

# In a position of command - Paul Kruger

Paul Kruger  
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In Chapter III of his memoirs exiled ZAR president tells of his negotiations with Moshoeshoe to end the first Basotho war

**THE MEMOIRS OF PAUL KRUGER**  
**FOUR TIMES PRESIDENT OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN REPUBLIC**  
**TOLD BY HIMSELF**  
**1902**

## CHAPTER III

*Chapter II can be read [here](#).*

### IN A POSITION OF COMMAND

AFTER our return from the expedition against Montsioa, Commandant General A. W. J. Pretorius fell seriously ill. When he realized that the end was at hand, he sent for me, but I had just gone on a hunting expedition in the Rustenburg district, and the messengers, unfortunately, did not reach me in time, so that, when I returned, I found that this great leader of the emigrants had passed away. This was most deplorable, for who knows what he might still have wished to discuss in his last moments. On the return journey from Montsioa's town, he had talked much to me on religious matters, and he might have had more to say to me on this subject.

A few days after his death, a letter arrived, addressed to the deceased, from the British Commissioners, Owen and Hogge [1], in which Pretorius was requested to take over the Orange Free State from the British Government on behalf of the emigrants.

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[1] These were the special commissioners who had been appointed by the Queen of England to settle relations on the eastern and northeastern frontiers of the Cape of Good Hope, and who made the agreement with the Boer emigrants by which both the Free State and the South African Republic obtained their independence. - **Note by the Editor of the German Edition.**

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But that was now impossible, and the assumption of the government of the country of the Orange Free State from the hands of the English was now effected by Messrs. Venter, Boshoff and a few other burghers of the Free State. This, afterwards, led to serious differences between the younger Pretorius and the Orange Free State, for the communication was to the effect that the Free State should be transferred to Commandant General Pretorius and the emigrants. Young Pretorius, like many other burghers, was of opinion that the land had been handed over to his father and therefore to himself as his successor. The question led almost to civil war between the Free State and the South African Republic.

Marthinus Wessel Pretorius, the eldest son of the deceased Pretorius, was appointed Commandant General of the South African Republic in his father's stead, and, after a law had been passed providing for a president, he was also elected to the office a few years later. This title, however, did not then mean that he was president of the Republic, for the new statute was not universally recognized. He was merely president of the Government which he represented. He now began to put forward his pretended claims on the Free State, and, in 1857, issued a call to arms, because he

was offended that his claims had been rejected. I was away on business, but was asked to return at once.

I disapproved most strongly of the conduct of Pretorius, whom I found encamped with his troops on the Vaal River, and I told him very plainly what I thought. But, when I heard that the President of the Free State had made an agreement with Commandant General Schoeman, in the north of the Transvaal, which was that part of the country where the new law was not yet acknowledged, that the latter should come to the Free State's assistance I advised prompt action and that we should attack Boshoff without delay. We crossed the river to meet Boshoff, who was advancing with a large commando.

When the opponents were close to one another, Boshoff sent one of his officers with proposals for a peaceful settlement. Pretorius was much in favor of this; nor were his men at all in a warlike mood.

When the adversaries' messenger arrived, they were practising buck-jumping, so that the officer exclaimed in astonishment: "Do they hold us so lightly?" Pretorius sent me as negotiator; and I told Boshoff my opinion just as openly as I had told it to Pretorius: "You are quite as guilty as your adversary," I said. "Why do you take up arms, instead of impeaching Pretorius before the Volksraad? He would certainly have been punished." Koos Venter, a big, strong man, who was standing by, began to rage against Pretorius, and kept on shouting:

"If I only had him here, I would wring his neck for him like a bird's."

At last my blood was up too, and I said:

"Mr. Boshoff, the matter can easily be settled. Let Koos take off his coat and I will take off mine, and we will fight it out. If he is beaten, you must submit to our conditions, and if he beats me, it will be the other way about."

But Venter would have none of this; he had no grudge against me, he argued. But I said:

"That has nothing to do with it. You stand up for your President and I for mine."

