

HIGHVELD HERO

**THE STORY OF
PIETER BEUKES
DE WET'S MASTER SPY**

BY

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TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL AFRIKAANS

BY

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**THE ENGLISH EDITION IS DEDICATED TO THE
IRISH BRIGADE WHICH HELPED US SO HEROICALLY
IN OUR STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM. – O.P.**

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POTCHEFSTROOM

In October, 1899, fifty years ago almost to a week, the Boer War --- called by us the Second War of Liberation --- broke out. The first war of that name had ended with a victory of Majuba which had set the seal on our Independence.

In October, 1899, we were living at Potchefstroom, at one time the capital of the Transvaal Republic. We had reached it by easy stages from Aberdeen in the Cape Province, the first home of my immigrant parents where my brother and I had been born. The last part of the long journey was the trek from Johannesburg. Today, the Blue Train, thundering down from the Rand to Cape Town, covers the distance in two and a half hours. In 1894 it took us, travelling with three stout wagons, each drawn by six oxen just under two weeks.

I imagine that I can still remember the journey, but probably merely recollect what I was told much later. In my mind's eye I can see my father a red-bearded German doctor, walking the whole distance of the trek, shooting birds and small buck for the pot. In republican days a traveler was allowed to shoot game from a public highway, provided he lay down his rifle or shot-gun when he retrieved his quarry.

Potchefstroom was then, as it is now, the most important center in the Western Transvaal. The railway from Johannesburg was being pushed forward beyond Randfontein, over Bank, Welverdiend and Frederikstad, all places that were to play a part in the war. It reached us in 1896, about the time of the Jameson Raid.

My recollection of the Raid is clear but fragmentary. I remember the mounted commandos moving out of the village through long lines of waving women and children. My father followed in the Red Cross wagonette, drawn at a spanking trot by six glistening mules, while my mother blinked back her tears. Three day later she nearly collapsed in our sitting-room when the landdroos --- our magistrate --- called with news. He had come to warn her that a dispatch rider who, as we learnt later, was little more than a deserter had arrived with the story that one of Jameson's guns had hit the field hospital and had blown up the big tent and everybody in it. The fatherly landdroos, however, comforted her by saying that he did not believe a word of the story.

A week later my father was back with fragments of a shell that had in fact, exploded in the hospital but had hurt nobody. The next day the victory over the raiders was celebrated with speeches and fireworks. It was a great occasion for everyone. Even the curfew for the Natives --- the African Nation --- was forgotten that night.

Before the coming of the railway, the only regular link with the outside world had been the stage coach which arrived twice a week from the Witwatersrand, and the same number of times from Kimberley in the opposite direction. Its entry into our village was always an event. As he reached the outskirts of the dorp, the Cape Colored driver would sound a spirited call on his official bugle and lash his mules into a head run for the last half mile of his long journey. The big coach would come to rocketing along ahead of long trail of dust. Then, with the driver handling his reins with the coolness of a professional, his assistant would stand on the brakes, the coach would sway and come to a slithering stop and the Great Outside World would descend into our midst.

Prospectors, gamblers, miners, artisans, professional men and an occasional female, sometimes a lady, usually not, would look about with strange eyes. Some of the travelers would be people paying

periodical visits to farms under gold options, or the country stores in which they were interested. Others would be on their way to the "coast", having made their pile. Others again would be at the beginning of their great adventure, seeking a home on the Witwatersrand or in the wilds north of Pretoria. Whether they came from the west or the east, from the Rand or Kimberley, our little village must have been a sight to gladden their hearts. It lay like an evergreen half-moon in the bend of the Mooi River, a stream even today without equal for the clearness and abundance of its water. After the weary miles of dust and heat, its dark green vegetable gardens and cool sprawling orchards must have seemed like a bit of paradise to the tired traveler.

When the Johannesburg railroad reached us in 1896, the coach service from the Rand was discontinued but the road connection with Kimberley was maintained until just prior to the outbreak of the Boer War. By then the line had reached Klerksdorp via Machavie and Koekemoer, both scenes of hard fighting some years afterwards. The rail connection between the Rand and Kimberley was, however, only established much later, in fact several years after the Peace Treaty of Vereeniging which marked the end of the Transvaal Republic.

The fact that Klerksdorp was the rail terminus during the whole of the war had an important bearing on hostilities in that area. It enabled the Boer Generals De Wet, De la Rey, Kemp, Cilliers and others to wage war against greatly superior numbers on terms of equality. Without a railway to help concentrate masses of troops at any threatened point the British had to rely on animal transport against guerillas who probably had no equals in the world as masters of horse flesh and as mule drivers. The Boers were also helped by an unusually good intelligence system. Its nerve center was in Potchefstroom and its chief spy the hero of this book Pieter Beukes. To appreciate his exploits, it is necessary to devote a little space to the layout of Potchefstroom as it was at the beginning of the Boer War.

If one came from Johannesburg one entered the village over the North Bridge. Today the main road from the Witwatersrand comes in at the right angle over the East Bridge also known as the Elandsheuwel Bridge. Just before the Mooi River reached the North Bridge some of its water was deviated into the Big Furrow, a canal which supplied the cord to the bow of the river bend and was used to irrigate all the village gardens. At the beginning of the Big Furrow the ground was high and level. This was the location of the British camps during the war and was, after the peace treaty, laid out as permanent cantonments for the occupation troops. Just below the North Bridge a mill stream had been dug. It supplied water to the grain mill of a queer old character one Hjula. Old man Hjula was a Dane by birth who had been a digger in Australia where he had struck it rich. He came to Potchefstroom in the later eighties with fifty thousand golden sovereigns in bags said to have been from Kangaroo skins. He, however, derived little profit from his mill as he gave away more flour to the poor than he got by way of payment for the milling. His generosity coupled with certain lively habits he acquired in Australia eventually made a poor man but he was always one of our most popular citizens, His mill stream joined the river again at the Elandsheuwel Bridge. Elandsheuwel, hill of the giant eland antelope, was the name of the most fertile areas of the Mooi River valley and belonged to the Grimbeek family, well-known pioneers of those days. It is on the south of the river, opposite the present golf course then a deep swamp covering several miles of reeds, mud and water. We used to do bird nesting there whilst our fathers and elder brothers shot snipe, or duck on the open patches. Most of this area was difficult and unless one knew of the ridges connecting the higher portions like rocks one could get very wet and very muddy in trying to cross it.

But there was one spot that was definitely gruesome. It was a big pool called the Devil's Hole. Nobody had ever plumbed the inky depths of its eerie waters and in fact, nobody ever wanted to. The place had a bad name. Even the grown-ups gave it wide berth. They more than half believed the native superstition that it was the lair of the huge man-eating Makoppa snake. Unfortunately, our main swimming pool lay just beyond the Devil's Hole. Passing it during the day was not so bad provided one crossed one's fingers and spat over your left shoulder but coming back after sunset if you had been fishing was a nightmare. You did not dare break into a run because that might entice the Makoppa and walking was just one long suspense. So most of the time we preferred to cross the river and take the longer way round the Elandsheuvel Bridge. You could do this by pitching your rod and bag, if any, across the stream and then swinging yourself over by the long branches of one of the weeping willows which fringed the river on both sides for the whole length of the village. There were times when the river was in flood and covered the whole breadth of the swamp even connecting up with the Devil's Hole. Then you had in any case to go round the Elandsheuvel Bridge and fish from the left bank. But those were the days of the big fish. I once caught a yellow fish which scaled over twelve pounds and fought like a tiger fish of the same size. These floods provided all kinds of excitement. Sometimes they stirred up the adjoining Loop Spruit and there we killed barbers, cat fish as big as the piccanins who helped us. On one occasion I remember a marsh otter family of three were flooded out and I caught up with them just off the Devil's Hole. The old dog otter fought our two big Airedales for twenty minutes before I got a lucky blow with a piece of lead piping I was carrying. These otters are as big as badgers and very vicious. Half the village came to see the pelt where I had stretched it in our back yard.

