

The Civil War of 1861 to 1864 - Paul Kruger

Paul Kruger
03 July 2014

In Chapter III of his memoir's exiled ZAR President describes the fight over the vacant Presidency

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

CHAPTER IV

THE CIVIL WAR: 1861-1864

Chapter III can be read [here](#).

IN the year 1860, Pretorius visited the Orange Free State to settle public affairs there. He had become State President of the Republic two years previously, after the acceptance of the constitution, and now, on the retirement of President Boshoff, was also elected President of the Orange Free State.

He owed his election to the Unionist Party there, since his chief aim was to amalgamate the two Republics. On attaining the second presidency, he was granted leave of absence for six months by the Volksraad of the South African Republic, of which he was also President, for the purpose of visiting the Free State. He probably expected to be able, within that time, to accomplish the union which he so much desired. During the President's absence, in accordance with an earlier resolution of the Volksraad, the oldest unofficial [1] member of the Executive Raad became Acting President of the South African Republic.

In this case, the office fell to Johannes Grobler. He was associated, as the law required, with another member unconnected with the Government, and these two, together with the Commandant General, composed the Executive Raad. Towards the end of 1860, the Volksraad passed a resolution that the State President should hold no other office. Therefore Pretorius, who refused to renounce the Presidency of the Orange Free State, resigned that of the South African Republic.

But, when Grobler assumed the office of Acting President, Schoeman, the Commandant General, [2] opposed him, declaring that the post should have been his. He held public meetings to get this power transferred to himself and to obtain a vote of censure on the Volksraad.

[1 The official members were the President, the State Secretary and the Commandant General. The two others were non-official, or auxiliary members, whose presence was not required at every sitting. - **Note by the Editor of the German Edition.**

2 After the Constitution had been accepted, there was as yet only one Commandant General. - **Note by the Editor of the German Edition.]**

Finally, he summoned all the military officers to Pretoria, and, having assembled them, proposed to abolish the Volksraad and to confer legislative power on the Executive Raad. I, with some other officers, protested against this proposal, on the ground that it ran counter to the constitution, and eventually won over the majority of the officers to my view. But this did not in the least disturb

General Schoeman.

He went to the Government Office and demanded of Grobler the papers and documents belonging to the Government. Grobler offered strong opposition, but was finally forced to retire. I now proposed that a general public meeting should be summoned for the purpose of deciding the matter, and this proposal was also accepted by Schoeman's party. His supporters, however, came to the meeting armed, while their leader had, in the meantime, on his own responsibility, appointed a certain Johannes Steyn to be Commandant General.

Neither I nor my adherents, of course, carried arms.

I had no idea that the other side intended to bring weapons, but, even if I had known of their intention, I should still have gone unarmed with my men, for party feeling ran so high that a hand-to-hand encounter might easily have ensued, which would have led to civil war.

When I had gone as far as Daspoort, on my way to Pretoria, I received an order from General Schoeman to advance no further, but to remain where I was. I replied that I would certainly not turn back before reaching Pretoria, having once accepted an invitation to attend the meeting. As a matter of fact, I rode into the town and went at once to Schoeman's house. I asked him how it was that he wished to hinder my coming to Pretoria, although he had himself agreed to the plan of summoning a general meeting, to which all burghers were invited. I added that this meeting was the sole object of my visit.

Now, just as I entered, a council of war happened to be taking place in Schoeman's house, under the presidency of Steyn, whom Schoeman had appointed Commandant General. As soon as he saw me, Steyn said: ' You must give in with a good grace. It 's the best you can do." I made him no answer, but turned to Schoeman and reproached him for having come armed to the meeting with his followers, while the other side had refrained from doing so. After I had spoken my mind plainly, I told him that I would inspan at once and return home with my burghers. But, when I turned to leave the room, some of Steyn's officers tried to seize me, while others signified their disapproval of such treatment and prevented my arrest.

After I had left the house, Steyn ordered a gun, loaded with shrapnel, to be pointed at the laager of the opposition party and threatened to shoot unless a certain Jeppe were handed over to him. This Jeppe was at that time the only printer in the Republic. His printing-press was at Potchefstroom, and Schoeman's party wished to have proclamations printed so that they might be quickly distributed and thus influence the burghers. I, of course, refused to grant this request; but the threat of Steyn's people, that they would open fire, made such an impression on Jeppe, who was standing behind me, that he rushed forward and gave himself up to the other side.

