

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF UNION DEFENCE FORCE OPERATIONS DURING THE AFRIKANER REBELLION, 1914-1915

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Abstract

The South African entry into the First World War, as part of the British war effort, required the invasion of German South West Africa (GSWA) in order to secure strategic Imperial objectives. The initial invasion of GSWA was repulsed at Sandfontein during September 1914 and became the first operational reverse for the Union Defence Forces (UDF) during the First World War. However, in addition to a seemingly prevalent external German threat following this operational loss, South Africa faced a second, more serious, internal threat. The socio-economic realities of early-twentieth-century South Africa, felt most keenly in rural Afrikaner society, in addition to the Union's entry into the war, which further magnified the rift between the competing interests of Afrikaner nationalists and the Union government loyal to the Crown, triggered the outbreak of an Afrikaner Rebellion in September 1914. As a result, the operational focus of the UDF shifted immediately from the invasion of GSWA to the internal military threat posed by Afrikaner rebel forces. The Afrikaner Rebellion became the first conventional military deployment of the UDF within the borders of South Africa to suppress an internal revolt. The UDF harnessed its operational and tactical mobility by operating from the central position, along internal lines of communication, in order to swiftly deal with the rebel threat.

This paper evaluates the military operations conducted by the UDF in the suppression of the 1914 Rebellion. The operational strategy and the tactics employed by the Union forces are analysed and explained in terms of military theory. As such, the Rebellion is used as a measure for the efficiency of the UDF and specifically in terms of military organisation, leadership, preparedness and operational effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

The Union of South Africa found itself in a precarious position at the outbreak of the First World War. The UDF was still in its developmental stage and was untested as a cohesive fighting force. The Union of South Africa was a dominion of Britain and when the British Empire declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914, the Union was in effect also at war with Germany. The British Empire requested the Union of South Africa to invade GSWA, capture its seaports and destroy its wireless communication stations.

Louis Botha and Jan Christiaan Smuts¹ supported the British war effort but JBM Hertzog contested the assumption that the association with the British Empire constituted an

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¹ Louis Botha was a commandant general during the South African War. After entering politics he subsequently became the first Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa. Botha was also

automatic involvement in the war. Botha's motion for the invasion was passed in Parliament on 10 September 1914 by 91 votes to ten. The Union officially entered the First World War on 14 September 1914.

The Afrikaner Rebellion coincided with the South African campaign in GSWA. The entrance of the Union into the Great War resulted in an upsurge of emotion among the Afrikaner people. Many of the past tensions, anger and sadness which dated back to the South African War or prior had resurfaced.

At the beginning of the campaign the Union faced an internal threat in the form of the 1914 Afrikaner Rebellion. This uprising was a manifestation of the dissatisfaction felt by many Afrikaners about the Union's involvement in a "British" war at a time when anti-British sentiments were still very much evident in the aftermath of the South African War. Seeing this as an opportunity they could exploit, the Germans fomented rebellion by meeting with prominent republican-inclined Afrikaner military leaders who were heading the rebellion, such as Commandant SG Maritz and General CF Beyers. The Afrikaner Rebellion merged with the German South West African campaign in that it delayed the invasion plans. The UDF first had to suppress the rebellion before commencing with the campaign.

The South African entrance into the First World War became the trigger cause of the Afrikaner Rebellion. Besides the Union's entry into the Great War there were also other precipitating and predisposing causes which contributed to the rebellion, including poverty, social pressures, political issues and economic interests. There were many impoverished, barely literate Afrikaners who lived in rural areas who certainly did not identify with the British cause. Apart from political differences, Afrikaner poverty and pre-disposition to rebel was also linked to the grave economic situation in the decades following the South African War.

Hertzog as a prominent leader and political figure of the time did not actively rebel, but the rebel leaders fought for his ideals and aspirations. Hertzog's name was mentioned by the different rebel leaders in motivating their defection and the cause of the rebellion is attributed in part to the rift between Hertzog and Botha.

The legitimacy of the invasion of GSWA was of little consequence to Maritz. Maritz regarded the invasion as a trigger to start a rebellion which would restore the old Afrikaner republics. Reitz supports this notion and indicates that the particular set of circumstances in the Union of South Africa at the time allowed the Afrikaners to embrace the idea of republicanism.

Maritz was the first of the defectors to declare rebellion however there were a number of other prominent leaders who promoted rebellion throughout the Union of South Africa. Lieutenant Colonel CR De Wet, who was a commandant in the South African War, became one of the significant rebel leaders in the Orange Free State. Beyers resigned his commission

promoted to general in the British Army. He formed a powerful partnership with Jan Christiaan Smuts. Smuts was a commandant during the South African War, and he later became the Union's minister of mines, interior and defence. Smuts also held the rank of general in the British Army. Botha and Smuts were towering political and military figures in South Africa's history.

around 15 September 1914 along with Major J Kemp and these two former UDF officers and their supporters became a significant threat during the Afrikaner Rebellion.

Beyers and Kemp took the lead in the Transvaal and the UDF military operations were thus directed at the forces of Beyers, Kemp, Maritz and De Wet. The rebel leaders thus became the centre of gravity.

Botha declined the British offer of assistance in operations to put down the rebellion and for the most part used Afrikaners when he took to the field with 32 000 troops. His motivation for this decision was to minimise the simmering tension between English and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans. On 12 October 1914, Smuts declared martial law in support of the suppression of the rebellion. The rebellion broke out during the initial stages of the invasion of GSWA.

The initial strategic plan for the invasion of GSWA which included amphibious landings at Lüderitz and Walvis Bay was stifled by the British War Office which decided that the naval vessels could only transport troops to Lüderitz. The invasion plan was thus changed and improvised to a less efficient one which Smuts was not entirely satisfied with.

The initial invasion of GSWA thus comprised the amphibious landings of the South African forces at Lüderitz and at Port Nolloth. The military force at Port Nolloth landed on 31 August 1914 and captured Raman's Drift on 14 September 1914. The wireless station at Swakopmund was destroyed on 14 September 1914 by naval shelling.

The South African force grouping deployed from Port Nolloth, took Raman's Drift and continued its advance to Sandfontein where it was defeated by a German military force. The defeat at Sandfontein coincided with the outbreak of the Afrikaner Rebellion in the Union. Consequently all further invasion efforts of GSWA were put on hold until the end of the rebellion in late 1914 early 1915.

Operational strategy of the central position

Botha and Smuts decided to concentrate the UDF in and around Pretoria and to deploy on internal lines to the areas where they were most required. The strategy of the UDF entailed rapid movement from a central position to rebel strongholds via internal lines, using trains (and motorcars to some extent) for operational movement (over large distances) and horses for tactical movement (over shorter distances related to battle). The Union was facing a threat from Maritz in GSWA and the Northern Cape; Beyers and Kemp in the Transvaal; and De Wet in the Orange Free State.