The village itself fell into two parts. The so-called top portion started at the beginning of the Big Furrow carried along for most of its length. Near where it re-entered the River was the Native Location on lower ground. At nine-o'clock every night a bell was rung on Church Square. That was the curfew for all non-Europeans. Anyone of them found in the White area after that was summarily dealt with by our Landdrost the next morning. The top portion took in most of the area on both sides of the Big Furrow. Within it were the dwellings of the more substantial citizens, the shops and of course the Churches. The lower portion extended all along the river right into the Native Location and wherever the swamp permitted it housed the less fortunate members of the community. Its main thoroughfare was called River Street. Piet Beukes lived there not far from the Devil's Hole.

At the end of the century just before the outbreak of the Boer War we were a very contented and fairly prosperous community. In spite of the railway line we were as isolated as when the only link with the outside world was the stage coach. But this isolation was self-imposed. As the one-time capital of the Transvaal we felt that we were too important to associate with villages like Klerksdorp and others which had no historical past. At the same time Johannesburg represented to us a place as wicked as the Babylon of the Bible. Here all vices reigned supreme and uitlanders spent their time plotting against our beloved president. The grown-ups had their worries but these were trivial compared with what they were later "after the Khakis had come". This phrase, much used after the war marked the departure of the good old times. To us boys Potchefstroom was just paradise. Even today when irrigation canals have reduced the river to a fraction of its original size its swimming and fishing is what other boys dream about. It had probably more bird and game life than any place in the Transvaal and the fruit was so abundant that most gardens were open to all neighbors and passersby. Into this Boer Eden came the British War. It altered much and none of it for the better. Times became very hard and living very difficult. Maybe all this was inevitable because all around us the battle for the Western Transvaal was

going on and unknown to practically all of us was the center of the Boer intelligence system and housed its chief spy, Pieter Beukes.

It was years after the Peace Treaty that we heard, to our great surprise, for the first time exactly who Pieter Beukes had been and what he achieved. To us he had always been a joke. The grown-ups hardly noticed him, and we boys treated him with contempt. I can still see him as he used to pass our house every morning: a pitiful scarecrow of a youngster, thin and hunched like a greyhound on a cold winter's morning. At the outbreak of the war he was about fifteen or sixteen --- some five years older than I --- but his arms and legs were no thicker than mine. He was always regarded as a rank coward and, if any boy challenged him to a fight, he would immediately take to his heels. Even boys of seven or eight could kick him with impunity as they passed. Yet, curiously enough, he possessed a wiry strength that was amazing: not even two of the bigger boys could hold him if he wanted to escape.

His chief characteristics were a pair of corduroy trousers, patched with buckskin, perpetually red-rimmed eyes and a continually dripping nose. In fact, we took it for granted that he suffered from a permanent cold. Only later did we realize that it was wholly a nervous affliction. He possessed neither shoes nor hat, while a torn football jersey served as both shirt and jacket. None of us ever knew who his parents were, or in fact whether Pieter Beukes was his real name.

It was said that he had grown up with Natives, and one thing seemed to confirm this: he cleaned his teeth every day with water and a sliver of wood, just as they do. Besides his teeth were like those of the Kaffirs: white and strong like a beast's. Not that we often noticed them, although his mouth perpetually gawked open, for his long lips hung like sluiceways over them.

He lived with his uncle, old Carel Vlotsam, the village drunkard, down in River Street. Old Carel --- even the children did not use the polite title usually given to their elders, "Oom" --- was a printer by trade, and a very good man at his work. But, as he explained to anyone he could buttonhole, turpentine and putty are deadly to a man's throat unless he could lubricate it freely. Whenever he had money, he was drunk and it was only when his whole future earnings had been mortgaged to the barman of the two hotels that he consented to start work again.

The tumble down structure in which he and Pieter lived had three rooms and his nephew was supposed to occupy one of them. He, however, usually slept in the woodshed at the back of the garden because, unless he was comfortably drunk, Old Carel was inclined to be cantankerous and heavy-handed. The house, if one could call it that, was quite close to the Devil's Hole, and one evening as I passed by I saw Pieter standing at its edge as if he belonged there. When I told the gang this they were furious because he had shown us all up for cowards for refusing to approach it except in bright daylight. Bull Pretorius, our leader, suggested we went to his woodshed and gave him a good hiding. But nobody was prepared to go. One boy suggested that if Piet was not afraid of the Devil's Hole at night he was probably bewitched and that if we hit him after sunset he might change into an owl or something. So that ended the matter, for he did indeed have eyes like an owl and could see extraordinarily well in the dark. I remember how he once picked up a whole handful of nails under our cart, when I could not see one and had to feel for them.

Shortly before the declaration of war, Piet who had always been nicknamed "Piet leather pants" or "Piet Drip nose" got his first job and also his first permanent nickname "Piet Pencil stub". He became delivery boy for Garlick's shop, and he was so lost in admiration of the chief clerk who wore his pencil behind his

right ear that, despite our mockery and scoffing, he followed his example and carried a stub behind his own ear also.

How Piet got this job forms quite a story in itself. Since the eighties of the last century the Convent of the Sacred Heart had carried on educational work in Potchefstroom. Shortly before the Boer War a Roman Catholic priest, Father McCarthy, established himself in the village and was appointed chaplain to the convent.

The Sacred Heart was the only school that managed to remain open throughout the war and, apart from keeping the torch of learning burning in Potchefstroom, the sisters devoted themselves to other good works as well. Although they found great difficulty in finding food for themselves and their regular boarders, they also provided a refuge for a number of Irish boys and girls whose fathers were fighting in the Irish Brigade alongside the Boers. In addition, they took pity on several Boer orphans and cared for them.

During the several periods of occupation, Father McCarthy joined forces with our landdrost and Dominee Albertyn, our own parson, in pressing for concessions to the villagers. The British officers were, on the whole, an inflexible lot but the Irish priest's eloquence carried the day on more than one occasion.

He was a great athlete and was most popular with all sections of the community. He had unlimited patience, especially with children. Yet there was one thing he would not tolerate, and that was cruelty to animals. Strangely enough Piet had the same characteristics and would attack the largest lot without hesitation to rescue a dog or a cat.

At that time, we had a popular amusement without ever realizing its cruelty. We would tie a tin can to the tail of any unfortunate beast that fell prey to our hands and then chase it along the main street. No one ever complained, except perhaps the owner of the pitiful victim, and even some of the grown-ups would pause and laugh to see the hunt come streaming down the road after its quarry which could not escape the bouncing, clattering tin behind it.

