

Native Wars - Paul Kruger

Paul Kruger
06 July 2014

In Chapter V of his memoirs exiled ZAR President describes his role in the great Basotho War and the fight against Machel

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

CHAPTER V

Click [here](#) to read Chapter IIII

NATIVE WARS

IN 1865, the great Basuto War broke out in the Free State. Robbing and plundering, the Basutos penetrated far into Free State territory. They also murdered some Transvaalers, among others a certain Pretorius and his family, who was returning home in his wagons, across the Drakensberg, from a journey to Natal. As assistance was required in the Orange Free State, I was dispatched with about 300 men [1] supplied by Pretorius/ From Malap, that is, from the settlement of the Chief Malap and his tribe, near Moshesh's town, I sent a message to the head chief to deliver up the murderers. Moshesh replied that he was prepared to do so, but asked for a few days' delay. Before the short time which was now allowed to him had expired, he treacherously fell upon the Boer camp with 3,000 Kaffirs and about 4,000 Zulus who had come to his assistance. Under cover of the darkness, aggravated by a continuous soft rain, and a rising mist, the Kaffirs came right into the camp and naturally occasioned great consternation. It was not till daybreak that we managed to drive them from the camp.

[1 I desire here to state that these figures are absolutely correct, notwithstanding that they differ entirely from those given in the historical works on South Africa that have so far appeared. - **Note by the Editor of the German Edition.**]

I had at that time a certain Nyhoff for my secretary, who had been drunk on the evening before the fight, and had been tied to a wagon-wheel for a punishment. He there slept so soundly that he noticed nothing of the fight, and, the next day, when he at last awoke, he looked round in astonishment and asked: " Have you people been fighting during the night? " Our commando pursued the enemy into the mountains in the direction of Malap's town. At the same time, I dispatched a message to Fick, the Chief Commandant of the Orange Free State, who had about 600 men with him, to ask him also to advance towards Malap's town, with his commando, and join me there.

This was done, and we held a council of war in which it was decided that the burghers of the South African Republic should receive farms in the territory which was now about to be freed of the enemy and hold them under the laws of the Orange Free State. The Government of the Free State was informed of this resolution. An attack was made on the Malap Mountains and met with perfect

success. The enemy was driven off, a large number of his men killed and wounded and a quantity of cattle captured.

From there the commando marched further in the direction of Moshesh's town. On the way, near the Katskatsberg, we came upon a strong Kaffir force of about 20,000 men. The strength of the enemy may be estimated to some extent from the following observations. When we Boers first saw the Kaffir forces, who were all mounted, we noticed some loose cattle among them, but these seemed so few compared with the number of the Kaffirs that we concluded they were cattle which the Kaffirs had brought with them for food.

But, when we had succeeded in capturing the cattle, we counted no less than 8,000 head. The Kaffirs made their way back to the town, pursued by our men, and, after some more fighting, we managed to capture 30,000 more sheep, 8,000 oxen and a few hundred horses.

Commandant Fick here received word from President Brand of the Free State that he could not consent to the resolution, which had been passed at the council of war, by which Transvaal burghers were to obtain grants of ground in the reconquered territory to be held under the laws of the Free State. In consequence of this the burghers of the South African Republic refused to fight any longer and went home.

I had hardly reached home, after this expedition, when I had to go to Potchef stroom to attend the Session of 1866 of the Volksraad. On my return journey after the sitting, I met with a serious accident.

At Schoonkloof Farm, in the Rustenburg district, just beyond Elephant's Pass, I had to cross a sloop, or ditch. The ditch was dry, but the road which led across the ditch was thoroughly soaked and cracked, so that it was impossible for wagon or horse to get through. Now, rather than turn back and go a long way out of my road, I went back a little way with my two-wheeled cart and then urged the mules to a full gallop towards the ditch, intending to make them jump the ditch and drag the cart after them. But the cart upset and I broke my left leg at the knee.

With my broken leg and assisted only by the small Kaffir boy whom I had with me, I had to get the cart up again, lift it on to the wheels, and, without being able to bind up my leg, drive for an hour and a half to get home. The jolting of the cart caused me terrible suffering, and my broken leg compelled me to nine months of inactivity, during which time I only managed to crawl about on crutches. My left leg has ever since been a little shorter than the other, but it was hardly noticeable after a time. ~ Before I had quite recovered, in 1867, I had to lead a commando against the rebel Kaffirs of the Zoutpansberg district. But, through lack of ammunition, this expedition was able to do but little.