The fulcrum of the strategy of the central position was Pretoria with deployments of the UDF projected to the key operational areas namely the Transvaal, Orange Free State and the Northern Cape. The operational strategy hinged on the dual aspects of military intelligence which provided a target and operational/tactical mobility which in turn provided the means to reach and accomplish the required objective.

The operational movement of the UDF was achieved through the construction and maintenance of additional railway which allowed for the rapid deployment of troops. The South

African Railway Service constructed 227 kilometres of new railway between Prieska and Upington which facilitated the projection of Union forces into the different operational theatres. Armoured trains were used to deploy troops and were protected with armoured plating with guns often added for firepower. The armoured trains were equipped with a 12 pounder, a machinegun section and a searchlight. The horses were entrained with saddles and bridles which had the dual purpose of saving space and allowing for quick reaction time. Mobility was further promoted by the formation of a motorcar contingent comprised of 110 automobiles (fitted with machineguns) provided by the Transvaal Automobile Club and 500 soldiers of the 2nd Transvaal Scottish. The operational movement of troops was made effective by the provision of an accurate intelligence picture.

The Union government had a Union wide intelligence network which included the police, magistrates and other sources such as the Railway Rifle Associations which guarded the railway and bridges. Sir Hugh Wyndham was in charge of gathering and processing information into reliable intelligence which was effectively pursued and capitalised on by the UDF. Thus military intelligence and operational mobility were effectively employed from the hub of Pretoria to put down the rebellion.



Map 1: Strategy of the central position²

² The base image was modified to represent the strategy of the central position. Map taken from: www.southafricaproject.info, Union of South Africa 1910, Accessed on 24 June 2015.

Rebellion in the Northern Cape

Botha called meeting in mid-August 1914 to clarify the Union's position in terms of the outbreak of the Great War and to gather support from the Union's military leaders and to discuss the operational plans, logistical requirements and possible contingencies for the pending German South West African campaign. Maritz attended the meeting on 14 August 1914 along with many other commandants.

Botha informed the meeting that the duty of all officers was to follow orders regardless of their personal feelings about the campaign. Kemp and Beyers however opposed the invasion plans and while in Pretoria Maritz, Beyers and Kemp along with the other conspirators had a private meeting. Maritz proceeded to show them correspondence from the German government which guaranteed German military support to the rebellion. At the same time there was increased German military activity on the border of the Union.

The Germans initially sent a small force which occupied a hill close to Nakob from 15 August until 18 August 1915. What was at first thought to be an invasion turned out to be the mere occupation of a kopje in the widely desolate border area which happened to be within the borders of the Union so as to overlook the waterhole at Nakob. On 22 August 1914 Lieutenant (Active Citizen Force) Christiaan Rudolf Liebenberg who was a farmer in GSWA, was fleeing to the Union when he was confronted by three German soldiers. A shootout ensued where one German soldier was killed and one soldier was injured. This incident was used by the Union to justify the invasion of GSWA.

After this incident Maritz crossed the border post at Schuits Drift from where he went to the German military post at Stolzenfels on 24 August 1914. Maritz telephoned a German official named Max Teinert and apologised for the incident at Nakob and stated that he was not responsible for it. Maritz also discussed the issue of German weapon supply for the rebels. Following this discussion Pieter de Wet (the brother of Andries de Wet leader of the *Vrij Korps*) accompanied Max Tienert to meet the German Governor, Dr Theodore Seitz, in Windhoek who agreed to provide the rebels with rifles but was unsure about the provision of guns.

On the side of the Germans there was already a small number of dissident South Africans who formed the *Vrij Korps*. The *Vrij Korps* was comprised of renegade Afrikaners and commandos from the South African War who under the command of Andries de Wet were armed by the Germans and promoted the German cause in the Northern Cape. On 18 September 1914 the *Vrij Korps* comprising 300 soldiers supported by a machine gun section captured the Union military post at Nakob and then the Rietfontein police station which was a small and secluded post on the border of GSWA.

Maritz was ordered up to support Colonel H Lukin (later Sir, Major General Lukin) on 25 September 1914 who promptly refused this order. On the orders of Smuts, Major B Enslin was sent to Upington on 27 September 1914 to determine the situation in terms of Maritz disaffection. Enslin wired Smuts stating that Maritz was in collusion with the Germans and that he required 2000 commandos to deal with Maritz's forces.³ Maritz claimed that his Force was

³ Sampson, *The capture of De Wet: The South African Rebellion 1914*, 78; Anon., *The Times History of the War*, 502.

insufficiently supplied in comparison with Lukin's Force which is why he could not support the invasion. Maritz was ordered back to Pretoria but he refused. Enslin remained in Upington with Maritz as his chief-of-staff.

Botha suggested to Cabinet that he be made commandant general as Beyers had resigned. Botha held a meeting with 35 commandants and told them that he would lead the campaign. All of the commandants agreed to follow Botha and Botha was subsequently appointed as commander-in-chief of the expeditionary force for GSWA by special commission, Section 81 of the Defence Act of 1912.

Botha asked for Colonel JJ Alberts, Commandants Collins, Mentz, Cilliers and General MW Myburgh to raise 1000 men each for the campaign. At the outbreak of the rebellion Botha moved these men throughout the Union by train so as to suppress the rebellion at key points.

On 30 September, Maritz was again ordered back to Pretoria, an order which was again refused. Commandant Coen Brits (later brigadier general) was sent up to Upington and was appointed as the commander of the entire area of the Northern Cape. He was given specific orders to arrest Maritz. Brits and his staff arrived in Upington on the morning of 6 October 1914. Enslin had recommended that Brits be sent to take over command as he had a considerable influence in the Northern Cape. Enslin subsequently became Brits's chief-of-staff.

In response to Brits being sent up, Maritz left Upington with his supporters (approximately 900) on 2 October and made for Vanrooisvlei 40 kilometres west of Upington. Enslin remained in Upington when Maritz departed to Vanrooisvlei.

Maritz trekked up to GSWA between 5 and 6 October 1914. Maritz and the *Vrij Korps* proceeded to Ukamos in GSWA where they met with the commander of the *Schutztruppe* Colonel J von Heydebreck. The grouping discussed the type of artillery support which would be given to Maritz. Following the meeting with Von Heydebreck, Maritz returned to Vanrooisvlei in the Union of South Africa on 8 October 1914. Andries de Wet subsequently joined Maritz at Vanrooisvlei on 9 October with the *Vrij Corps* and German artillery support.

