from public view. They did not fit into the South African political context in the years following the First World War. As this research discovered, even a precise record of casualties amongst both black and white UDF members was difficult to ascertain through secondary and archival resources not ever examined methodically or corrected, indicative once again of how Sandfontein "disappeared." The re-burial of the UDF white fallen occurred eight years after the battle but without the same honour arranged for their dead black comrades. This thesis has attempted to tell at least part of this forgotten component, namely the services of these men whose role in Lukin's force was fundamental to its operation. They too endured the battle of Sandfontein and need their history restored.

If Smuts and Lukin had been more accepting of the strategic limitations and operational capabilities of "A" Force during late September 1914, the avoidance of

the defeat like Sandfontein would have been far more plausible. However, for domestic reasons it suited the SAP government to begin the GSWA campaign quickly thereby drawing it was hoped, the electorate together and countering the acute political dissention between whites. The events at Nakob, so publicised in the press, bolstered the immediate formulation of a GSWA invasion plan. The hurried despatch of "A" Force who faced arguably the most difficult of the tasks delegated to the three participant UDF groups, exacerbated the uneven arrival of Lukin's command at the border, and its premature crossing into German territory on 14 September. Despite documented logistical inadequacies, GSWA was invaded before Lukin's full brigade strength and supplies were anywhere near the river. The SAMR troops, mostly tough ex-frontier mounted policemen, mobilized enthusiastically, but with little real preparation or experience as soldiers for a conventional war. They had to conduct a brigade-sized operation against a neighbouring colony, defended by a determined and professional enemy well acquainted with fighting in the south. The inadequacies of initial intelligence gathering reconnaissance, and the insufficient outposts established at Sandfontein before the battle are evidence of such inexperience and oversights.

The reinforcement of Sandfontein with Grant's force was the ultimate decision of the pressurised and loyal Lukin who responded as he believed fit to the urgent directives from DHQ, effectively Smuts, for a rapid forward advance towards Warmbad. However, the additional garrisoning of Sandfontein also occurred without a proper appraisal of intelligence regarding German military strength in the south, or a reasonable hearing given to the opinions of field officers concerned about the position's defensibility. Smuts and DHQ erred very significantly in persisting with the services of a clearly reluctant senior field commander, namely Maritz, a bluntly forthright Afrikaner rebel who was intended by military commanders to assist Lukin as an integral part of the invasion plan. Traitorous as Maritz conduct was it is supremely ironic that the secondary accounts blamed him so vehemently for not behaving any differently from that expected of the anti-British and Afrikaner republican's consistently stated beliefs. This thesis also concludes, in contrast to the 1915-37 writings, that it was unlikely that had Maritz cooperated with Lukin, defeat at Sandfontein would have been prevented considering the distance of the site from the eastern GSWA borders, and weakness of "B" Force in artillery. The Germans had

more than enough men and field guns to defeat Grant's force and Maritz together, and the latter could have been contained on the Gordonia border. For all his treachery, Maritz became a welcome red herring for both the UDF and government to displace culpability.

The cultural gap between Lukin's almost exclusively British colonial orientated SAMR command compared with Maritz and his Afrikaner rebels, also assisted the easier diversion of responsibility for Sandfontein away from Smuts, the SAP government, DHQ, and Lukin. The largely English-speaking UDF staff with its British colonial culture and ethos accepted without question that Maritz was the chief culprit, and that was the view carried in the press, and thereafter further whipping up the pro-government public opinion. The full culpability being deflected to Maritz appeared even more plausible because of the particular dislike the rebel had evoked amongst government supporters by rebelling while still a Defence Force member, and his handing over of government troops into German captivity. However, the condemnation of Maritz treachery, however justified, also served to mask the failure of Smuts and DHQ in moving with such haste to direct an invasion, and Lukin's failure to reassess the wisdom of occupying and reinforcing Sandfontein, without properly considering his SAMR brigade's capability while on the Orange River border, or German military strength and intentions. Maritz main concern was fermenting rebellion in the Northern Cape, not assisting the Germans in repelling a Union invasion, and he received from the SAP and military unsought credit for causing the Sandfontein defeat.

Still requiring examination is the documentation concerning the discussions of the SAP cabinet during the crucial weeks of August to September 1914. This dissertation, setting out initially as an account of the South African soldier's experiences in the GSWA campaign, has in terms of primary documents, largely based itself on military orientated sources. Further investigation on archival government documentation for the period is necessary to strengthen the argument that the "pushing" of Lukin was as deliberate as suggested by those sources examined, and nothing in this regard was forthcoming in the Smuts papers examined in the UCT library. Extensive examination is also necessary of other archival documents on the whole South African military

invasion of GSWA in 1914-15, to begin the task of compiling a fully comprehensive academic military history compatible with the plethora of extensively researched accounts published overseas on the First World War, and thereby bringing the South African military writing of this period up to date. The historiography of the GSWA campaign and that of Sandfontein in particular, has never been closely scrutinised regarding the Union government's decision to invade. Neither has it been challenged or reinterpreted regarding a more realistic portrayal of the UDF soldiers experience during the invasion. There had been no attempt before this dissertation to begin working through the archival materials in several repositories in South Africa and Namibia, since the "official historians," in accordance to with their own purposes, constructed their own accounts all those years ago. This attempt to analyse the circumstances of the battle in detail with the assistance of more modern methods of military history, brings the 1914 UDF soldiers endurance, before and during the Sandfontein battle, more plausibly and vividly to the reader, setting up this author hopes, a bridgehead towards the completion of a thorough and comprehensive GSWA campaign history.