One afternoon we again caught a stray cat and were just fastening the can to its tail when Piet swept like a whirlwind into our midst. Knocking three of the bigger boys flying, he snatched up the cat and took to his heels with the animal in his arms. Yelling like demons, we swung round after him and straight into Father McCarthy who had been watching the whole affair from the pavement. Without waiting for us to recover from our surprise he began laying about him with a will and many of us felt the sting of the stout stick he was carrying before we managed to escape.

The next day he sent for Piet and had a long talk to him. Then he called on his friend Terence Maguire, manager of Garlick's store. The upshot was that the following Monday Piet proudly mounted the shop's delivery wagon as a wage earner. He wore a new outfit, a hot bath had made him look slightly less grubby, his hair has been cut and, for the first time in his life, he had a clean handkerchief. Later, as I have said, he took to carrying a stub of pencil behind his ear as the badge of his profession.

It is during this period of newly-won self-respect that I had an experience with Piet which, only much later, after I had learnt of his courage and resource during the war, made me realize how much there was to this starveling from River Street.

One evening after he had put up the shutters outside the shop, Piet arrived at our house for some cough mixture for his uncle, old Carel Vlotsam. My father who was the principal doctor in the village used to dispense his own medicines and prescriptions, as was the practice in those days. That particular night he was not expected home until late as he was out visiting a patient some distance away. Meanwhile Piet had sidled shyly into the dining-room and sat quietly waiting. At first mother wanted to send him away but this sent the boy into such a fit of anxiety, for he knew what would happen to him should he arrive home without the medicine, which incidentally contained a little alcohol, that she repented and allowed him to stay. She took no further notice of him and returned to our game of draughts for I was laid up with a poisoned foot.

It had happened like this: Our neighbor, a Dutchman named Holleman, had embedded six inch nails with the points upwards on top of his garden wall to protect his pomegranates which, unlike the other fruit in the village, were comparatively rare. In attempting to vault the wall with the aid of a pole, during a raid on his prize tree, I had misjudged the height and had run of the rusty nails through my foot. For obvious reasons I said nothing about it for two days, but on the third an angry red line had begun to run up my leg and my groin was swollen and painful. It was a beautiful case of blood-poisoning. The whole family immediately decided to regard me an invalid and all took turns in helping me pass the time. Actually, Mother had just begun her second game of draughts when she heard Father dismounting from his bicycle at the front gate.

“Just a moment”, said Mother, “I must get your father a cup of coffee. Come on, Piet, what about trying a game.”

Poor Piet knew just as little about draughts as the man in the moon, but he got up from his chair and came over to the settee where I was reclining. For my age I was an excellent player and at first did not want to waste my breath explain the game to him. He, however, looked so hurt and pitiful at my show of impatience that I decided to teach him the moves.

Then something happened which made me open my eyes in amazement. After the first three halting games, Piet managed to beat me. We set the pieces up again, Again I lost. Just then Father entered with the medicine. He was the champion chess player of the village and never bothered to waste his time with draughts. He smiled when I lost for the second time and said: “How for the third game, and I shall lend you a hand”.

When we had gone half-way and my position was becoming hopeless, he took over but his defeat was even more rapid than my first two. When Piet took his leave with the medicine clutched in his hand, I told Father that the boy had only just learnt the game. He shook his head in amazement and said “a natural mathematical brain”. And, in fact, Piet had that strange faculty for at school he often did sums mentally that we others had to commit to paper. Yet so weak was his other work that he usually was way down at the bottom of the class.

That was Potchefstroom that I knew as a boy. It only began to change when after 1902 when, in the words of old Mr. Bresler, the schoolmaster, it had become too big for a table napkin and too small for a table cloth. About that time too, it became the home of many a quarrel and dispute and, from once being proudly known as the first capital of the South Africa Republic, it earned the doubtful reputation of being the first municipality where the council had to appoint a former heavyweight boxer as official bouncer to keep its members in order.

Of the “vlei” or swamp one can hardly find a trace today. The largest portion, John Girdwood Macfie, our first civil magistrate after the war, turned it into the finest golf course in the Transvaal with the aid of an excellent drainage system, the labor of Native convicts and, last but not least, true Caledonian thoroughness. It was at this time that they dragged the Devil’s Hole and found the body of Nyati, the most notorious Native spy in the British Intelligence Service. The other portion of the swamp which Macfie left in its natural state dried up of its own accord when they built the big reservoir higher up the river.

The wilderness where we used to go bird-nesting and where our fathers and elder brothers used to shoot waterfowl, today provides the most succulent of grazing for the village cows. Even the giant willows above the whirlpool on whose branches we used to swing across the stream have shrunk within themselves and now nothing remains but the gnarled hollow trunks.

The Mooi River too has changed. Where once it had been a raging torrent in the rainy season, overflowing its banks and flooding the countryside right up to River Street, it is now but a muddy stream in summer and a feeble trickle in winter. There are still, a couple of deep pools but nothing like the huge “seekoeigat” where fifty years before, the hippos had disported themselves and which, even in our time, was still an outsized swimming bath for the village boys. Still less is there anything like the whirlpool further down where only the strongest swimmers ever dared to venture, and which was the scene of Piet’s first deed of daring-do.

That distant Potchefstroom was a pleasant place for the grown-ups and a paradise for its children.

THE SECRET GUNS

When war came, Garlick's store closed and Piet was again without a job. Within a few weeks he had lost almost all his veneer of civilization and, except for the stub of pencil loyally tucked behind his ear, there was little to remind the world of his proud but temporary status as delivery boy.

During the first months of hostilities, we cheered the Boer victories, but soon the tide began to turn. And then one morning we woke up to find the British in our midst. They were a scouting party that had pressed forward from Bank, past Frederickstad to Potchefstroom. They managed to enter the village only because there had been no opposition. Those armed burghers who should have defended the place had lost heart and already regarded the war as over. The enemy rounded them up and made them lay down their arms in front of the office of the landdrost. They then had to swear an oath that they would take no further part in the fighting. After that they were allowed to go home.

The following day the rifles that had been surrendered were drenched in paraffin, thrown in a pile in the road and set ablaze. A couple of new Mausers that were found in the police station were added for good measure. The wooden stocks were soon reduced to ash. The barrels and the breaches, however, remained undamaged.

For several weeks this heap of junk lay in the open, but shrewd observers might have noticed that it was becoming smaller daily. The British who expected an attack by General De Wet at any moment took no notice of this pile of scrap iron, and the villagers showed even less interest.

Then one morning we awoke to find our burghers once more in possession of the village. The enemy had withdrawn under cover of darkness, and a detachment of General De Wet's scouts who had been keeping an eye on them galloped in before sunrise. They brought the wind of freedom that shamed those who had laid down their arms in despondency. "The war lost? Don't you believe, only now are we ready for the fray".

A number of those who had surrendered immediately volunteered to join the commando. The others were given five minutes to decide whether they would prefer a Boer bullet to a British one. Without exception they agreed that an oath which they had taken under compulsion was not binding, and soon the commando gained seventy-five new members. There were, however, only eighteen rifles to be found for the new recruits. One of these guns had been recovered from the garbage dump by a post office clerk named Lubbe. The stock had been badly charred but one of the insurgent burghers from the Cape Province named Labuschagne quickly turned out a new one.