I now inspanned to return to Rustenburg. I cried out at parting to Schoeman's men: " Once I have crossed the Magaliesberg, you must look on me as an enemy." Just as our wagons were moving away, President Pretorius arrived at Pretoria on his return journey from the Orange Free State and at once rode up to our wagons with a number of Schoeman's men, in order to speak to me and induce me to go no further.

Schoeman's followers now declared that they would sooner throw away their guns than allow them to be a cause of strife. They were also willing that I should make a proposal to be submitted to the vote of the Volksraad. I therefore outspanned again and suggested that Pretorius, Proes the State Attorney, and myself should elaborate a proposal. This met with universal assent. At a meeting of us three men, it was agreed that a commission should be appointed to summon the Volksraad, which should then decide who had acted rightly and who wrongly. The public meeting endorsed this suggestion and at once appointed a commission with Stephanus Lombard as president. The commissioners now entrusted three members of the Volksraad, including the president, Christian Klopper, with the task of summoning that assembly.

Thus, at length, a properly-convened Volksraad met, declared, after thorough investigation, that Schoeman was guilty of breaking the law, and deposed him from the office of Commandant General. The Volksraad resolved further that a special court should settle all the resulting points of

dispute. It nominated W. van Rensburg as acting State President, and Theunis Snyman as Commandant General. When, however, the special court sat to deal with these matters, Schoeman violently put an end to its proceedings.

I had returned home after the session of the Volksraad and happened to be on a hunting expedition on the Crocodile River, when the new complications arose. Messengers were sent to recall me. Now during the recent disputes many members of the Hervormde Church had reproached me with having no right whatever to meddle in public affairs. According to the constitution of the Republic, the Hervormde Church was the state church. Its members alone were entitled to exercise any influence in public affairs. Whoever was not a member of the Hervormde Church was not a fully-qualified burgher.

Now I belonged to the Christellijk-Gereformeerde Church, recently founded, in 1859, by Dr. Postma, at Rustenburg. It is generally known in South Africa as the Dopper,, or Canting Church. The actual derivation of the word Dopper cannot be stated with certainty. At that time, it was derived from the word dop, a damper or extinguisher for putting out candles. The meaning would seem to be that, just as a dop extinguishes a candle, so the Doppers extinguished all new thoughts and opposed all progress.

As for the peculiar tenets of the Dopper Church, they consist in a strict adhesion to the decrees of the Synod of Dordrecht, of 1618 to 1619, and share the point of view of the Old Reformed Church. The service differs from that of the other Evangelical bodies in this particular, that no hymns except psalms are sung by the worshipers. The members of this Church were not recognized by the constitution, for, when it was drafted, they did not form an independent community.

Now when I was asked to give help in these fresh difficulties, I replied that people must put up with Schoeman's conduct. At any rate, I could not do or suggest anything, for I had no political standing.

As a result of this, Acting President van Rensburg, who had been put in office by my party, caused a meeting to be called of the Council of the Hervormde Church, which passed a resolution conferring equal rights on the burghers of all Evangelical churches.

As soon as I heard of this resolution, which was subsequently confirmed by the Volksraad, I rode to Pretoria, where I found President van Rensburg with a portion of his followers and also Schoeman with a number of his adherents.

The two parties were on hostile terms. I went at once to Schoeman's people, with the intention of persuading them to come to a peaceful understanding.

I suggested that a meeting should be summoned of burghers from every part of the Republic and that all should acquiesce in whatever resolution the majority of the meeting might adopt. Both parties agreed to this proposal, and a meeting was called at Pretoria. Hither came a mass of burghers from all parts of the Republic, and it was resolved, by a large majority, to carry out the proposal which had been already accepted by the Volksraad: namely, that a special court should settle each separate question. But Schoeman resisted this proposal and called up all his men, who were still outside Pretoria, to rally round him. Thereupon van Rensburg, in his turn, ordered Commandant General Snyman to call a council of war and at once posted sentries to prevent Schoeman from sending out any more messages.