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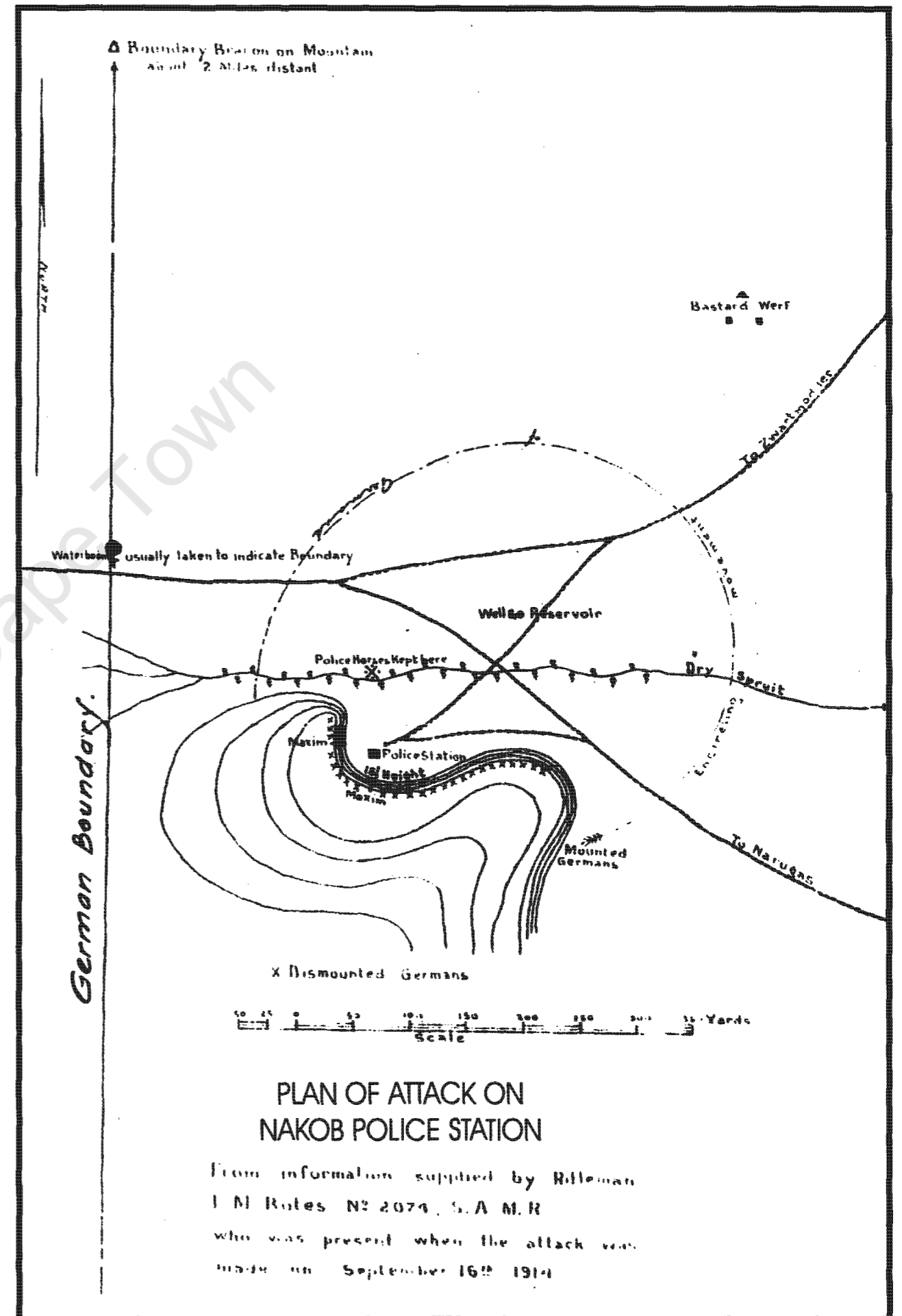
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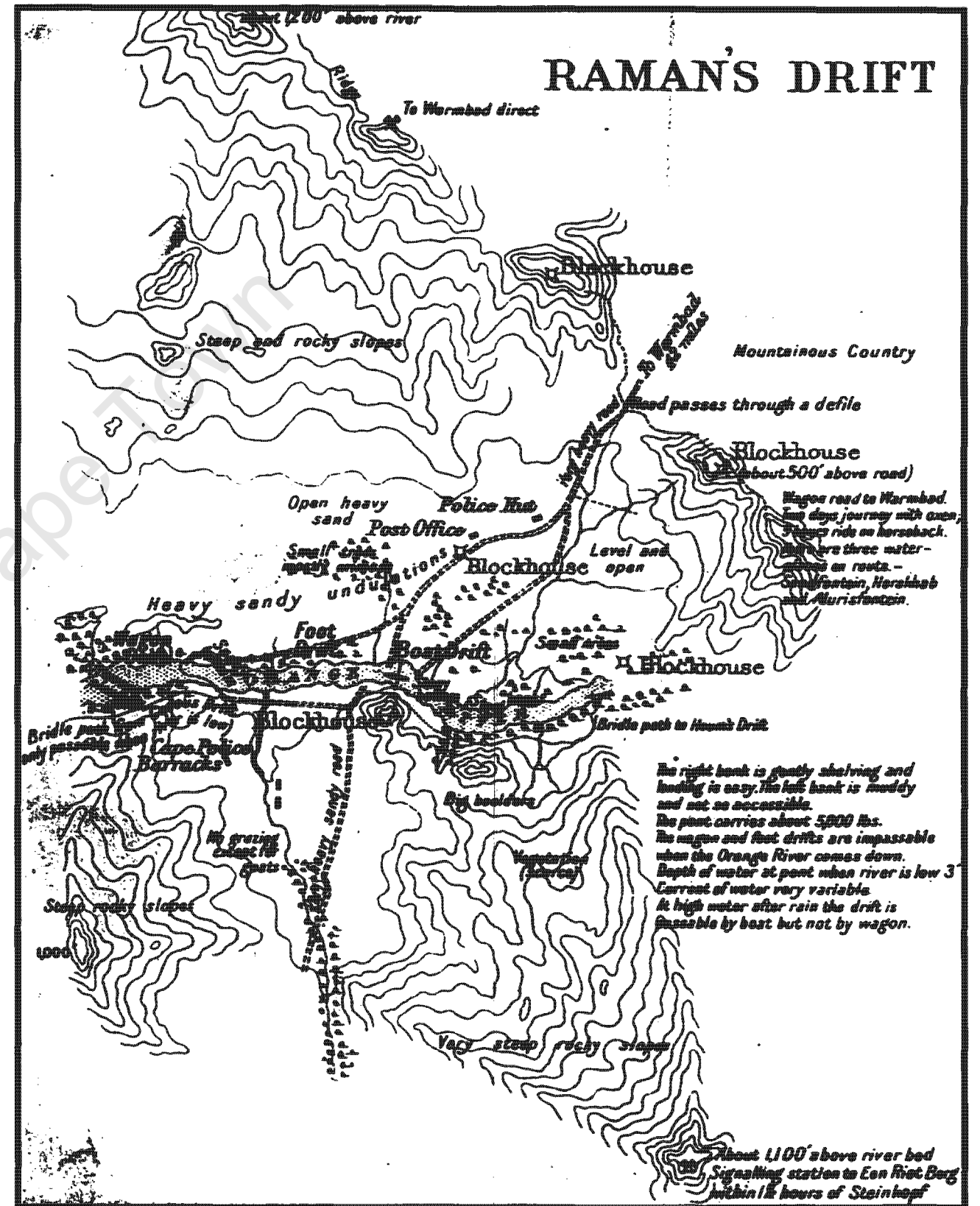
# MAPS & PHOTOGRAPHS