The man had established himself as a wagon maker in Krugersdorp shortly before the war. And there he proved himself so handy at repairing rifles that he seldom had time to practice his legitimate trade as the townsmen and bearded farmers took a pride in keeping their guns in first class condition.

When the Boers saw the reconditioned rifle, they immediately began enquiring what had happened to the other guns. Lubbe gave the first clue when he said:

"Piet Pencil stub should know; he was always hanging round that heap of junk."

When Piet was run to earth he was summarily accused of having stolen the old barrels and breaches. He pulled himself together and replied: "It's quite true. I hid them for our burghers." Everybody howled with laughter. The thought of Piet Pencil stub posing as a national hero was too good to be true. Piet looked discomforted but he stood his ground. Even today I am not sure whether he salted the rifles away from himself or for the Boers. Probably the former for he could as little ignore a derelict firearm as a kaffir fowl could pass a maize-pip without picking it up.

I well remember when the grown-ups had target practice he would hang around the butts begging to be allowed to take a shot himself. He was fairly handy with a gun although the old Martinis that most of the burghers had. Used to kick him almost in two. It was only at the outbreak of the war that the seven millimeter Mausers which our people later used to such good effect were generally distributed by the authorities.

Yet, whatever Piet's motives might have been, the rifles had been saved and several men were sent to fetch them from the woodshed behind old Carel Voltsma's shack. Labuschagne commandeered Turner's carpenter-shop in Berg Street and enlisted the aid of a number of young fellows as assistants. They worked like Trojans and, within three weeks, the commando was presented with eighty-five brightly polished rifles fitted with new stocks.

Two days later General De Wet rode into the village with his bodyguard, and the reconditioned rifles were ceremoniously presented to him. The General was in a cheerful mood. The tide had begun to turn. The Boers were regaining hope and those who a short while previously had laid down their arms and had returned despondently home began rejoining the commandos in their hundreds. To De Wet, Potchefstroom was a good omen with its seventy-five volunteers and its eighty-five rifles which had been salvaged from the dirt-heap in such an unexpected manner. He inspected the new recruits and their arms on Church Square, and then mounted an ox-wagon to make a short but fiery speech.

The General was not a man of many phrases but what he had to say was to the point. He had the gift, so frequently found among the Boer leaders, of infusing into his speech the whole of his strong personality and that passionate love for freedom which is so characteristic of our race.

When he had finished, the cheering crowds surged round his wagon and gazed with expressions of awe and veneration at the rugged frame and strong bearded face of their leader. He held up his hand for silence, and then called out: "Piet Beukes."

The startled Piet who had been hanging about on the fringe of the crowd was pushed forward by willing hands and found himself looking into the dominating blue eyes of the greatest guerilla leader our war produced.

"Well, Piet," said the General, "I hear that it was you who hid the rifles for us. That was very resourceful of you. Potchefstroom ought to be proud of its son."

For the General this little speech was a gesture which he had forgotten the following day. But for Piet it was the beginning of a new life. For him De Wet's words opened a casement through which the fresh air and the sun streamed into the innermost recesses of his starved and stunted nature. No one had ever spoken to him like that before: not even Father McCarthy. No longer was he an outcast; he was a son of Potchefstroom --- somebody of whom the village ought to be proud. In those few moments General De

Wet became his idol. The future held but one object for Piet: the opportunity to do something which would make the General talk to him like that again.

After the ceremony of the guns, the General, holding one of the rejuvenated rifles, was photographed by our local photographer, Max Fleischack. Scarcely had he printed the picture and put it in his window when Piet entered his studio. He said he wanted to work for Mr. Fleischack. He wanted no pay: he was willing to work for a whole month in order to get a copy of that picture.

The photographer burst out laughing.

“Is that what’s worrying you, Piet?” he said, “Well now you did our cause a great service when you hid those guns. I’ll give you a copy of that picture as a present.”

Piet’s eyes became even more bloodshot, he rubbed his long nose in embarrassment and had to swallow three times before he could stammer his thanks.

Max Fleischack was fine old fellow. Often he used to allow us boys to enter his darkroom to watch him develop his pictures. In our village he had gained a reputation for being absolutely fearless. At the time of the Jameson Raid, for instance, he was found sitting on top of a rock in full view of the enemy calmly sniping at the invaders. When someone shouted to him to take cover, he merely laughed and in his broken German-Afrikaans called out:

“Dose deffils can’t hit one wide haystack.”

And so Piet got his portrait and hid it away in the cache which he reserved for his dearest possessions, in the otter’s den below the whirlpool. But we youngster knew nothing of that.

For twenty-four hours after General De Wet had spoken to him, Piet walked about as in a dream. But the next day we already began to realize that he had changed subtly and that we were dealing with quite a different fellow. True, his eyes remained bloodshot, his nose still dripped and his body was as skinny and twisted as ever, but his attitude was no longer that of an emaciated greyhound on a cold winter’s morning, but rather that of a terrier at a rat hole.

He had not long to wait for his first chance to live up to the model General De Wet had set him. One afternoon he was loitering past Hjule’s mill when Koos Koekemoer, the dispatch rider, came past on his bicycle.

“Come along, Piet”, he called out, “you are supposed to be a hero, here is your chance to prove it. Take my bike and ride to Boskop. They say the British are moving up in that direction from Frederikstad. I’m dead-beat doing sentry duty the whole night and I’ll never get there in time.” Koos, incidentally, was the laziest member of the Potchefstroom commando. He was seldom put on sentry duty because, despite the field cornet’s sjambok, he was almost invariably discovered at his post snoring his head off.

Without a word Piet mounted. Heavens alone knows where he had learnt to ride: he never possessed a bike of his own so he must have “borrowed” one when the owner’s back was turned and practiced on the sly.

He pedaled past Boskop where, naturally, there were no British soldiers to be seen. Dismounting on the rise overlooking Frederikstad, he peered through the bushes and could see the enemy tents in neat rows

near the railway line. Suddenly he glimpsed a troop of mounted men jogging towards the hills, and some sixth sense told him they boded no good for someone.

On the other side of a footpath, worn deep into the hillside by countless generations of Natives, straggled along the slope. He made up his mind on the spur of the moment, swung the bicycle on the track and jolted along, parallel to the enemy but about a half mile away. After some thirty minutes, keeping the British horsemen constantly in sight, he rounded the shoulder of the hill. Through the gap he saw a farm house nestling in a natural bowl, and in the orchard to the right, he noticed two horses tethered to the trees.

Glancing over his shoulder, he marked the British dismounting some distance away. While he was still staring, they spread out and began surrounding the house. Piet threw all his weight on the pedals and literally flew for the homestead. The British caught sight of him, and one of them beckoned. He pretended not to understand and waved back, meanwhile pedaling so furiously that the chain was in imminent danger of snapping. The soldiers raised his gun to his shoulder. Still Piet flew. Suddenly the first shot rang out. Two Boers peered round the door. At the top of his lungs Piet shouted: "The Khakis are coming." Without pausing, he flashed past the house and swerved to the right towards the main road.