President Pretorius had promised to send me ammunition, but could not keep his word, as the goods were stopped at the frontier. In the Zoutpansberg district the village of Schoemansdaal had suffered especially from the attacks of the Kaffirs. I went there, and twice attacked the Kaffirs in order to drive them from that neighborhood. But, in these two attempts, all my ammunition was exhausted, and, much against my will, I was obliged to abandon the village.

I offered to remain until help and ammunition should come from Pretoria, where I had sent a mounted messenger to inform the President of our plight. But only one field-cornet with his men was willing to stay with me, the others refusing to hear of any further delay.

I called the villagers together, and held a meeting in which I told them that I would remain with them, but the villagers declared that they would rather not stay there under such conditions, but would go back with the commando, as they could then at least take their most valuable possessions on the wagons of their relations in the commando, while otherwise, if the Kaffirs were not driven away, they would have to flee later on, and then, for want of transport, would have to leave all their property behind them. So there was nothing for it but to escort the inhabitants of Schoemansdaal to Marabastad, which place thus, for the time being, became the chief settlement in the Zoutpansberg

district.

On the return journey across Makapaanspoort, the inhabitants of that district complained that the Kaffir captain Machedem had stolen much cattle from them and that he had acted altogether in so aggressive a manner that they lived in constant fear of attack.

Machedem was summoned to appear before me, as he had changed his quarters, and I could not go to him to speak with him. His present habitation was a mere nest of caves, ravines and earth-holes, where his people lived on stolen cattle and could easily escape pursuit. Machedem answered the summons, but many of his people would not leave their caves.

I therefore went myself, accompanied by the captain, to fetch the rebels. On arriving at the kraal, I sent messengers to announce the object of my visit. But the Kaffirs refused to listen to the messengers and attacked them. When I heard the firing, I ran to the rescue. The Kaffirs fired at me also, but, after a short fight, we succeeded in capturing those of the cave-dwellers who had not escaped. This band, together with the others who had first obeyed the summons, were then taken to their new home, five or six miles up the Nile River. At Makapaanspoort, a small guard was also left to protect the inhabitants.

This affair with Machedem had caused a great to-do.

While we were besieging the refractory Kaffirs in their caves, the girls of the tribe brought them water and food. In order not to harm the women and yet to prevent them from prolonging the men's resistance, I had them all captured, as they were going to the caves, and placed under supervision.

We took them with us to Pretoria, there to be delivered, and left to the decision of the Executive Raad, whose confirmation I also had to obtain of my choice of the place allotted to Machedem and his people for their new settlement (I had full authority and orders to make him leave his old quarters).

If Machedem's tribe should not have submitted and promised to behave better, the girls, according to English (and afterwards also Boer) custom, would have been ingeboekt, that is, portioned out to Boer families under legal supervision until they came of age. Machedem, however, behaved so well that the Executive Raad soon after restored all the girls to him.

In the following year, 1868, I set out again, and, accompanied by only one burgher, made for the Waterberg and Zoutpansberg districts, to see how matters stood there. At Makapaanspoort, I found all the Kaffir chiefs of the neighborhood assembled.

They all seemed greatly surprised at my unexpected visit. They knew I was to come, but had thought that I would summon them by messenger to come to me; and they now consulted as to how they should act in this case. They had never thought that I would venture among them alone.

Without displaying the least distrust, I dismounted in their town, and they all kept quiet. They greeted me with the words: "When it is peace, it is peace; and when it is war, it is war," which implied that my arrival without an escort showed them that my disposition towards them was friendly, that I expected the same from them, and that therefore they must keep the peace.

From Makapaanspoort, I went on to Zoutpansberg, where one of the captains who had fought against me in the previous year now offered his submission. The object of this journey was not merely that I might see the captains personally and admonish them to keep the peace, but also, as is the duty of a commandant general, take a census of the Kaffirs, a valuation necessary for the purpose of taxation.

Source: http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page72308?oid=645184&sn=Marketingweb+detail&pid=90389&utm_source=Po