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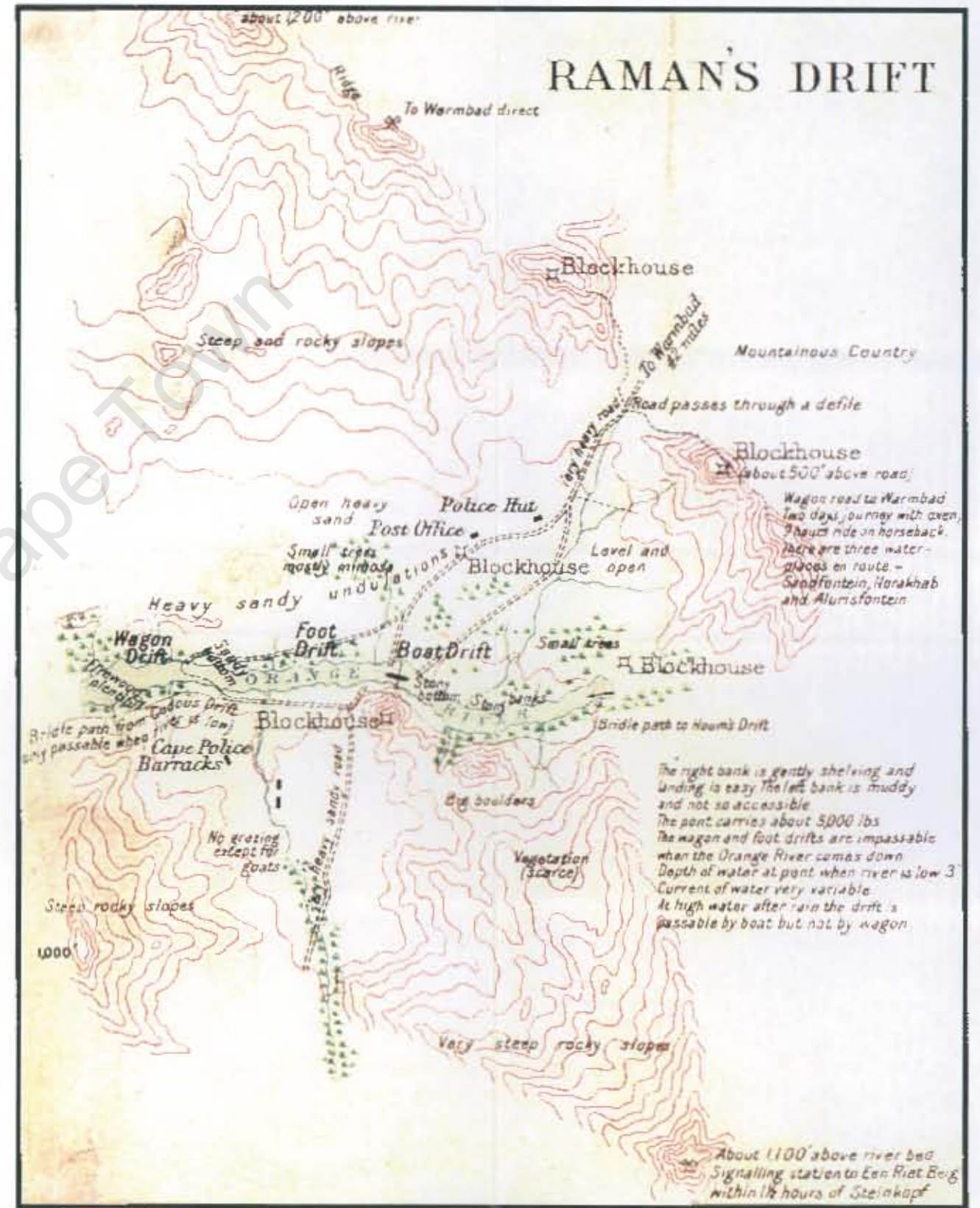