The *Vrij Korps* had approximately 92 members with German artillery support. The German artillery included four '96 model' and two pom-poms which were supported by 80 German soldiers. Maritz captured a Union gun section at Vanrooisvlei and made a speech declaring rebellion and claimed to be liberating the Union of South Africa from Britain. A total of 62 Union soldiers were taken prisoner and were sent off to GSWA. Maritz's defection made the Union susceptible to invasion from a German/rebel force from the direction of the border of the Northern Cape.

Enslin sent a telegram to Smuts recommending that another military force be sent up to the Northern Cape to protect the interests of the Union from Maritz and any possible attacks which may come from GSWA. Botha and Smuts proceeded to send a detachment of Enslin's Horse to Upington which arrived on 9 October 1914 in addition to the Durban Light Infantry and the Imperial Light Horse which arrived in Upington on 18 October 1914. These units were to form a buffer force in the event of an invasion of the Union or an attack on the Union forces from the German/rebel forces on the border.

On 9 October 1914 Colonel Barend Daniel Boucher was sent with a message from Brits requesting Maritz to hand over his command. Boucher eventually reached Maritz on 10 October after he had given his speech at Vanrooisvlei. On Boucher's arrival he was taken prisoner by Maritz. Maritz showed Boucher German documents and correspondence which dated to June 1913, which indicated that Maritz had been in contact with the Germans for some time.

The German authorities requested Maritz to attack Upington in October 1914 but Maritz did not comply with this request as he was unsure of the Afrikaner reaction to such an attack. Instead Maritz and his rebel force captured Keimoes (temporarily) and then Kakamas where Maritz was seen passing with 600 rebels. The combined rebel force comprising South African rebels, the *Vrij Corps* and German artillery led by Maritz proceeded to Keimoes on 11 October 1914 and subsequently declared a new Republic of South Africa. Maritz's forces then left Keimoes and proceeded to Kakamas. Keimoes was subsequently retaken by Union forces.

On the morning of 22 October 1914 Maritz's forces later returned and attacked the Union military post at Keimoes with approximately 800 soldiers of which 120 soldiers were German. There were initially 150 Union soldiers in Keimoes who were later reinforced by 200 of the Durban Light Infantry and 200 more soldiers of the Imperial Light Horse. Pieter de Wet was ordered to take a hill which overlooked the outpost at Keimoes. A group of rebels later charged the Union forces at Keimoes where two rebels were killed. Maritz was informed about the failed charge and proceeded to inspect the terrain by approaching the military post and observing the situation through his field glasses. During this inspection Maritz came within firing range and was shot in the leg. Maritz was then evacuated to Jerusalem in GSWA.

The Union forces held Keimoes and then pursued the rebels to Kakamas where the rebels were again forced to flee. Brits's forces advanced on Kakamas on 24 October 1914 and Commandant Stadler and a number of rebels formed a blocking force so as to delay the advance of the Union forces. Brits's force advanced on Kakamas from three directions. Although the rebels had taken the hills north of Kakamas and engaged the Union forces as they advanced. The UDF returned fire and rushed the rebel held positions forcing them to flee. The rebels then fled to Schuits Drift. At this point Brits was recalled to Pretoria. The remnants of Maritz's force was scattered at Schuits Drift one of the few negotiable fords across the Orange River.

On 25 October 1914 in the vicinity of Calvinia at Branvlei, Major Pieter Arnoldus Vermaas caught approximately 32 of Maritz's men. Maritz's lieutenants with groups of 20 – 50 members in and around Calvinia had been attempting to gather support for the rebellion but Vermaas managed to capture or push back the majority of these rebels. Following the retreat of the rebels from around Calvinia, Vermaas was sent to Pella on 29 October 1914 from where he deployed to Ramans Drift where he had several skirmishes with the Germans forces. With the initial defeat of Maritz at Keimoes and Kakamas, the focus of the rebellion changed to Kemp who was attempting to cross the Northern Cape from the Transvaal.

Transvaal

On 11 October Botha instructed the Commandants in the Transvaal to raise their commandos in order to suppress rebellion in the Northern Cape. By 19 October Beyers had left Pretoria and steadily made his way to Damhoek. General Botha had received several intelligence reports that indicated that Beyers and his followers were commanding horses and rifles in the men towards open rebellion in the Krugersdorp District. A Commandant in the Krugersdorp District, SF Alberts, was informed by General Botha that his entire district was in rebellion and that he had to suppress it. On 25 October Alberts faltered and joined Beyers' commando, who had relocated to the farm Commissie Drift close to Rustenburg where a large number of people had assembled. On the night of 26 October, Botha and commandos from the Eastern Transvaal journeyed to Brits (town) on the Pretoria-Rustenburg line intent on capturing Beyers and his men. After detraining at Brits, Botha divided his force into three groupings in order to envelop Beyers' position at Commissie Drift. The arrival of Botha's force at Commissie Drift on the morning of 27 October caught Beyers off-guard, causing his force to scatter in various directions. The Union Forces managed to capture 90 rebels, with Beyers and some men pursued in the direction of Rooiwal.

The government forces pursued Beyers' force to Rooiwal where they took up position in an old kraal. General Botha had ordered Beyers' position to be surrounded and that all rebels were to be captured. His men were under strict orders not fire on the rebels. After a brief skirmish Beyers and his force managed to escape from Rooiwal and reached Steenbokfontein by nightfall. Botha and his commandos pursued Beyers towards Koster after which Botha and the majority of his force returned to Pretoria. The military operations at Commissie Drift established the moral of the Government troops and their military superiority. The ignominious flight of the rebel forces from Commissie Drift discouraged their supporters from the outset.

On 28 October Beyers' force had been joined by Major Kemp and fifty of his followers. A large body of men had been assembled at Hakboslaagte to be addressed by Beyers and FGA. Wolmarans. At this meeting Beyers issued a decree in which the Union Government's actions in German South West Africa and the proclamation of martial law were condemned. After the meeting Beyers and Kemp travelled to Vleeskraal. On the same day a passenger train travelling from De la Rey to Treurfontein was stopped by a rebel force under Izak Claasen at Oppaslaagte Siding near Hakboslaagte. The train was searched for arms and ammunition, where after the train driver was questioned about the whereabouts of the Government Forces before being allowed to continue.