Pickets were now stationed at various points around Pretoria a particularly strong one at Aapjes River, where the suburb of Arcadia is now situated. The veteran Jacob Malan was in command of this post. He notified the Commandant General, on the following day, that his presence there was superfluous, as Schoeman's messengers easily made their way through the pickets and rode people down, if they did not get out of the way. Snyman then gave orders, that, if one of Schoeman's messengers should again come and refuse to halt when the challenge to do so was repeated, the watch must fire at his horse. Soon after this order was issued, a messenger came riding at full speed and paid no heed to the injunction to halt. The outpost thereupon shot the horse with a charge of large shot. The messenger turned, but as he was turning, his horse dropped. He himself was wounded by a shot in the arm. Thus was the first shot fired that began the Civil War.

On the same evening, the Commandant General, in conjunction with the military officers, issued an order that all burghers must assemble in the town in order to surround Schoeman and take him prisoner on the following day. But, during the night, Schoeman found a way of breaking through with his men as far as Potchefstroom. All who remained behind were visited with punishment by the Council of War.

Schoeman then mustered a commando at Potchefstroom, to which spot General Snyman's commando now hastened. The Acting President and myself accompanied Snyman.

Schoeman's party now spread a report that I, Paul Kruger, was out with my men on commando to compel the recognition of my own church, the Christelijk-Gereformeerde Church, as the state church, instead of the Hervormde denomination.

These rumors occasioned many to join Schoeman's side. Even in the district of Marico, he obtained adherents, including Jan Viljoen, the commandant of that district. As soon as the Government's commando, numbering about 500 or 600 men, reached Potchefstroom, President van Rensburg sent a message to Schoeman with a proposal that a joint commission should be appointed from both sides to find a way out of their difficulties. Schoeman agreed to this proposal, and appointed, on his side, Jan Kock, the father of General Kock, who fell in the late war, together with other burghers, to serve on the commission, while I, together with some others, was entrusted with the conduct of the peace negotiations by the Government party. The delegates met half-way between the two camps. Scarcely had we met, when Jan Kock said to me:

"So you want to make your church the state church?"

I answered quietly:

"Oom Jan, I need not take much trouble to contradict you. If you think a little, you must see for yourself that such a statement must be untrue. Here is the Government's laager. The President and all the officers belong to the Hervormde Church, and I scarcely know whether, out of 500 or 600 men, as many as twenty belong to my church. Therefore what you say about the churches cannot be true."

Afterwards I added:

"I have never thought of making the church to which I belong the state church. Nay, even if you were to offer to make it so, I should decidedly refuse, for our principle declares that Christ and no other must be the Head of the Church."

The commission was, however, unable to come to a decision, and the members separated without accomplishing any result.

On the following day, General Snyman sent me with a gun and a number of burghers to bombard the town from the south side. As soon as I arrived, I at once opened fire with the gun, and succeeded in disabling one of the enemy's guns with my third shot.

General Schoeman replied from the town with artillery and rifle-fire. This duel of the guns lasted all day. On the following night, Schoeman, with his commando, quitted the town for a plateau on the northern side, in order thence to attack the Government party. But I had suspected Schoeman of this intention, and crept alone up the hills in order to observe the enemy's movements. When, at daybreak, I saw Schoeman's commando approaching, I hastened back to my men and gave them orders to get ready and follow me to the hills.

That no time might be lost, I led the way with fifteen to twenty men, while the rest completed their preparations, and charged with them to within fifty or sixty paces of Schoeman's followers, who opened fire with shot and bullets. Of course, I and my men replied, and the firing grew so fierce that neither party could see the other for the smoke and we were obliged to take aim by instinct.

I had three wounded, while the other side had to lament the loss of one killed and about fifteen wounded. General Schoeman, who was slightly wounded himself, fled on the same day into the Orange Free State, but was pursued by us and lost yet a few more followers, whom we took

prisoners.

On his farm in the Orange Free State, his people rallied once more, and General Snyman took the necessary steps to have his opponents arrested there.