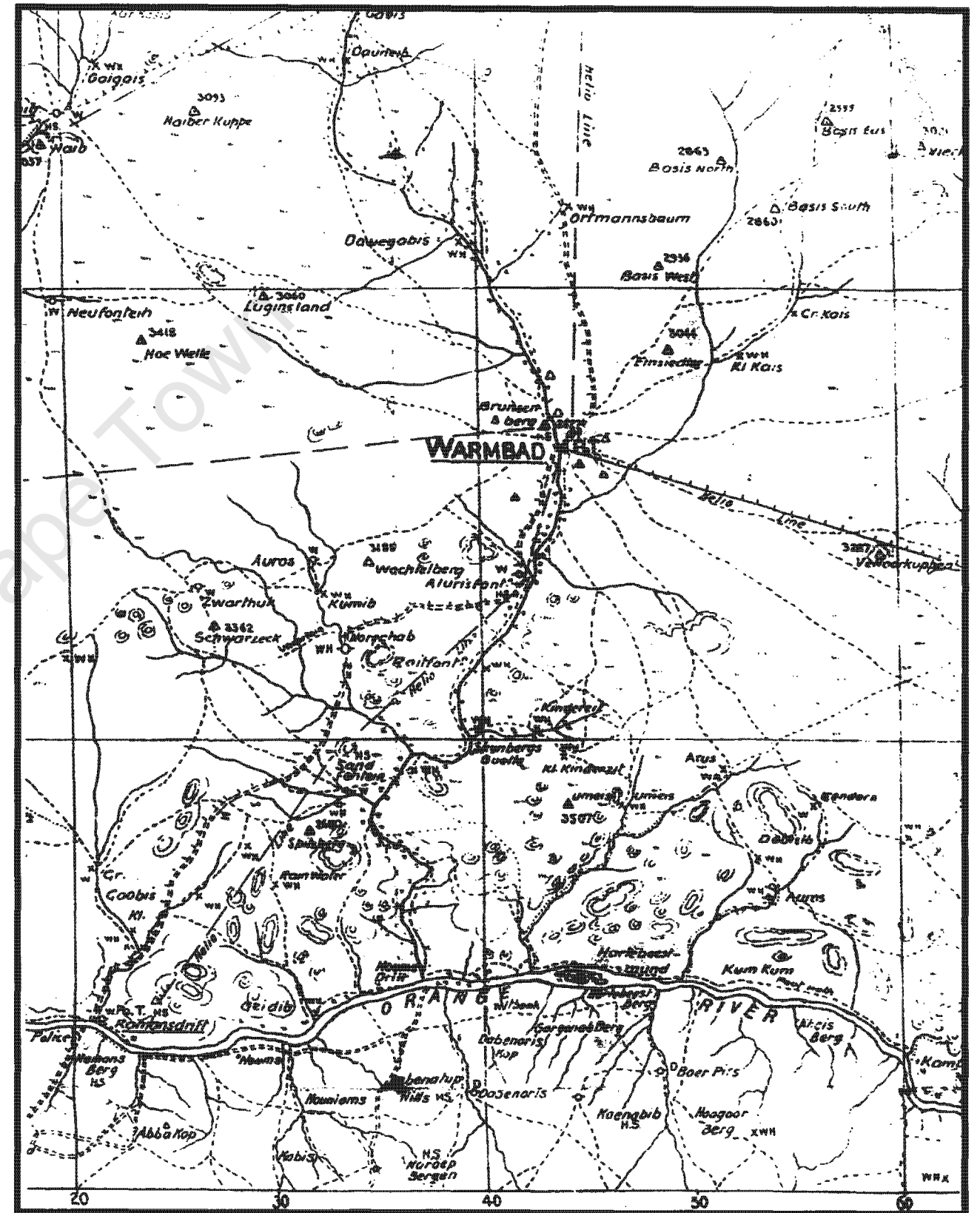
Source: SAMR Box 1044, File No. 516/81, "Questions in Parliament regarding Nakob,"  
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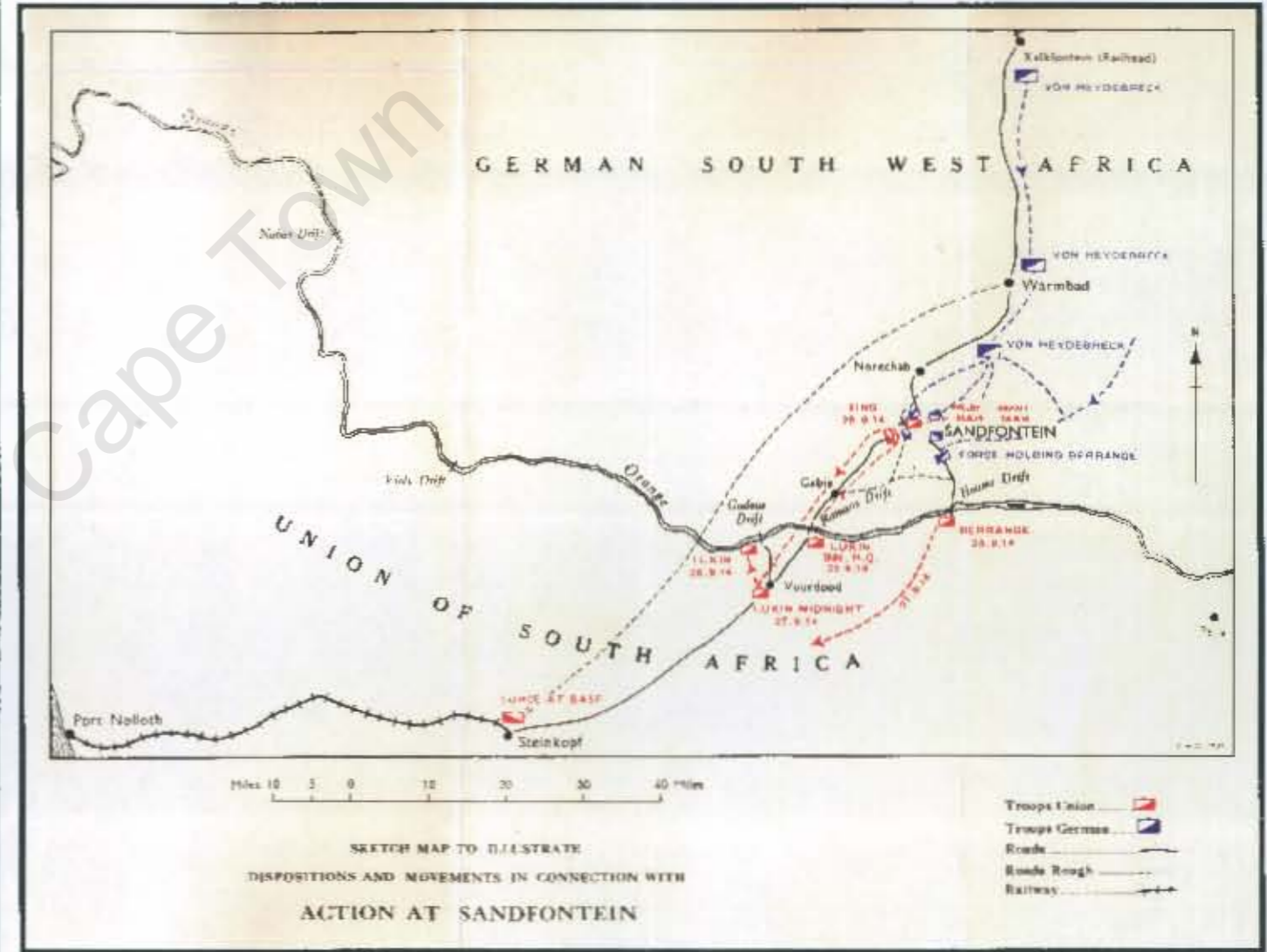
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Source: Collyer, J.J. The Campaign in German South West Africa 1914-1915