On 29 October Colonel JJ Alberts was instructed by Botha to suppress the outbreak of rebellion in the vicinity of Treurfontein. During the early morning Alberts instructed his men to detrain close to Treurfontein and to envelop the rebel commando under Wolmarans and Claasen that was approaching Treurfontein Station. Colonel Alberts conducted a reconnaissance in force, where after the rebels immediately attacked his force. Some of his forces were surrounded with a further 110 men captured. Amidst the confusion, Alberts noticed that a rebel commando was trying to envelop his position from three directions, where after he deployed his forces accordingly. Under a flag of truce some rebels approached the Union troops and gestured their intention to surrender. In order to ascertain their true intentions, one Capt Nolte was sent under a white flag to ascertain their intentions. Captain Nolte was shot

dead in a callous encounter with these men shortly after his arrival at their position. Without hesitation Alberts ordered his men to charge and fire upon the rebels, whom immediately turned and fled. The pursuit of the rebels continued for 25 miles, where after 13 rebels were killed, 36 wounded and approximately 240 captured. Colonel Alberts's victory at Treurfontein dealt a heavy blow to the rebellion in the western Transvaal, and encouraged numerous Afrikaners to abstain from active disloyalty.

On the same day Commandant P Vorster captured some rebels in the vicinity of the Magaliesberg. At this point the Government took active steps to persuade the rebels from further rebellious acts and return to their homes. Vorster reported that large numbers of rebels were anxious to return home, and suggested that a proclamation be issued which guaranteed their lives if they returned home. General Smuts requested Vorster to send messengers to the rebels near Magaliesberg to inform them that if they surrendered their arms they would not be prosecuted and vice versa. On 30 October Smuts had sent this proclamation to Lichtenburg, Wolmaranstad, Klerksdorp, Bloemhof and Rustenburg. These terms and conditions had upset a large number of the UDF commandos. Despite the views of the loyal commandos, Smuts was intent on bringing a halt to the rebellion in the Western Transvaal.

On 29 October Wolmaranstad was occupied, leaving the situation in the Transvaal rather precarious. Around Pretoria, C Muller was conducting a recruiting campaign amongst the disillusioned Afrikaners. Muller wanted to attack Pretoria, in order to unsettle Botha's central position. Muller actively went into rebellion on 24 October and disappeared from Pretoria. On 26 October Muller and his followers were gathered at Donkerhoek, where he explained his military and political plans to them. By 29 October Muller had collected a considerable following, and by 4 November it was reported that he would march on Bronkhorstspuit. A force under Colonel Mentz left Pretoria in order to seek a decisive engagement with Muller's forces, and on the following day Mentz's made contact with Muller's close to Bronkhorstspuit. Christian Muller contacted Mentz and demanded that the Government forces turn back in order to prevent bloodshed. Colonel Mentz demanded Muller's unconditional surrender, which were not favourable to Muller. His commando immediately mounted their horses and fled from the scene, and was pursued by Mentz and his men. This resulted in a brief fire fight that lasted about ten minutes. On 7 November Mentz succeeded in surrounding the rebels at Molutzekop, where an intense fight left Muller severely wounded. Colonel Mentz and his forces managed to capture the majority of the rebels. This entirely cleared up the position to the east of Pretoria which left the position in the Transvaal under the control of the Union government.

On 2 November Beyers left Vleeskraal with a strong force towards the Vaal River and Katbosfontein, where after he crossed the Johannesburg-Fourteen Streams railway line near Kingswood Station. The Government were intent on protecting the strategic railway line throughout the Transvaal. Commandant PD Swartz and his force at Kingswood decided to guard the station and railway bridge when they learned that Beyers was advancing past their position. Commandant Swartz's troops exchanged fire with some of Beyers' men, where after they pursued this force to the Vaal River. The rebels successfully crossed the Vaal River after a brief fire fight with Swartz's men.

The presence of strong Government forces around Pretoria and Rustenburg prevented from the rebels from concentrating and attacking the capital. A number of small skirmishes

took place in-and-around the Districts of Pretoria, Rustenburg and Waterberg, during which the rebel forces were forced to surrender. Jopie Fourie, who was the motive power in the districts north of Pretoria, was causing considerable trouble near Haman's Kraal and conducted his campaign based on guerrilla warfare tactics. Fourie refrained from resigning his commission in the UDF when he went into open rebellion. A strong force under Lt Col NJ Pretorius moved out of Pretoria on 15 December with the distinct purpose of engaging Fourie and his men. On the afternoon of 16 December Pretorius and his forces made contact with Fourie on the farm Nooitgedacht. A fierce engagement unfolded and by darkness Fourie and his followers had been defeated and captured. The Government casualties amounted to 12 men killed and a further 24 wounded. Fourie paid the ultimate penalty for his actions as a deserter as he was condemned to death for his treacherous actions. This brought an end to the military operations in the Transvaal.

Operations against Kemp spill over into the Northern Cape

During late October Kemp was on the run after being defeated by the Union forces close to Treurfontein. He headed through the Northern Cape and crossed the border into GSWA with the aim of joining up with Maritz and his forces. On 6 November Kemp passed Vryburg and then made for Kuruman. By 7 November the communication to Kuruman was cut and the town was subsequently captured on 8 November. Kemp continued his advance and moved to Klein Witzand and took a position which had the only water source in the area. The Union forces attacked Kemp at Klein Witzand on 16 November 1914 but were repulsed.

Kemp and his men then made a dash for GSWA by first heading northeast to the edge of the Kalahari Desert where he reached Rooidam on 25 November. From there after a brief engagement with the Union Forces the rebel forces headed westwards towards the German South West African border. The Union forces engaged the rebels with artillery and the rebels returned fire with small arms targeting the horses of the Union forces. The Natal Carbineers and the SAMR was on the spoor of Kemp but they never managed to capture him. There was one final stand before Kemp made good his escape: Kemp had left a rearguard to cover his final escape and while the Union forces were engaged with the rebel rearguard, Kemp managed to circle back past the rear of the Union forces and make good his escape to GSWA. After Kemp left Rooidam, Pieter de Wet found the rebel force close to Grondneus from where the *Vrij Korps* escorted them into GSWA.

Free State

The rebellion in the Free State started on 25 October NW Serfontein and his commando demonstrated in force at Reitz and captured a train full of Government rifles and ammunition. On the same day Heilbron was occupied by rebels under the command of R de Villiers, DH van Coller and JM Els. The rebellion in Heilbron and Vredefort were principally carried out by De Villiers and Serfontein's men. On 26 October, following a brief skirmish between Government troops and rebels at Wolvehook Station, Kopjes was raided by a force under Hans Meyer. They commandeered horses, rifles and ammunition and stole approximately £500 from the local bank. By 27 October Hans Meyer and his force had occupied Parys, whereafter telegraph lines were cut in several places across the province. The first shot of the rebellion in the Free State was fired outside Parys, when Government forces under JA Van der Merwe engaged a small rebel force outside of the town. Commandant van der Merwe

managed to occupy Parys despite the fact that it fell into rebel hands once more during the following weeks. The town of Vredefort was occupied by Hans Meyer's men, during which the UDF troops were driven from the town.