The Government of the Orange Free State was asked if it would allow such arrests to take place on that ground and territory. It replied that it had no objection, and even sent Landdrost Truter, of Kroonstad, to assist in making the arrests. But Schoeman was too quick for them. He retreated in the night in the direction of Wakkerstroom, and once more rallied his commando on a farm at the junction of the Klip Stream and Vaal River.

The Government commando, which had at first withdrawn rather to the north, on the assumption that Schoeman would make for Pretoria, pursued him first to the farm I have mentioned, thence to Potchefstroom, and fell in with his laager at the Mooi River between the Loop Stream and Potchefstroom. Just as fighting was about to begin, a small band of Schoeman's people came up, among them being President Pretorius.

He proposed that yet another commission should be appointed to settle our differences. The Government party agreed to this and laagered a few thousand paces above Schoeman's men, opposite Potchefstroom, on the Mooi River. The Government once more sent me with a few other burghers to serve on the commission, while Schoeman's party nominated President Pretorius and others. The place of meeting lay half-way between the laagers.

I proposed that we should now definitely recognize the resolution of the Volksraad appointing van Rensburg Acting President and entrusting the punishment of the guilty to a special tribunal. One of the most hotly-debated points in our discussion was, who should sit as judge of this tribunal? But at last this question, too, was decided, after a debate of many hours, in accordance with my ideas. I had proposed to establish the tribunal in exact conformity with the requirements of the constitution. It was further resolved that President van Rensburg should summon the special court without delay. The decisions of the commission were accepted by both commandos ; the members separated ; the war seemed at an end.

President van Rensburg at once acted on this decision and summoned the special court. But, although the court was composed in equal parts of members drawn from both factions, the first case, which happened to be that of Andries du Toit, belonging to the Schoeman party, was given against him. This was enough. The remaining members of the party rode away. The costs of the court, as well as those of the commando, were given against Schoeman's party, and a council of war was to be held, to which his officers were also to be invited. It so happened that I had meantime been elected Commandant General, and was charged by the Government with the task of collecting the costs of the commando from the opposite side and, at the same time, bringing the officers to the council of war. I summoned a meeting for this purpose in the Heidelberg district, where I met with a most friendly reception from the field-cornet of that district, named Roets, a member of the opposite faction. I also succeeded in collecting, by peaceful means, a portion of the fines imposed, and in inducing a number of the officers opposed to me, including Commandant Jan Marais, to accompany me to Pretoria. On my way to the meeting at Heidelberg, a young Boer perpetually rode in front of me and announced that "Paul Kruger was coming." To this he invariably added that he would not advise him to come, as it would go badly with him.

Now, since I traveled by night as well as by day, I overtook this young man and, on the following morning, turned back from a farm, which he was just going to visit. The young man came straight up to me and began to rattle off his usual speech. I let him finish his say and then said to him :

"Young man, let me give you some good advice: do not repeat this foolish stuff any longer! Your whole party has already been guilty of quite enough disobedience against the administrative authority."

"Yes; but who are you, Oom? " asked the young man.

"Paul Kruger," I replied.

To hear these words and lay hold of his horse was for the young man the work of an instant. He trembled so violently in every limb that he could scarcely mount his horse. But, once he was in the saddle, he did not wait a moment. I tried at least to discover his name but could get no reply save a cry of terror, and then away he flew!

On my return from Heidelberg to Pretoria, I had a still more amusing experience. I was traveling with the above-mentioned Jan Marais to the farm of a certain Strydom in the Pretoria district. Mrs. Strydom knew Marais very well, and was aware that he belonged to Schoeman's party. But she did not know me, and thought I was one of his officers. Her husband had been summoned to serve as a magistrate in the local court, but had failed to appear, and had accordingly been condemned to pay a fine of 100, whereupon he had taken to flight. Mrs. Strydom told her visitors with complete unconcern that her husband had been obliged to fly from his house, because "this Paul Kruger" had condemned him to pay a fine of ,100 on account of his failure to preside in the local court. Of course this fine was not imposed by me, but by the court itself. Yet she directed all her wrath upon "Kruger," and spoke without restraint in a most unpleasant manner about the Government party and specially about myself, who, "so to speak, was the head of the party." After she had continued these tirades against myself and my party for about half an hour, there arrived from Pretoria a certain Jan Bantjes, who was attached to the side of the Government. He saluted me, and, coming up, said:

"What, you here too, General? Are you taking Marais as your prisoner? "

"No," I answered, "he is going with me of his own free will to the council of war."