Source: Von Oelhafen, Der Feldzug in Sudwest 1914-15





1. Defence Minister Smuts and General Lukin in 1918. (Official History)



2. Brigadier-General Collyer (Official History)



3. SAP Minister of Defence in 1923, Colonel Hendrik Mentz (Official History)



Members of the THA who fell into the hands of the Germans at Sandfontein, and were later entertained at the South African Party Club in Johannesburg by Mr Henry Adler, father of Lt F. B. Adler. Third row (l to r): A. O. Colman, A. Pollock (in rear), C. H. van Diggelen, Gordon Douglas, N. C. S. MacMaster, J. Vannus, R. S. Brophy, S/Sgt B. C. Webster. Seated, (l to r) J. P. F. Ogilvie, A. G. Tainton, Sgt N. R. Kermack, Mr Henry Adler, Sgt A. K. Good, Bdr H. C. van Diggelen, W. V. Colman, Cecil Baumann and W. A. Currie. Seated on floor (l to r): J. J. Yates, R. E. Pierce, B. Brokenshaw, D. McMillan, R. E. Johnstone, J. P. Hanekom.

4. THA Sandfontein veterans. (Orpen, N., A History of the Transvaal Horse Artillery, THA Artillery Regimental Council, Johannesburg, 1975.)



5. Lieutenant-Colonel R.C. Grant as a Brigadier-General, a few years after Sandfontein. (Cape Mounted Riflemen Album, 5477-5640, Album 72, South African Library)



6. Captain Welby (Cape Mounted Riflemen Album, 5477-5640, Album 72, South African Library)



**7. Lt Donald Scott, the author of "The Story of Sandfontein."  
(Cape Mounted Riflemen Album, 5477-5640, Album 72, South African Library)**



**8. Captured UDF officers from Sandfontein; Lt Adler is sitting on the ground, front right, Capt Welby, middle second from left. (Hein Altmann collection)**



9. Corporal P. J. Young, author of Boot and Saddle, (Cape Mounted Riflemen Album, 5477-5640, Album 72, South African Library)



Some of the prisoners at Franzfontein camp, South West Africa in 1915, photographed by a German officer. Members of the THA who have been identified are: Back row, on left, Gnr P. Hanekom; third from left, Gnr N. C. S. MacMaster. Second row, seated third from left, Gnr R. S. Brophy; sixth from left, Gnr C. H. van Diggelen; seventh, Gnr A. L. Allwright; ninth, Gnr Geo Dunbar; eleventh, Gnr H. C. van Diggelen. Seated on ground (*l to r*): Gnr C. Baumann, Gnr Reg Langebrink, Sgt A. K. Good and Gnr Gordon Douglas.