On 28 October De Wet and his followers entered Vrede, where after the local magistrate was insulted and maltreated. During the course of the afternoon De Wet made a speech at the Church Square, where he made clear his intention to go into open rebellion. On 29 October Hertzog had met with De Wet near Harrismith during which he tried to persuade him to meet with President Steyn. It was believed that Steyn could persuade De Wet from pursuing the rebellion. By the end of October the rebels occupied Frankfort, whilst the Districts of Senekal and Bethlehem were also ripe with rebel activity. By the beginning of November De Wet had started for Lindley which he planned to occupy. On 2 November De Wet had finally refused to meet Steyn, where after he journeyed to Vechtkop to address a meeting of his followers. During this meeting De Wet laid out the plans for his armed insurrection. Following the meeting at Vechtkop, De Wet and his men occupied Lindley on 3 November. During the occupation of Lindley, the town was looted and the magistrate threatened with violence. Bolstered by the arrival of a new batch of recruits, De Wet and his men journeyed towards the Windburg District. On 5 November De Wet and his men destroyed the railway line at several places near the Lovat Station, and arrived at Lindeques Kraal in the vicinity of Doornberg on 7 November.

On 7 November Colonel Lemmer defeated Beyers' force at Verlatenkraal Drift, inflicting heavy casualties and capturing approximately 400 rebels. Colonel Lemmer had instructed his officers to dispose his forces along the railway line. With his headquarters at Maquassi, Lemmer was ready to move at a moment's notice in order to meet Beyers and De Wet's forces. By 7 November Colonel Brand had instructed Commandant FR Cronje to proceed to Hoopstad with his commando where they encamped close to Lindeques Kraal after establishing De Wet's whereabouts. During the next morning Cronje and his force fought a sharp action with De Wet's men at Doornberg, during which several casualties were incurred by both sides. After the fire fight at Doornberg, Cronje and his men retired to Theunissen whilst fighting a rearguard action. On the following morning De Wet and his forces occupied Windburg, during which his men ransacked and looted the town.

General Botha left Pretoria on the same day by train and interviewed his chief officers at Vereeniging as to the latest situation in the Free State. On 10 November Botha had gathered a strong concentration at Theunissen. On the same day Beyers and his forces reached Bultfontein, where after he left under a safe conduct to meet with Steyn. Concurrently De Wet left Windburg with his commandoes and advanced towards Clocolan. By 11 November Botha and his force occupied Windburg without opposition. After halting for the day, Botha's forces left for Mushroom Valley during the evening. General Botha had decided to envelop De Wet's position at Hoenderkop. During the morning of 12 November De Wet and his men were surprised when the Government Forces attacked at Hoenderkop. Colonel Brand's force advanced from the west and established contact with the rear and right flank of the rebel force. A heavy engagement developed early on during the morning, during which period Botha deployed some artillery to aid his attack. After the brisk engagement De Wet managed to make good his escape through a nek to the south towards Virginia Station. The Hoenderkop engagement sealed the fate of the rebellion, as a wholesale defection of De Wet's followers followed soon afterwards. The official casualty figures from the engagement were not released

however approximately 250 rebels were captured as well as De Wet's stores. After retreating from Hoenderkop, De Wet joined forces with Beyers and Conroy in an attempt to reach Maritz and Kemp in GSWA. This suited Botha's plan, and all efforts were directed to driving the rebels westwards to compel as large an enemy concentration as possible. Louis Botha was perhaps looking for the *grand battle* in order to crush the rebellion outright.

By mid-November Botha reached Clocolan and entrained there for Kimberley, which he would use as his central position. By 16 November De Wet crossed railway line at Virginia, and was opposed by a UDF unit of 180 men under command of Lt Col Badenhorst. Badenhorst and his men prevented 1500 of De Wet's rebels from crossing the railway line. Hereafter Botha ceased to give any further attention to De Wet. On the same day Colonel Lemmer left for Aaronslaagte where Beyers and Conroy had been located. By 17 November Celliers left Boshof and encountered the rebel forces at Verhelslaagte near Bultfontein. The ensuing engagement soon developed into a sharp running fight and after a general advance by the Government troops it soon developed into a rebel rout. The rebel forces had lost a number of men and equipment to the Union forces. This military operation caused a wholesale disappearance of Beyers' supporters. After the fight at Verhelslaagte, Beyers managed to escape and fled in the direction of Reitz where Wessel Wessels and Serfontein were assembling a large rebel force.

By 26 November the Celliers and Lemmer's commandos reported that De Wet had escaped over the Vaal River with only six men. Many of his supporters had turned around after Beyers' defeat at Verhelslaagte. By the end of November the north-eastern Free State was still in turmoil, fostered in particular by Wessels, Serfontein and Van Coller. The Senekal, Bethlehem, Vrede, Heilbron, Lindley, Frankfort and Harrismith Districts were the scenes of large-scale unrest. This rebel concentration, though formidable in strength, was shown to be of little military account. During the evening of 30 November General Botha arrived in Kroonstad, where he consulted with Smuts as to the military situation. On 1 December Botha left for Bethlehem where he interviewed his commanders. The rebel concentration was primarily at Reitz, where Wessels had issued several 'proclamations' indicate his intention to fight. At daybreak on 2 December the Government forces advanced forces to a point just north of Haaksch Siding on the Bethlehem-Frankfort railway. During the evening Botha dispersed his forces across a broad front. During 3 December Botha advanced on Reitz his forces occupied the town without the slightest attempt at resistance. The operation resulted in the capture of a considerable number of rebels.

On 8 December the remnants of the rebel forces under Wessels, Serfontein and Van Coller surrendered unconditionally to General Botha at the Tiger River. On the same day Beyers emerged from his concealment and crossed the main Free State railway line near Ventersburg. His force was attacked by a small party of Government troops and pursued to the vicinity of Greylings Request. The majority of the rebels surrendered whilst Beyers and an accomplice tried to cross the Vaal River at an old drift. But owing to the full river, both men drowned. These events had signalled the culmination of the rebellion in the Free State.

Skirmishes on the Orange River

Van Deventer took over command of the forces in the Northern Cape in December 1914. Commandant Phillipus Lodivicus Du Plessis was the commandant of the Cradock commando. His force was sent up to Upington where he served under Colonel Bouwer. On 10 December Bouwer deployed Du Plessis's commando to capture a grouping of rebels who were in and around the Orange River border area. The Union and rebel forces engaged and after a skirmish several Union soldiers were wounded and the rebels managed to evade capture. Du Plessis and ten of his soldiers were subsequently captured by the rebels and taken to Schuits Drift. There were a number of incidents on the border of GSWA where Union soldiers were captured by the rebel forces.