A light began to dawn on Mrs. Strydom, and her tongue was silenced by apprehension. In tones of earnest entreaty she said to me :

"Oh, General, I did not know who you were. Do not be angry at what I have said. I am so nervous by nature that I always talk to people as they talk to me, to avoid all unpleasantness. I only speak like that when I think people belong to the other side ; but, if people of your party come, I speak quite differently. I have the sum here, which my husband was fined. I can fetch it you, if the general will only take it."

To this I, of course, replied that I had nothing to do with the money; neither could I take it, for the matter was one which concerned the court. But, from that moment until the time of my departure, Mrs. Strydom was more than amiable.

The council of war in Pretoria passed off without any noteworthy results. Shortly afterwards, I was instructed by President van Rensburg to go to the Orange Free State to settle the question of determining the boundary between the two States.

When I reached Potchef stroom, I learned that Jan Viljoen, of Schoeman's party, the Commandant of Marico, was approaching with a commando to capture me. I rode to meet him with my small escort to ask what he wanted. Some of my men, including Field-cornet Sarel Eloff, dashed forward to seize a kopje, which seemed to be Viljoen's objective, and succeeded in reaching it before Viljoen. When they had secured this advantage, they cried out to Viljoen's men that they had no hostile intentions, but only desired a friendly conference.

The others rode continually nearer, until they completely surrounded Eloff with his small band of comrades, whereupon they captured the whole company and rode off with them to their camp. When they were nearly opposite the place where I had remained with the rest of my men, Field-cornet Eloff suddenly put spurs to his horse and rode up to me.

His guards of course set after him, as soon as they had recovered from their surprise, but they could not catch him on his good horse. The other prisoners were taken to the enemy's laager and afterwards declared that they had been threatened with all sorts of punishments, if I did not yield to the demands of Schoeman's party. They did not dare to make a prisoner of me, although I had only a few men with me. My camp had been surrounded, but it was impossible to surprise me, for I was prepared for everything.

However, considering their overwhelming superiority in numbers and in order to avoid injuring the

prisoners, I had resolved, if it came to a fight, to avoid an encounter. So I and Eloff determined to continue our journey to the Orange Free State, while the other burghers might better disperse to their homes. As a matter of fact, we arrived without hindrance at Buhrmann's farm, in the neighborhood of the Rhenoster River, in the Orange Free State, while several more of our burghers were made prisoners on their way home by Viljoen's men.

I was continually kept informed of the plans and intentions of Viljoen's commando by trusty messengers, and I made use of the same messengers to convey to the enemy the following intelligence. I allowed them to suppose that I never intended to return to the South African Republic, but should settle down in the Orange Free State, because there were so many disputes in the Transvaal. I even bought a farm in the Orange Free State, on condition of being allowed to give it back again, and sent for a team of oxen: nay, I even caused my family to prepare themselves for a trek, so as to make the news seem more probable. I had recourse to this stratagem chiefly that I might set free my imprisoned burghers. Shortly afterwards, I received a message that a large commando of the Opposition was on the way to Pretoria for the purpose of attacking a Government commando encamped on the Crocodile River.

A small portion of the hostile commando had remained at Potchefstroom to guard the prisoners.

When I learned that the prisoners had been set free and were dispersed, and when, at the same time, a messenger from the Government party came to me to ask what my plans were, I resolved to return immediately and join the Government commando on the Crocodile River. Pretorius, who in the meantime had resigned the office of President of the Orange Free State, happened at this moment to be at Potchefstroom. I let him know that I would pay him a visit, if it were at all possible, but found no time to do so.

I did, however, push on in the night to Stompoorfontein Farm, in the Potchefstroom district, which belonged to Wolmarans, a member of the party. But I stayed there only about half an hour and journeyed on again to my farm, called Waterkloof, in the Rustenburg district, which I reached in the afternoon of the same day. Field-cornet Sarel Eloff, who had been with me the whole time, parted from me on the hoogevel, and went straight to the Zwartruggen district to commandeer the burghers there. He promised to rejoin me in a few days with his men.