In a couple of bounds the Boers reached their horses, vaulted into the saddle and tore after Piet. The troops were caught napping, and the furious fusillade that they sent after the fugitives was too hurriedly-aimed to constitute any real danger. Three-quarters of an hour later the two horsemen, jogging along, overtook Piet just outside Potchefstroom, just near the North Bridge. He had dismounted and watched them approach. The younger of the two riders pressed his mount over to the boy.

"I am Ben Pieterse. Who are you?" he said.

"I am Pieter Beukes, but call me Piet Pencil stub", the lad stammered.

"Well, my young fellow-me-lad, you did us a great service today. But for your warning we would have been captured." His companion, an older man, grumbled aloud: "What does it matter. That or a bullet is all we can look forward to anyhow."

"Oh no, Oom Kerneels", rejoined the other, "you mustn't say that. Our struggle for freedom is only just beginning."

Shrugging his shoulders, Oom Kerneels turned to the boy: "In that case, my thanks as well", and bent to tighten a buckle.

Ben Pieterse swung himself out of the saddle and began talking to Piet. It appeared that both he and his companion belonged to a scout corps recruited by the famous Danie Theron who shortly before their meeting had fallen at Gatsrand. At that moment they had dispatches for General De Wet and had just dropped in at the farmhouse to tell the farmer's wife who was all by herself that her son had been wounded near Johannesburg and had been taken prisoner by the British. Ben had conveyed the message and at the same time had done his utmost to reassure and comfort the distracted mother. That deed of mercy had delayed them and had almost led to their capture. Ben watched the boy's face as he unrolled his tale, and noting eagerness, he suddenly asked Piet whether he did not want to help in the struggle against the enemy.

The old Piet would have remained dumb. The new Piet, however, with the word of praise of General De Wet still ringing in his ears, immediately agreed and asked what he could do to help in the cause. The scout looked at him with warm approval.

Ben Pieterse had grown up in the Volksrust district where his father owned a farm in the shadows of Majuba, the scene of our decisive victory against the British in the First War of Liberation. These historic surroundings and the Voortrekkerblood that flowed in his veins made him volunteer for active service on the first day of hostilities. He was fortunate enough to be selected by the incomparable Danie Theron as a member of his famous scout corps. Together they ranged the countryside on their hazardous missions, but when his leader fell, Ben lost interest in the scouts. The work no longer held the same attraction as when he galloped across the veld behind Danie Theron. And yet he knew that the Republic still had need of him. He thereupon decided to get General De Wet's permission to create a special espionage service. Before the war he had served in the newly formed detective force organized by State Attorney, later General, Jan Smuts where, among other things, he gained a good grounding in the secret service of the Republic.

It was with this in mind that he turned to Piet and said: "Meet me at ten o'clock tonight in front of the post office. We shall discuss the matter further then."

The two burghers moved off to hand in their dispatches. That done, Ben asked for a special interview with General De Wet. When he was admitted to the General's presence, he explained his plans for a far flung intelligence service. Fortunately, one of the members of De Wet's bodyguard had served with Ben in the detective force and could vouch for both his ability and his integrity.

Christiaan de Wet was a man of few words. His replies to any request were invariably "yes" or "no". In this case it was a swift "yes".

When Ben met Piet at ten o'clock that night he had already worked out his preliminary plan of campaign. He asked Piet point-blank whether he wanted to join this special service of his. At quarter-past ten the new recruit had taken the oath before the field cornet and a vision of adventure unrolled itself before the boy's eyes.

The next couple of weeks, however, proved a bitter disappointment to Piet. Disappointing because he had imagined that he would report all his actions personally to General De Wet and receive the same mead of praise as at the ceremony of the guns, and further disappointing because, for the first four weeks, he was not even sent anywhere near the enemy. He had to make reports about the number of bags of maize at the station, about Native huts and about cattle on the neighboring farms. At first it was doubly galling because he was made to feel as if he were back at school once more. He had to grind away with pencil and paper, he had always loathed. Among other matters, he had to learn a very simple code where mules meant canon, cattle meant British, donkeys were tents and pigs stood for supply wagons. According to whether the words were spelt with capitals or not and whether the leant backwards or forwards, they meant one or ten or a hundred or a thousand. He had to use these amounts in letters which he was supposed to write to an imaginary and illiterate uncle.

The uncouth handwriting came naturally enough to Piet and the figures were always correct for, as I have said, arithmetic came easily to him.

After the first month Piet began feeling happier, or at any rate when he was given tasks more suited to his nature, such as worming way up to a Native hut and eavesdropping on a conversation, or slipping past sentries after he had distracted their attention by striking a match or throwing a stone.

The Boers had scarce been two months in Potchefstroom when they withdrew again and Piet, without anyone noticing it, accompanied them. In fact, after he had been sworn in as a spy he, on the advice of Ben Pieterse, had once more donned the mask of the old Piet. Again he was the whining cur and so well did he hide his terrier zeal that we once again began treating him with good natured scorn.

Six weeks after his disappearance with the Boers, Piet was back in the village. That same night he slipped along in the shadows to the Zinn's house and spent some hours with Tant Betta in one of the back rooms. That Betta Zinn who at that time was about sixty years old was the most dependable Boer woman in the whole neighborhood. She had the analytical mind of a scientist and the love of freedom of a Voortrekker. The Zinns lived in one of the largest and oldest houses in Potchefstroom. It was near the fort where our burghers had cooped up the British in the first War of Liberation in 1880. The building bore many a bullet mark from stray shots on the doors and the walls. These the Zinns preserved as historic mementoes.

Tant Betta was descended from an old Cape family, all of whom excepting her were jingoes. One of her sisters was married to Sir Edgar Williams, legal adviser to Lord Roberts. The family was extremely influential and stuck together like leeches. To them the family came first, then the British Empire and after that, nothing at all. This family attachment was even extended to the black sheep, Betta, who had married Zinn, the Assistant Surveyor-General of the South African Republic. The attachment, however, continued and became more marked when her husband died shortly before the Jameson Raid.

Old Zinn had been well-to-do and he left Tant Betta in comfortable circumstances. Consequently, she spent her widowhood in good works and there was never a lame dog in the village who came to her for assistance in vain. The result was that she was universally loved and respected. Present day Afrikaners would, however, have had one fault to find with her. Her language was the most fantastic mixture of Afrikaans and English due to the fact that in her home in Cape Town only English had been spoken and she had just learnt Afrikaans when she migrated to the Transvaal.

Most of our important visitors were accommodated in her home when they came to Potchefstroom, as in the case of General De Wet when he entered the village after the first English withdrawal. The very evening after he had given Ben Pieterse permission to found his special intelligence corps he had a very long and serious conversation with Tant Betta, during the course of which he asked her to become the head of the service in Potchefstroom. At first she refused.

"Krisjan, that's a man's work. I don't feel capable of doing it." "Tant Betta, if you weren't able in every aspect, I wouldn't have asked you. In any case it is not my personal request. Our freedom and our very existence is at stake," the soldier replied. Faced with such an appeal, Tant Betta capitulated.