On 22 December 1914 a Union commando under the command Lieutenant Colonel Van Zijl and Commandant Breedt were captured by rebel forces at Nous. The rebels attacked the Union camp and it was discovered that Van Zijl was not in the base when the attack took place. Furthermore the Union force was not deployed in the correct positions and precautions were not taken to defend the camp from attack. The rebels captured approximately 130 Union soldiers at Nous.

Van Deventer subsequently sent the Vermaas Scouts and the Calvinia Ruiters to Schuits Drift. On their arrival on 22 December and on hearing the sound of cannon fire they found Commandant Van Niekerk and approximately 500 Union soldiers on the back foot as they were engaged with and surrounded by Martitz's rebels. The arrival of the Vermaas Scouts and Calvinia Ruiters swung the balance to the side of the Union and Maritz and his rebels were repulsed.

There was substantial German and rebel activity on the border of GSWA in late December 1914 and January 1915. Van Deventer wrote to Smuts on 27 December 1914 stating that there was a concentration of German and rebels at Schuits Drift. Furthermore the German and rebel forces had been seen at Nydesputs. On receipt of this information Van Deventer deployed his forces accordingly.

The remoteness of many of the positions in the arid Northern Cape and its concomitant lack of water served as motivation to not permanently deploy UDF commandos in many of the rural and distant locations. Further motivation for the centralisation of Union forces and an advance into GSWA proper was that any pockets of localised rebel or German forces in rural locations would have their communication lines cut. Furthermore the strongest German/rebel position at that time was at Schuits Drift.

There were 400 Union soldiers deployed at Nydesputs and on 18 January 1915 these soldiers were surrounded by a rebel/German force. During the engagement that ensued nine Union soldiers were killed, 20 wounded and 170 were taken prisoner. The remaining approximately 200 soldiers retreated to Vanrooisvlei. The casualties of the German/rebel force are unclear. The German/rebel force was 700 to 800 strong with three pom-poms and three maxims. The presence of the *Vrij Korps* at the Battle of Nydesputs is confirmed by Pieter de Wet.

Van Deventer attributes the loss at Nydestputs to the inadequate orders given by the Union officers which offered an all round defence but did not provide for protection from flank attacks which in turn allowed the Union position to be surrounded. Furthermore Van Deventer adds that the officers gave orders for the Union soldiers to retreat without giving them specific instructions on what was required of them which caused confusion and contributed the resultant losses. The captured soldiers were left behind by the German/rebel forces, and were subsequently reorganised into other units.

The Battle of Nydesputs angered Van Deventer as the Union forces suffered large casualties. Boucher had reservations about the military capabilities of the commandos deployed at the border of GSWA and he requested from Defence headquarters to have them replaced. It is unclear whether the abilities and qualities of the deployed commandos had a direct impact on the loss at Nydesputs.

Following the Battle at Nydesputs, Maritz was told by the German authorities that the South African rebels were not allowed to fall back into GSWA as the colony was running low on rations and supplies. Maritz tried to make contact with Van Deventer in Upington to discuss terms but received no response. Following this Maritz and his rebels attacked Upington.

Maritz's attack on Upington on 24 January 1915 can be regarded as the final phase of the Rebellion. Maritz attacked Upington with approximately 1000 men, four guns, two pom-poms and two machine guns. Maritz and Kemp attacked from the northeast and the attack comprised an artillery duel. The Cape Field Artillery engaged the rebels from the kopjes next to the church in Upington (refer to figure 1). The rebels also attacked from the west along the Orange riverbed. These rebels were led by Stadler and advanced forward under the cover of pom-pom fire. The Union defenders delivered a high volume of accurate fire which prevented the rebels from entering the town.

The rebels became desperate in not being able to penetrate the defences of the town. In their frustration Maritz and Kemp attempted a mounted charge but were repulsed by the Cape Field Artillery who fired at the advancing rebels at short range of approximately 1000 yards.

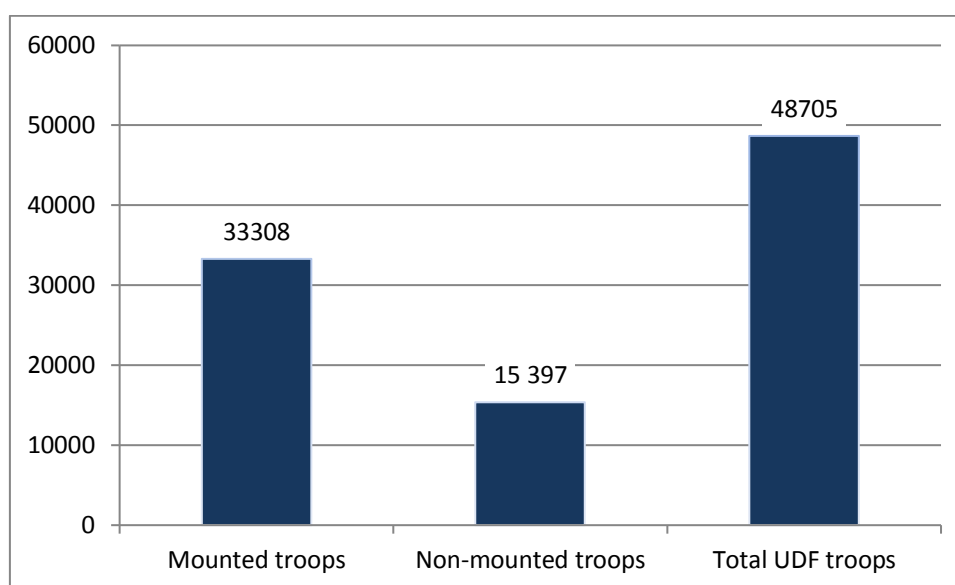
The rebels were firmly repulsed. The Union artillery fired 243 rounds during the exchange and the German artillery fired approximately 150 shells. The rebels casualties were: 12 killed, 23 wounded and 97 captured to the Union's three killed and 22 wounded. The rebel assault on the town of Upington on 24 January 1915 lasted six hours and Van Deventer who was in command ensured a decisive victory for the Union.

The failed attack by Maritz on Upington brought an effective end to any rebel participation in the German South West African campaign. Major H Ritter subsequently attacked the Union force based at Kakamas on 4 February 1915 but was repulsed by a stout South African defence. Ritter's offensive on Kakamas was the last attack that the Germans would make within Union territory. The Germans suffered 12 killed and 12 soldiers captured.