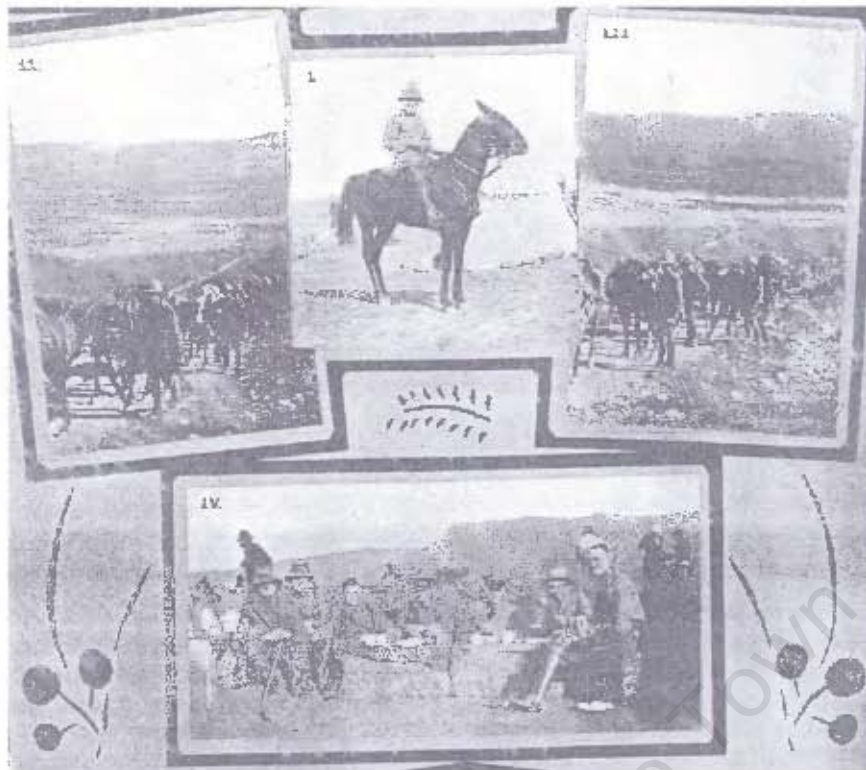
10. THA and SAMR troops and non-commissioned officers as prisoners of war. (History of the Transvaal Horse Artillery, THA Artillery Regimental Council, Johannesburg, 1975.)



11. Colonel von Heydebreck (Namibian National Archives)



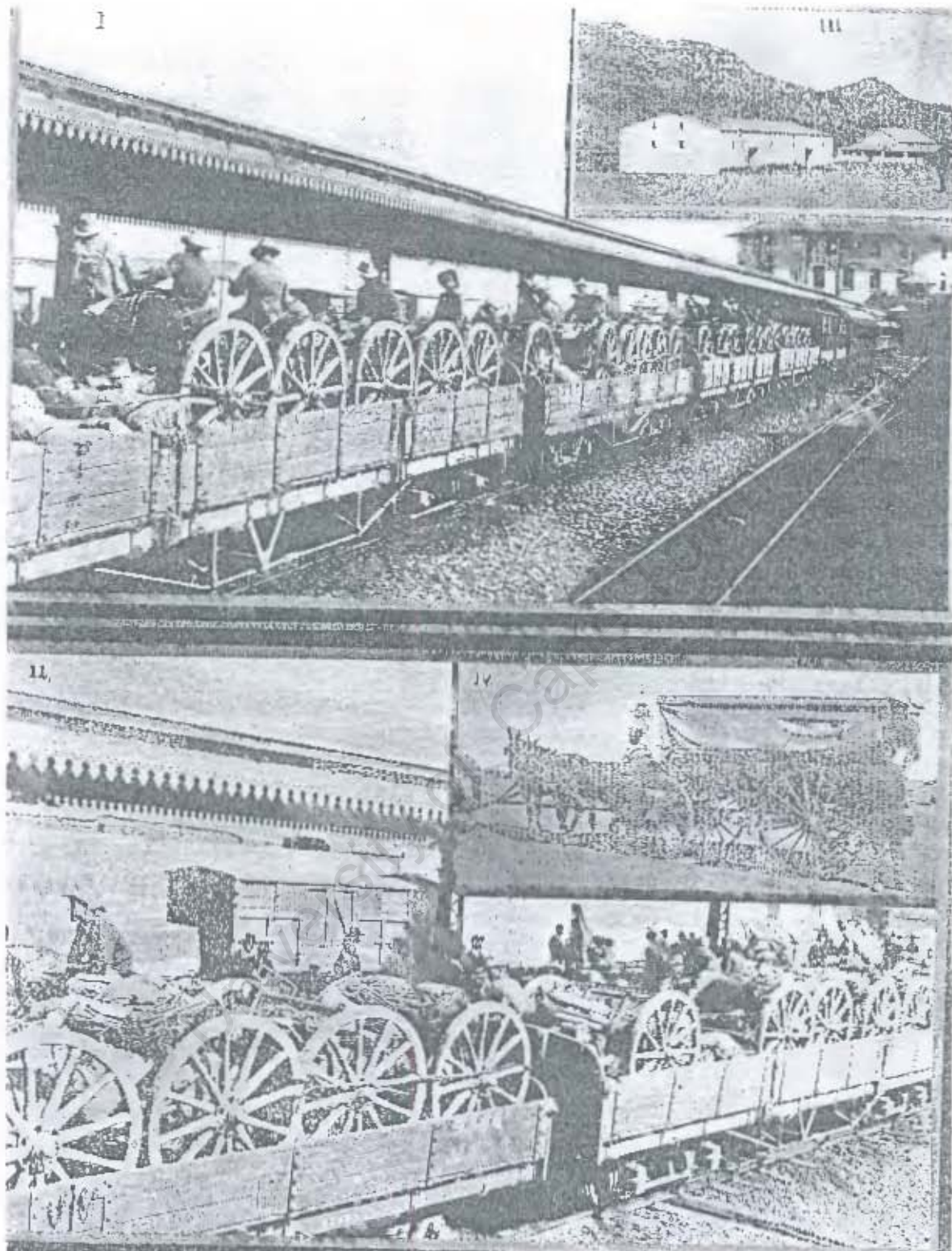
12. (i) & (ii) German *Schutztruppe* ("Colonial force") equipped and uniformed as the Sandfontein attackers were. (Namibian National Archives)