There were no half-hearted measures once she tackled anything --- whether it was housekeeping or espionage. Besides she had a particular talent for working with Natives. To a large extent she had to correlate all the scraps of information that they gleaned in the village and the location and eventually these Native spies were even more devoted to her than to Ben Pieterse.

She was constantly suspect after the second British occupation of the village, but the enemy could prove nothing against her. Even the chief Native spy of the British, Nyati, for whom the Boer intelligence service held very few secrets could prove nothing against her and finally stopped keeping her under observation. She used her Cape Town family very cleverly as a smoke screen for her activities on behalf of the Republic. She was continually writing letters to them which the military censor had to let through whether he liked it or not. In them she always complained bitterly that the British junior officer was victimizing her merely because she exercised the vaunted British right of freedom of speech. Her family in their turn complained to Lord Milner about this "un-English" victimization, while Sir Edgar Williams lodged similar complaints with the British General Staff, until even the provost marshal was afraid of her and gave her a very wide berth.

I do not know everything that passed between Tant Betta and Piet that evening. The following day, however, he appeared in a new role. He began selling manure in an old cart which his uncle had previously used for transporting his paint pots, drawn by a donkey that he had ostensibly bought complete with harness from Tant Betta. The manure he collected from the sties of old Schrammslurie, and Austrian with British sympathies who had fled to the Cape at the outbreak of the war.

The old fellow whom we called Laurie for short had started a big piggery just behind the goal and next to the railway line. Scarce had he departed in a hurry when hostilities commenced than the burghers commandeered his porkers. When Piet set up in his new business there must have been more than a hundred tons of pig manure piled up in the sties. One never noticed it when the weather was fine but as soon as it rained it began smelling to high heaven. At first Piet delivered the bulk of his supplies to Tant Betta until he was supposed to have paid off the donkey and harness. After that he began hawking it around the village.

The plots in Potchefstroom were renowned for their excellent vegetables, and there was a good market for everything, even for the humble cabbage. When the British reoccupied the village in force a couple of months after the Boers had withdrawn, Piet embarked on another venture when he began selling vegetables to the troops. On such occasions he sluiced out his cart but never bothered to wash himself; consequently, one could smell him at ten yards upwind and fifty yards down. He sometimes managed to penetrate as far as the officers' quarters from where he was usually driven by curses and sometimes by sjambok.

It had got about that Piet had accompanied the Boers when they had withdrawn, but people also heard, and Tant Betta saw to the spreading of the story, how it came about that he left them. He was supposed to have stolen the field cornet's watch. Full details were given of how he had been bound in the usual way to a wagon wheel for the night after he was given a terrific thrashing and chased away. When the neighbors clicked their tongues at the story, Tant Betta detailed how she had tried to help him and then added with a sigh: "That type of poor white trash is hopeless."

At that time, we children invented another term of abuse for Piet. We called him "Old Dungbeetle" and took the greatest delight in shouting it out after him in the streets. He never thought of retaliation; his nose merely dripped faster than ever, his eyes became more bloodshot and his voice sharpened into an even higher whine.

Yet during all the months that followed, with all the coming and going of supplies, guns and troops. No camp in the whole Transvaal was so well spied upon as the one at Potchefstroom. It was the base depot

from which the British operated against the western areas, and it was a matter of life and death for our people to know exactly what was afoot. That information Piet conveyed to his “uncle” by letter. Many was the night that he sat sucking his pencil in the flickering candle-light in the old woodshed in order to write about mules and pigs and horses and cattle. Some of his letter were capitals and others not; some leant crazily forwards and some toppled backwards. But Ben Pieterse understood them all.

With the information gleaned from these letters, the Boers were able to frustrate the British plans time after time and to postpone the subjection of the Western Transvaal by at least twelve months, a considerable period in a war that lasted less than three years.

THE HIDDEN AMMUNITION

One morning shortly after the enemy had occupied the village for the second time, Tant Betta noticed Piet delivering a load of manure to the English parson who was a gardener of some merit. She stepped into the street and while still some distance off shouted out:

“Hey there, Piet Pencil stub, you might as well bring me another couple of loads.” Piet glanced up and watched her approach. As she came up to him she whispered:

“I must see you for certain tonight.” Then she said aloud: “But don’t bring such wet stuff again: the stench is terrible.” Piet mumbled: “Very well, Missus”, and continued his work.

When they met in the backroom that evening, Tant Betta looked troubled and Piet understood why when she broached the subject which she regarded as a most serious matter. She told him there were ten thousand Mauser cartridges buried under the woodpile in the garden of the landdrost. The British knew that the Boers had left them somewhere in the village but at the moment they suspected the dominee of the Dutch Church as the old landdrost had been confined indoors with a heart ailment for some months. They therefore decided to dig up the dominee’s garden, but when they drew a blank it would be the landdrost’s turn. Should they discover the ammunition, the old man would be fortunate if he escaped a firing squad? In any case they would send him to goal and that, in his feeble state of health would be equivalent of a death sentence.

Oubaas Dirk Tom, the landdrost or magistrate was the most popular man in the village. One might have said that he was more than a public figure; he was an institution. He was a short man but dignified and friendly. When President Kruger used to visit the village and the landdrost drove down the main street with him in his ceremonial landau, he received almost as much applause as the President himself. He was, however, not in Piet’s good books.

The reason was simple. One day he had him arrested and brought before him where he had to account for the huge pile of pumpkins that the constable had found on the roof of old Carel’s woodshed. The amount coincided approximately with the number which had disappeared from one of the fields on the farm, Elandsheuwel. Piet could offer no explanation and indeed made no attempt to do so. Instead his nose started running and began making those noises which as usual, and even necessary, when one has no handkerchief. The humane magistrate looked sternly at him, and declared the pumpkins forfeit except for six small ones. He then warned him that if he ever touched another person’s property again he would get a taste of the gaoler’s cane in the front office. In passing, I might as well explain that Piet had raided Elandsheuwel only under the persuasion of old Carel’s stick. Like all us boys he helped himself when he was hungry, or else in fun, but he would never have gathered a wagon load of pumpkins for himself. And I believe that the landdrost knew that well enough.

But to return to the cartridges. They had that very night to be moved to a place of safety. Piet’s eyes grew bigger in doubt. “How on earth shall I manage?” he asked.

Tant Betta was not accustomed to treating her male folk, from whom she expected action, with kid gloves.

“That I don’t know”, she said. “That is your problem. Or must I tell Ben Pieterse that you are a coward?”

Piet sat in silence for a moment, blinking his eyes.

“Can you give me someone to help?” he asked at length.

“No one except my little Bushman”, she replied. This Bushman was a little creature whom she had raised when he had lost his parents, and he would literally have given his life for her. He was about the same age as Piet, just as thin, but even tougher.

“Can he come with me immediately?”

“Yes.”

A quarter of an hour later Piet and the Bushman disappeared through the back fence. The problem was difficult, but at least one aspect of the matter gave Piet no headache. He knew where to hide the ammunition. At first he would hide it in the reeds behind the Wesleyan Church, adjoining the plot belonging to old Carel. The following night he would carry the boxes to his otter den.