Analysis and conclusion

The headquarters of the UDF had the advantage of efficient intelligence gathering and processing during the Afrikaner Rebellion. This gave the Union forces access to information that made a rapid decision making cycle possible; they could then make maximum use of mobility to concentrate on the rebels and ensure surprise.

The strategy of the central position was effectively employed. The Union made use of internal lines of operations to combat the military threat of the Afrikaner Rebellion. It was essential for the UDF to use railways, armoured trains and motorcars for internal operational movement of forces within the Union's borders. In addition horses were used for tactical movement against the rebels. The Union forces had 33308 mounted troops which were used mobilised for the GSWA campaign; a large number of these troops were used during the UDF operations against the rebels (refer to graph 1).



Graph 1: UDF troops used in operations to suppress the rebellion⁴

Van Deventer attributes his success in his operations against the rebels to the rapidity with which he deployed and positioned his commandos; which forced the rebels to surrender. Furthermore, the UDF was able to defeat the rebel forces because of their superior operational and tactical mobility and their rapid decision making cycle which in turn ensured surprise. The UDF gained and maintained the initiative throughout the military operations against the rebels.

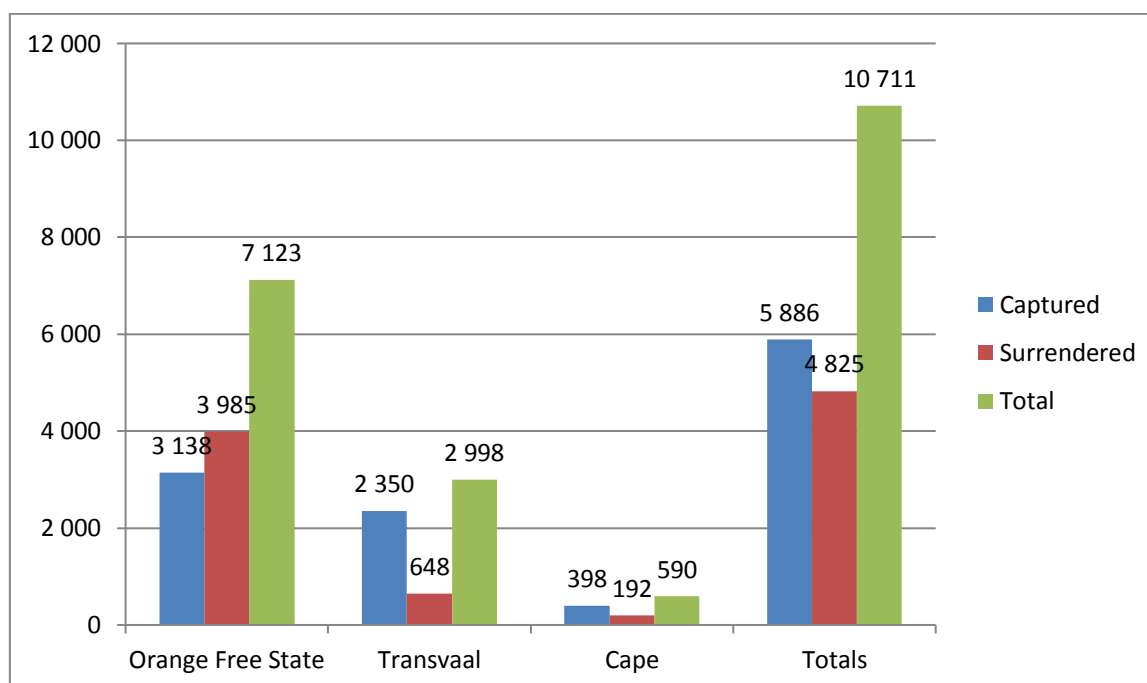
According to Lord S Buxton, the governor general of South Africa, the rebels had no clear campaign plan, no staff work, no cooperation and no definite objectives. Following the failed attempt at Uppington the rebels based in GSWA surrendered on 30 January 1915. Smuts gave the official figures of the rebellion as 130 government soldiers killed and 275 wounded;

⁴ DOD Archives, AG 1914–1921, Box 150, Strengths, List of all Union Defence Forces on active duty, 23 November 1914.

and 190 rebels killed and 400 wounded. The total number of rebels who were captured and surrendered is indicated in Table 1.

Province	Captured	Surrendered	Total
Orange Free State	3 138	3 985	7 123
Transvaal	2 350	648	2 998
Cape	398	192	590
Totals	5 886	4 825	10 711

Table 1: Rebels captured and surrendered⁵



Graph2: Rebels captured and surrendered⁶

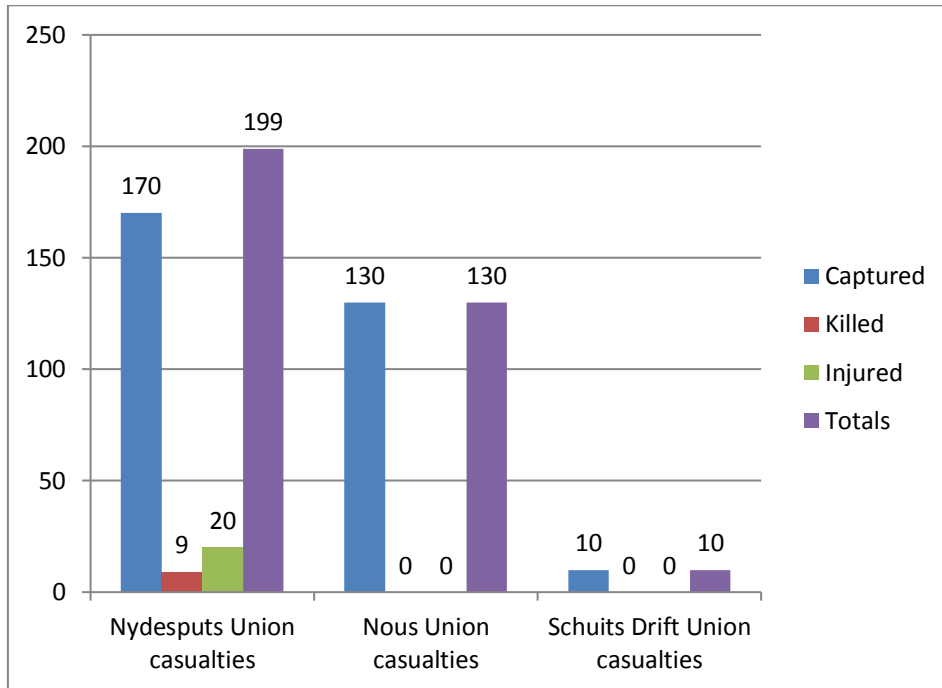
There were significant engagements in the Northern Cape, Orange Free State and Transvaal. These engagements ensured that the UDF maintained the initiative in UDF operations against the rebels (refer to tables 1 – 3 and graphs 2 - 5).