However, there was no duel, but Venter kept quiet after that, and a commission was appointed to meet on the Vaal River to settle the difference. Here, although I did not at all approve of it, I was called upon to defend the action of my President, who was himself violently attacked. In the end a compromise was arrived at, and Pretorius relinquished his unjust claims.

It was agreed in the contract that each section of the Boers should have the right to punish offenders in its own country. Now, however, two burghers who had sided with Pretorius in the Free State were charged with high treason and condemned to die on the gallows. Once again I had to go to act as mediator:

"Why do you again break the compact?" I asked Boshoff.

"We break the compact? What do you mean?" he retorted.

"Well, are you not going to hang two of your people?"

"Yes, we have the right to do so: it says so in the agreement."

"Nothing of the sort. You have the right to punish certainly; but 'punish' means to 'chastise,' to admonish, to warn, and to correct by means of the chastisement."

And, when Boshoff would not allow this, I fetched a Bible and showed him that the Holy Writ distinguished between punishing and chastising. We may chastise a man with the prospect of death, but we may not kill him in order to punish him. The Free Staters gave hi after this, and so the matter was finally settled.

Shortly afterwards, I had the opportunity of rendering the Free State a service. Ever since the Declaration of Independence, they had had difficulties with Moshesh, and these difficulties at last led to open war between Moshesh and the Free State. Moshesh was no contemptible adversary, and

he had a large force at his command. His bands were continually making plundering inroads into the southern portion of the Orange Free State, and, when this came to my knowledge, I decided to go to the Free State and offer my services to the Government.

President Pretorius accompanied me with about 50 men, under Field-cornet Bodenstein. At Osspruit, on the Upper Sand River, we came upon the first camp of the Free Staters. That same night, the Kaffirs robbed the herds of this camp. I sent Field-cornet Bodenstein with his men in pursuit, and they succeeded in regaining the cattle. From here we marched on by Winburg to Bloemfontein.

On our arrival, I offered myself to go to Moshesh to negotiate a peace. The Free State Government accepted my offer and gave me General Fick and Marthinus Schoeman as an escort. Moshesh lived on Thaba Bosigo Mountain. When we came to the foot of the mountain, I sent up a message to Moshesh that we had not come to fight him, but that I wanted to talk to him about peace. Moshesh sent back word :

"I will come down directly to speak with Mr. Kruger."

I was not disposed to wait, however, and at once climbed the mountain so as to go straight to Moshesh's town. When we reached the top, Moshesh was just coming to meet us. Magato, the Kaffir captain from the Rustenburg neighborhood, whom we knew and who happened to be with Moshesh, introduced me to him, saying :

"This is Paul Kruger."

Moshesh gave me his hand, and said:

"Is that Paul Kruger? How is it possible? I have heard tell of him for so many years, and now I am so old. How, then, can he still be so young?"

He took hold of my arm and led me to his house and into a room which no black dared enter, but which was always ready for the reception of white men.

After taking some refreshments, we at once proceeded to business. I began:

"Why do you kill one another for such a trifle? Why not, rather, arrange the matter amicably? You must surely see that war does you damage and makes you block the highroads for other nations with whom you are living at peace."

After much argument on both sides, Moshesh said at last:

"What you say is true, for everything I want in this house I have to buy from other nations. And, when the roads are blocked by war, of course I can get nothing." Then, changing the subject, "Are you the man," he asked, " who fetched Mapela down from his mountain? "

[The trial of Mapela had just taken place. - **Note by the Editor of the German Edition.**]

I said:

"Yes."

Then Moshesh proceeded:

"Are you aware that two of my daughters were married to Mapela? " adding, after a moment's silence, " You need not think that it was your courage that brought Mapela down from his mountain, hut it was the dispensation of God that punished Mapela for committing so foul a murder."

Now, as Moshesh was at every moment speaking of the dispensation of God and using pious words, I said to him:

"But if you are so devout, how do you come to have more than one wife? "

Moshesh replied:

"Yes, I have just about two hundred ; but that is not half so many as Solomon had."