Talking of the “otter den” brings me to one sport in which Piet excelled even the biggest boys. He was a surprisingly good swimmer and diver. There used to be a tradition in connection with the whirlpool which was as old as the Republic itself. The whirlpool was the bathing pool exclusive to the older boys, and any youngster who wandered in that direction was grabbed by the big fellows, swung by his arms and legs and hurled into the water. After that he would be ducked three times, until he had lost almost all his breath.

One day they caught Piet. He was not even near the sacred place. They just felt like ducking him properly. They grabbed his arms and legs and hurled him right in the middle of the whirlpool. Down he sank like a stone. They waited for him to reappear. One minute passed. Then two and three. Still there was no sign of him.

“Good heavens”, said one of the boys “He is drowned.”

The others turned deathly pale. They had heard gruesome stories about people who committed murder and were later hanged in Pretoria goal. The ringleader snatched up his clothes and dashed off. The others followed. For twenty-four hours the gang walked about with hangdog expressions, as if suffering from the effects of their first smoke. So quiet were they at home and displayed so little appetite that their parents began wondering what the matter was. They had already begun suspecting that their sons were sickening for something serious when one of gang was heard running from the house. “He isn’t drowned. I have just seen him behind the church.”

“Are you sure? Perhaps it’s his ghost.”

“Oh no. I spoke to him.”

“The swindler”, they chorused. “Now we ought to give him a proper ducking.” But somehow they never dared tackle Piet again.

The secret of Piet’s disappearance was his “otter den”. While the other children were at school, Piet often went swimming in the whirlpool. It began after one of the teachers named Viljoen – Old Tanner, as we called him because of his fondness for using a quince stick on our hides --- had given him a thrashing for falling asleep in class. Your modern teacher would know that falling asleep in school is a well-known symptom of malnutrition, but in those days any serious inattention was punished by the rod and the boy expelled for the day. It was on one of those occasions of enforced absence that Piet while wandering

along the river saw an otter disappearing under the overhanging bank of the whirlpool. He dived in and swam after the animal. Feeling around he discovered beneath the water a large hole sloping upwards in the bank. Following it, he broke water in a small cavern where he could draw breath. The next day he set about enlarging the chamber with an old trowel and then noticed that it ran in a narrow funnel upwards into the middle of a large poplar thicket on Elandsheuwel. The distance from this exit to the pumpkin fields was scarcely a hundred yards. Piet enlarged the opening and then proceeded to mask it with driftwood. Not even a close scrutiny would have discovered that it might have been used by a human being. As an added precaution he was most careful never to leave any tracks behind. He always approached it backwards, meanwhile obliterating his footsteps with a branch which he later tossed into the river. In time he made the otter den quite habitable with looted khaki blankets and straw. He could therefore jump into the river above the whirlpool fully clothed and drift downstream under water until he reached the entrance to his lair. Once inside, he could undress and dry himself in his blankets.

Hiding the ammunition therefore presented no problem, provided he managed to get the cartridges as far as the whirlpool. The main difficulty of transport arose because the cartridges were wrapped in tens and packed in zinc lined fifty pound boxes. And it was quite a step from the woodpile in the landdrost's garden. In addition, British patrols were regularly sent through the streets. The main guard of the occupation forces consisted of 200 men. Their tents were pitched at the lower end of Church Square, on what today is known as Market Square. Patrols left this encampment every hour. There were usually ten patrols of five men each. Potchefstroom was so laid out that each block of plots was bounded by four streets. The houses faced on to the streets while the gardens at the back adjoined one another. It was therefore possible to creep from the back of the landdrost into the next garden and so, past the house, to the next street. One could repeat the process until, at length, one had covered the ground between the landdrost's woodpile and the reeds near the Wesleyan Church. Or I should rather have said that it would have been possible to move the ammunition, in this fashion were it not for the barbed wire fences, prickly-pear hedges and vicious watchdogs.

It would not be difficult to evade the British patrols. That was, unless they had Native spies because these people could see clearly in the dark. The real difficulty was not how one would escape oneself, should one be spotted but to see that the ammunition was not lost. Piet was obsessed by the importance of one of the first lessons he had learnt from Ben Pieterse: "One's life means nothing, the mission, everything." He consequently was determined not to lose the cartridges, even though he had to brave every danger. Fortunately, both he and the Bushman knew each plot like the back of their hands. From long experience they had learnt where each owner grew the finest grapes and the most luscious peaches.

Midnight struck by the time they had dragged the last of the boxes from beneath the woodpile, by the light of the waning moon. Crossing the first plot, belonging to old Mrs. Jones, was easy. She was deaf as a quail, the result of a British bullet which hit her by accident during the first British War in 1880. Getting through Oom Flippie Malherbe's grounds was more difficult. Not that he was not a good patriot, but because he would assuredly call to his Basotho milk boy should he see two heavily burdened figures stealing through his vineyard. As Piet knew to his cost, he was a man who slept with one eye and two ears open. Adjoining Oom Flippie was a vacant plot, and there the two boys turned towards the street, for the next house belonged to the widow of Jan Loots and she had the most vicious dog in the whole village.

Immediately, they ran into bad luck. Scarce had they emerged on the pavement than a British patrol came around the corner. They were marching in step with their rifles at the ready. These patrols had the pleasant habit of potting at anything they saw moving. Many a dog had got the fright of its life and more than one mule or ox that had strayed through the kraal wire had come to an untimely end. The people of the village were afterwards so used to the firing that it barely kept them out of their sleep for a couple of minutes. This craving of the Tommies to let off their rifles however, had one good result. No one ever ventured into the streets after sunset.

When the patrol appeared round the corner, Piet and the Bushman, together with the box, melted into the shadows of the deep furrow bordering the plot. The soldiers marched along the pavement, shaking the ground so strongly that earth and small stones rained on the two fugitives. Ten times did Piet and the Bushman have to follow the same dangerous procedure. Nevertheless, all went well until they rounded the corner of River Street with the last box. It was here that Piet himself lived and it was only a hundred yards to the reeds behind the Wesleyan Church. Suddenly they heard a British Non-commissioned Officer – or at any rate someone with that kind of voice – remark “But Ovembu, where are the ghosts we have to catch?” The thick voice of an uneducated Native answered in English: “I am absolutely certain I saw two people carrying something in this direction. They should appear around the corner any moment. If they don’t we shall just have to walk up that street.”

Piet felt that a crisis was at hand. He whispered to the Bushman: “I’ll draw them away. You carry the box to the reeds.” With that he sprang across the street.

“There he goes! Shoot!” And the volley crashed through the early morning air. Piet gave a scream and redoubled his speed in the direction of the Devil’ Hole. Another volley rang out, and again Piet shrieked like a banshee. But by that time he reached the reeds near the Devil’s Pool. Then came a wail of anguish to chill the blood and marrow, a heavy thud in the swamp, and silence.

Then the Native spy, who lived in the Potchefstroom location, and knew all about the legend of the lurking man-eating snake, turned almost yellow.

“The Makoppa snake has caught him”, he screeched, and took his heels in the direction of Church Square. The corporal began swearing and raving.

“Catch that nigger. Come back your idiot.”

But all in vain. Ovembu was not found until late the next afternoon. Without the Native and without a knowledge of the swamp, the patrol could do nothing and they had to return to their headquarters.