On the day after my arrival at the farm I rested, as it was Sunday, but the same night I pushed on to Zwartkopje, where President van Rensburg, with part of his burghers, was encamped. Here I met him, having hurried up on the news of the advance of a strong commando. On the following day, which was Tuesday, the enemy's commando was sighted. I had set a good watch and was early informed of their approach. The enemy seemed intent on occupying Zwartkopje, while my men hurried to outstrip them and be the first to take up their stand on the kopje.

Now began a race on both sides for the nearest kopje.

Both sides came into collision at the top. I, with a man named Enslin, was in front. As he got off his horse, Enslin was already prepared to fire, but some one from the enemy's ranks called across: "Don't shoot; let us talk: why need we kill one another?"

Enslin lowered his gun, but, just as he did so, received a bullet and fell dead into my arms. Thereupon a general engagement ensued, but, before it had lasted half an hour, the enemy made for their horses and fled in the direction of Pretoria.

My burghers now mounted their horses to pursue the enemy, but I stopped them by pointing out that they had not to do with enemies, but with brothers.

Just at that moment, Field-cornet Eloff came up with 50 men, and wanted to continue the fight. But I would not let him, and, though dissatisfied at this, he listened to my arguments. President van Rensburg greatly appreciated this conduct on my part.

When the enemy's burghers saw that they were not being pursued, they turned back to bring their wagons to a safe place. They encamped on a group of kopjes a few thousand paces distant from my men.

In the evening, I sent Eloff with some men to keep watch in the neighborhood of the enemy's laager. They got so close to the laager that they could hear the people talking there, and could see how busy they were in putting their artillery into position by the light of lanterns. None of them observed that the enemy was in close proximity.

That night, ex-President Pretorius entered the enemy's laager, and at once sent a message to me, in which he asked for a conference to discuss the terms of peace. As I had entertained the same plan, I readily agreed to it. Delegates were appointed on both sides for this conference: Grobler, Prinsloo and myself for the Government, and ex-President Pretorius, Menitjes and Fourie for the enemy. As soon as we met, I again proposed, as at a previous conference, that the Government elected must, in accordance with the constitution of the country, be first recognized as legal by the Volksraad.

In proof of our peaceful intentions, I told the enemy that one of our pickets, on the previous night, had come so close to their laager that it might have attacked them quite unawares, had it wished to do so. This fact did not fail to make an impression, and after a discussion that lasted several days, we agreed on the following points:

1. The Government to be recognized by the Volksraad.
2. A new presidential election to take place.

The mooted points still existing to be referred to a court of arbitration composed of judges of the Free State. With this object, the Free State should be asked to assign such judges as were necessary.

The Opposition proposed, moreover, that a commission should be nominated from their side whose duty it should be to see that the arrangement was strictly kept by the Government, and that they must have free access to President van Rensburg's office. To this no objection was raised, and ex-President Pretorius and another burgher were elected members of this commission. At the same time, Fourie and myself, with Jan Kraep as secretary, were dispatched to the Orange Free State, in order to ask for judges from the Government of this State, who, in accordance with the arrangement, might constitute the court.

The burghers dispersed and went to their homes.

When our deputation reached the Orange Free State, where President Brand had just taken his oath of office, the latter advised both parties to settle the matter amicably rather than bring it before a court.

He pointed out to us that an impartial court of law would pass sentences on too many burghers, and that an understanding on both sides would be much better; finally, he even refused to appoint the judges of his country for the purpose. I now sought for a precedent for settling a matter of this kind, and at last discovered that an old jurist had laid down the principle that charges of rebellion in a country torn by civil war could, by general consent, be dismissed by a general amnesty, so long as the chief parties concerned were discharged from their official positions.

The Volksraad resolved in this sense, and peace was thus fully restored. The Volksraad also agreed to the proposal that a new presidential election should be held. At the same time, at my own instance, as I wished to give the burghers the opportunity of choosing another commandant general if they were dissatisfied with me, a new election for Commandant General was held, at which I obtained more than two-thirds of the votes.

Source: http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page72308?oid=644178&sn=Marketingweb+detail&pid=90389&utm_source=Po