13. (Nongqui collage) The SAMR moving up to the Orange River drifts from Steinkopf; (top two photos); 4<sup>th</sup> SAMR officers at Steinkopf (middle); September 1914; SAMR farriers at Port Nolloth. (bottom) (The Nongqui, December 1914)



14. A indicates where the 4<sup>th</sup> SAMR emerged from the Union of South Africa side of the border to cross the Orange at Ramans Drift on 14 September 1914. The old German police station is some distance behind the author who is standing in the foreground. (author's collection)



15. (Nongqui collage) Temporary German hospital at Ramans Drift (top); black UDF members entrained with SAMR & THA artillery (main two photos); ambulance wagon returning with wounded from Sandfontein (middle right).  
(The Nongqui, December 1914)



19. The THA gun positions (A & B), and kraal where the wounded gunners sheltered with the SA Medical Corps detachment (C). The approximate location of the black UDF members unmarked common grave is at D. (author's collection)



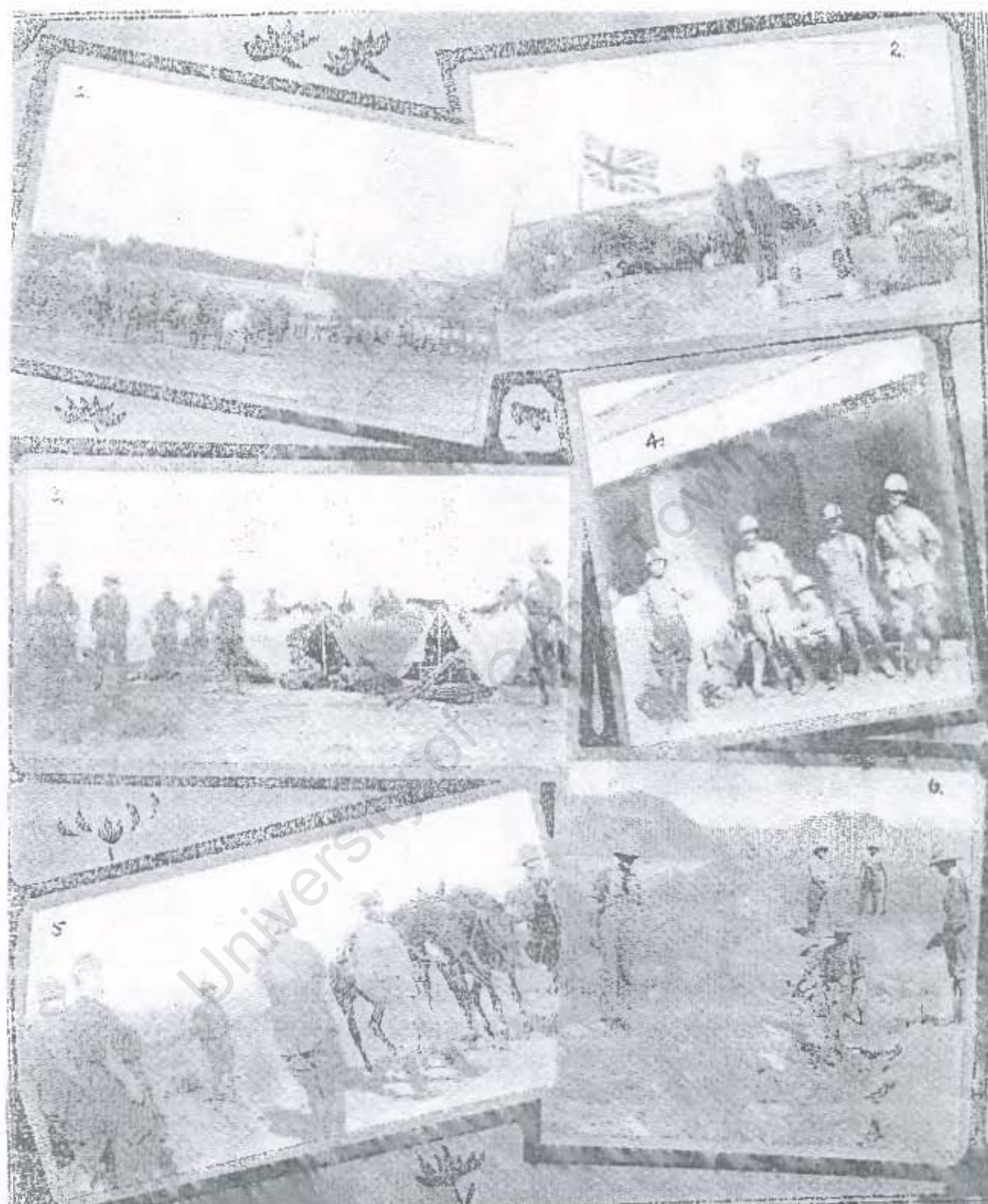
20. Grant's sangar on the Sandfontein koppie summit, photographed from east to west. (author's collection)