⁵ DOD Archives, D, Box 1, Treason trials, Rebels captured and surrendered. Note these statistics exclude the Battle of Upington.

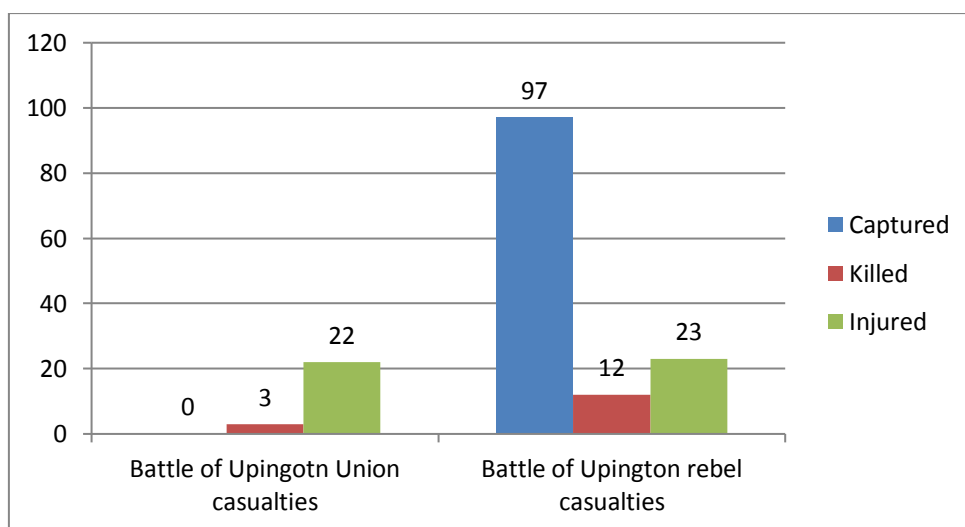
⁶ *Ibid.*

Northern Cape Engagements	
Union victories	Rebel victories
Keimoes	Schuits Drift
Kakamas	Nous
Schuits Drift	Nydesputs
Upington	

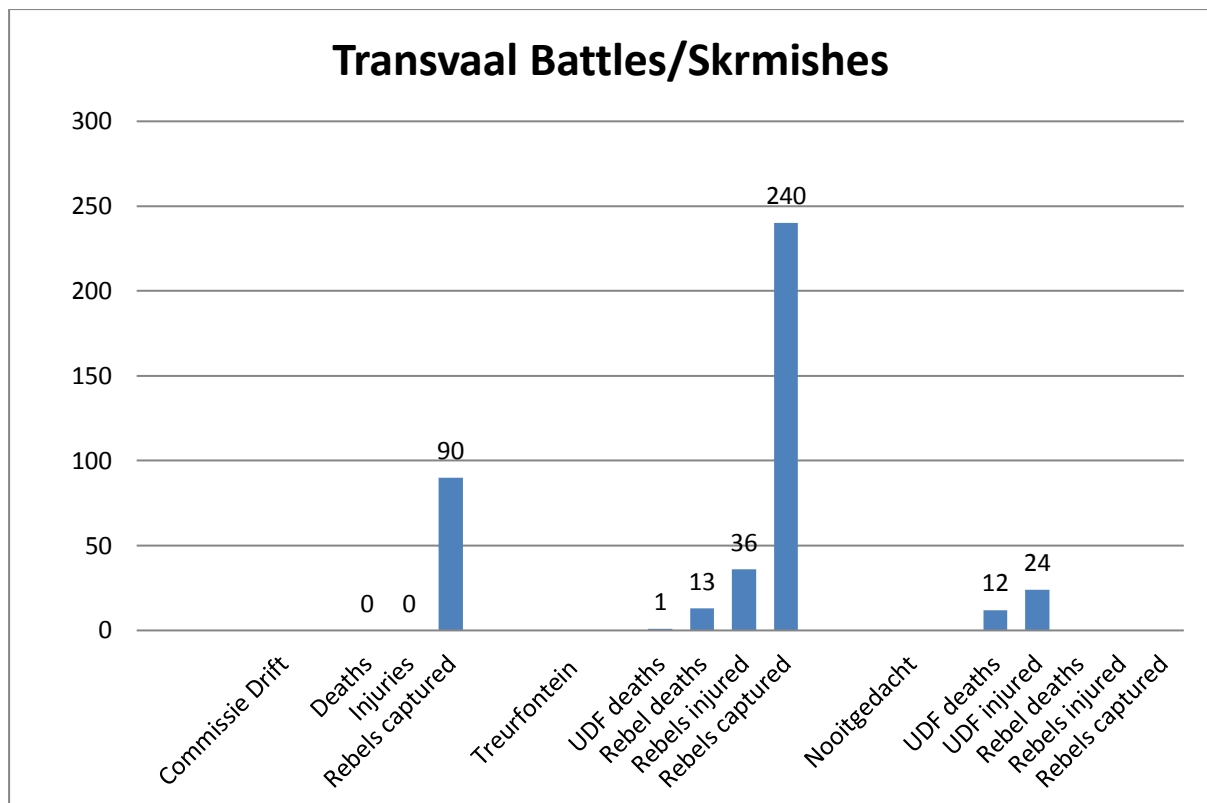
Table 2: Significant Northern Cape engagements



Graph 3: Union casualties at significant Northern Cape engagements



Graph 4: Battle of Upington casualties



Graph 5: Transvaal Battles/Skirmishes⁷

It is also relevant that the rebellion provided the UDF – especially the commandos – with the means to rehearse their drills and tactics. The rebels unwittingly gave the UDF valuable training in the execution of operational and tactical movements and in the review of their battle drills before recommencing with the invasion of GSWA.

The Union raised a total of 48705 troops for the rebellion and the German South West African campaign of which 33 308 mounted troops and 15 397 were non-mounted troops. The rebellion gave the UDF insight into its deficiencies as far as supplies were concerned and the UDF subsequently acquired 20 000 Portuguese Mauser rifles and 10 000 000 rounds of ammunition.

After the Battle of Sandfontein and the Afrikaner Rebellion, the UDF was solidified under a unified leadership structure. The re-invasion of GSWA followed four axes of advance which included the invasion of the Northern, Southern, Eastern and Central force. This invasion concept was similar to the one Smuts initially envisioned.

⁷ Anon., *Judicial Commission of Inquiry*, 66. Anon., *Official History*, 16-17.