To which I made answer:

"Yes, but you surely know that, since Christ's time and according to the New Testament, a man may have only one wife."

Moshesh reflected for a moment and then said:

"Well, what shall I say to you . . . it is just nature."

In the evening, I sent for Moshesh again to come to me. Moshesh came, but this time dressed like an ordinary Kaffir, that is, not in European clothes.

When he came in, I called to him:

"Why is Moshesh so long coming? Can't he come when I send for him? "

Moshesh answered:

"I am Moshesh."

"Oh," said I.

"Are you Moshesh? Then why are you dressed like a woman?"

Moshesh laughed heartily.

That same evening, we made an agreement that the war was to stop at once. Moshesh agreed to call in his Kaffirs as soon as he received word that the Orange Free State had accepted the terms. A peace document was drawn up, and signed the following morning.

Moshesh then invited me to stay with him a little longer, as he wanted to pick me out a fine saddlehorse. I accepted the invitation, but my companions Fick and Schoeman did not care to wait any longer and went back alone. Moshesh then brought me an excellent saddle-horse as a present. The Government of the Orange Free State afterwards accepted the treaty drafted by Moshesh and myself, and this brought the first Basuto War to an end.

Before leaving Moshesh's town, I received a message from President Pretorius asking me to return at once and set out as general or, rather, assistant general, with a commando, against Gasibone, a Kaffir chief on the Harts River. This chief had stolen the white men's cattle, killed some of the men and carried off an old woman and a girl of eighteen. On receipt of this message, I at once jumped on my horse and rode to my home in the Magaliesberg, in the Rustenburg district. In three days, I spent over fifty hours on horseback. The commando had meantime assembled and was waiting for me near Klerksdorp, where I joined it after spending one day at my farm.

On reaching the meeting-place, I found that the burghers had hardly any ammunition and no cattle for food. But we set out, nevertheless, in the hope of being able, on the way, to procure both from private sources. I also sent a message to the Orange Free State requesting them to provide us with what was necessary.

But I did not obtain much here, as I had no money and had to buy on the promise of future payment. Our shortness of ammunition was such that we could not shoot any game, but I nevertheless devised a means of providing meat for my commando, by instructing the burghers to surround the game, drive it into the bends of the Vaal River and there kill it by beating it with sticks.

The whole commando was about 200 strong. When we approached Gasibone's place, Commandant Piet Venter came to our support from the Orange Free State with about 100 men, white and colored. It soon became evident that Gasibone had taken refuge with one of his subordinates, called Mahura, who lived in a mountain fastness, filled with ravines, further up the Harts River Gorge. I sent word to Mahura that I was coming in pursuit of Gasibone and that I should keep to the south side of the Harts River, also that Mahura was not to interfere with Gasibone, unless he was prepared to capture

him and deliver him up.

On receiving this message, Mahura, with the assistance of an interpreter, set free the old woman and the young girl who had been carried off by Gasibone. When our commando came to within a few thousand paces of the place where we knew Gasibone's camp to be, the two chiefs attacked us with united forces. We defeated them, and they fled into the caves and rocks with which the place abounded.

The following morning, the commando attacked them there and hunted them out of their hiding-places. Gasibone fled in the night in the direction of British Bechuanaland, but, on the following day, he was found in the brushwood by a patrol, and fell after a sharp fight. Part of the men with him were taken prisoners, but afterwards released.

Meanwhile, the missionary who was with Mahura wrote to me on his behalf to say that he had done wrong in helping Gasibone, that he deserved to be punished, but begged for forgiveness and was willing to submit. I sent back word that I would gladly forgive him all, but that he must come to me to receive instructions as to his subsequent behavior. Mahura, however, did not come personally, on the pretence that he was too ill to travel, but sent one of his captains. I nevertheless appointed him chief of that particular Kaffir tribe, in Gasibone's place. The cattle which Gasibone had stolen were restored forthwith. Then the commando returned home again.

For me it had been a year of hard work.

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