17. German sangar overlooking Ramans Drift (author's collection)



18. (Nonggui collage) Ramans Drift, October 1914: 4<sup>th</sup> SAMR cleaning rifles and digging trenches (top); watering men and horses (middle); German prisoners (bottom left), GSWA side of Ramans Drift (bottom right) (The Nonggui, 1914, December 1914.)



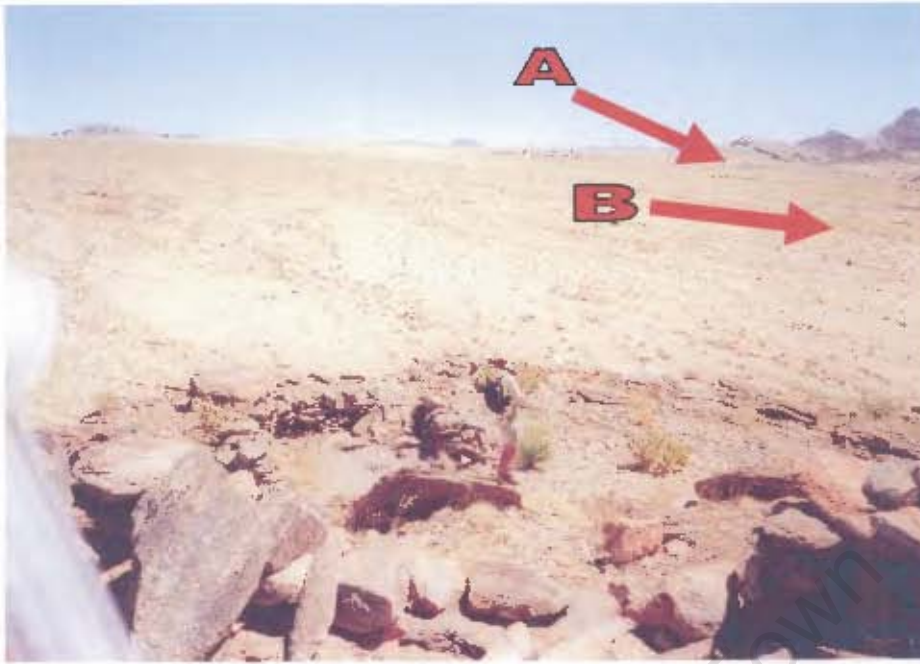
16. (Nongqui collage) SAMR camp, Rosbank, Cape Town (top left); Regimental HQ at Port Nolloth (top right); 4<sup>th</sup> SAMR at Steinkopf (middle left); 4<sup>th</sup> SAMR officers Ramans Drift (middle right); German prisoner (in front of horse, centre) & SAMR troops (bottom left); SAMR trenches at Ramans Drift (bottom right) (The Nongqui, 1914, December 1914, photos entitled "With the 4<sup>th</sup> SAMR on Active Service, September-November, 1914.")



21. SAMR sangars looking to the northwest. (author's collection)



22. SAMR sangars at Sandfontein facing the east. A indicates the rocky outcrops that German infantry had reached before their anticipated bayonet charge during the closing stages of the battle. B indicates the approximate position of the German artillery battery, located to the northeast. (author's collection)



23. Sangars slightly below summit, facing plain out to the west. A marks the position of the German northwest artillery section at 7.30am, while B indicates where this mountain gun battery shifted during the final bombardment after 5.30pm. (author's collection)



24. Sandfontein koppie spur running southwest; the photo was taken from the edge of the summit. A indicates sangars while B shows the slope where several German infantrymen descending during the morning, only to be hurriedly driven into cover by SAMR rifle fire. C shows the approximate position of the southern attack under Major Ritter. (author's collection)



25. German military, police, and settler graves at Sandfontein. The Sandfontein koppie is behind with its spur to the right. The photo is taken from approximately west to east. (author's collection)



26. Major von Rapport's grave in Sandfontein cemetery, with the common grave for the non-commissioned officers and troops behind, and slightly to the left. (author's collection)



27. German position near Norochab some four kilometres from Sandfontein. Either at, or close to this point, Colonel von Heydebreck attempted to direct the battle. (author's collection)



28. Sandfontein koppie (A) as the German artillery would have viewed it from the south. (author's collection)



29. German 77mm mountain gun identical to those used at Sandfontein; captured and in the hands of SAMR artillerymen after the GSWA campaign. (The Nongqui, January 1916)



30. Colonel Grant being carried after the battle by two black UDF members. (Namibian National Archives)



31. The formal military re-burial of the white UDF dead from Sandfontein at Warmbad, 1 November 1922. (Namibian National Archives)



32. The SAMR and THA graves in Warmbad today. (author's collection)