Meanwhile Piet arrived quite easily and without a scratch at old Carel’s woodshed. The scream had been his, but the thud was that of a stump to which he always fastened his night-lines. More than two years previously Piet had noticed that was a number of barbels, and big ones at that, in the Devil’s Hole. They were much whiter than the barbels of the river and looked as if they were half blind. Nevertheless, they tasted not a whit less good than the barbels of the Mooi River. Piet never believed the Makoppa story. By nature, he was one of those people who had no nerves, like the late general Manie Maritz, Col. Deneys Reitz or General Kemp.

The next night Piet carried the cartridges from the clump of reeds, past two plots, into old Carel’s garden. From there he took them on his little manure cart along a road through the swamp which only

he knew and unloaded them at the whirlpool. He decided not to take the little Bushman with him for he did not want to initiate anyone into the secret of the otter's den.

The last stage was the most difficult. Carrying a box of ammunition on his head he walked across the river under water and heaved the ammunition up into his lair. Half dead from cold and exhaustion he struggled back hours later with the little cart to his straw mattress in the woodshed, and only got up late that afternoon to have something to eat.

That night Ben Pieterse arrived to make plans for transporting the cartridges to the Boers. He and Piet turned the problem over in their minds for a long time but could find no solution. On one thing they agreed; it was absolutely impossible to take the cartridges any further in boxes.

Consequently, they had to be unpacked. But what then? A single spy might be able to flit to and fro across the river, but one would need a whole football team for ten thousand bullets, and they would never be able to evade the patrols.

Piet wondered whether Ben might be able to take some along after every visit. But they then estimated that he could move scarcely two hundred and fifty cartridges at a time. And that would mean forty journeys to and fro. His other work was too important for him to waste time in this way.

After discussing the matter for two hours Piet said; "You must give me a chance to think." "Good, I'll return next Saturday", Ben replied.

By the following Saturday, Piet had made considerable progress. Tant Betta had fashioned a kind of jacket from canvas with ten rows of ten pockets round the inside. Each pocket could take five cartridges. A well-built man, with this waist-coat which would hang almost to his knees, could therefore walk off with five hundred bullets.

"Good", said Ben, "Now I shall have to give you one of my Native spies to meet you on twenty successive nights in the poplar thicket at Elandheuwel. From there he will have to walk with the cartridges under his overcoat to the Native village of Mopok where my head Native, old Simeon, can hide them until we can pick them up in a scots cart."

"No", said Piet, "that won't do."

"Why not?"

"In the first place because he will never get past the guards at Elandsheuwel. And in the second place because it will mean that I will have to divulge the secret of the otter's den."

"Righto, what then?" Ben asked.

"If we can get them over the river above the bridge near Elandsheuwel, one of your Natives could easily carry them as far as the hut of Gegund. You will be able to send your scots car there, although it will not be as easy as to the village of Mopok."

"That seems alright. If only we could get the cartridges to the farm of that old traitor, Doppies Bezuidenhout, we would be in clover."

"Quite true, but how will we manage to get them over there?"

Again they had to part without any final decision. It was characteristic of Piet's development as a master spy that those problems which at first took him days to solve, later on were disposed of in a couple of hours.

The following morning, however, Piet saw a solution, and immediately decided on his plan of action. The British themselves, he had decided, would transport the cartridges to Doppies' farm. When he unfolded his plan to Ben a week later, the latter looked at him as if he were stark crazy. But after he had finished listening he departed with a smile.

That very night Piet removed one of the boxes of bullets and filled his waistcoat.

The next morning, he drove towards the British camp with his little manure cart piled high with vegetables. He had a trade connection with the cook of the British Officers' mess, a Johannesburg Indian named Ebrahim. Ebrahim was a confirmed hemp or "dagga" smoker. The plots of Potchefstroom were covered with wild dagga and Piet was often seen in the camp with his little cart. He regularly exchanged a handful of dagga seed, hidden in a hollowed out cabbage, with the cook for a tin of jam. Piet always considered the jam most welcome but, in addition, he reasoned that, should he become suspect, the whole transaction would serve as an excellent cloak for his presence in the camp. They always need to exchange the cabbage and the jam behind the kitchen of the officers' mess where there were a number of drums filled with kitchen refuse. Piet little cart was often seen there for hours without ever arousing any particular attention. The refuse bins were carted in a military wagon out to Doppies farm every day where the garbage was considered welcome food for the pigs. In exchange for this, old Doppies delivered a couple of gallons of milk at a fair price to the officers' mess. Every evening four full drums were taken to the farm and four empty ones brought back.

One Monday shortly after the last conversation between Piet and Ben, the Native who used to milk the cows for old Doppies did not put in an appearance. By Tuesday afternoon the old traitor was only too glad to hire another at a lower wage. When the original Native presented himself on Tuesday with the story that he had been kidnapped the previous Sunday and dragged to the kraal of Mopok, old Doppies called him a liar and a drunkard and chased him off the farm threatening him with a good hiding.

The first night the new Native did an extraordinary thing. With a piece of plough share he scratched a distinguishing mark on one of the full and one of the empty drums. After that the solution of the problem of the cartridges was simple. During the next three weeks Tant Betta had to make another nineteen waistcoat bandoliers. It was difficult to get the material. Finally, she made them from old tents, losing thirty machine needles in the process. But the women who helped her, without knowing what they were to be used for, managed it at last.

Every morning Piet, with his cart loaded with vegetables, under which a full bandolier was hidden, drove to the camp. After hanging about for some time and having to display endless patience he managed to secrete the bandolier under the refuse in the marked drum. Late each afternoon the military wagon would take the drums out to old Doppies' farm where the new Native would receive them and load the four empty ones. Two of the full drums were immediately boiled over an open fire for the pigs, while the other two under which was the marked one were kept for the following morning.

That night the Native would don the bandolier, put on his overcoat, and walk unconcernedly to the hut of Gegund, where the cartridges would be hidden in a hole under the manure in the goat kraal. Little

more than three weeks later a party of Boers appeared one night at Gegund's hut, gave him three golden Kruger pounds and disappeared with the ammunition in a scots cart.

Years later Piet explained why he considered it necessary to have the bandoliers made, seeing that they were merely hidden in the dirt bins. He said that they were there for the protection of the Native who had to carry them to the hut of Gegund. Several times the Native had been challenged by patrols and if he had carried a bag or if his pockets had bulged, he would have been arrested.

The later history of these bullets is also quite interesting. I shall, however, tell you only what happened to the last bandolier. It was used in the first and last naval engagement that the Boers were ever involved in. When General Smuts, invading the Cape Province reached the coast of Namaqualand there was a small British warship cruising in those waters. Deneys Reitz and Jan Borrius, two of his burghers, decided to declare war on the British Navy. Deneys was the well-known son of President Reitz, and Jan's father was the printer in Potchefstroom who published the Government Gazette.

From a thousand yards they took pot shots at the warship with the very bullets which Piet and the Bushman had rescued. The two young burghers had the time of their lives until the warship opened fire with her guns. Then wisely, they decided that discretion was the better part of valor and withdrew to the rear in good order.

THE CHARGE OF THE WOMEN

For the most of the war the food position was difficult in our village. At times it became critical. The worst period was shortly before the end of the second British occupation. With intervals there were four occupations in all, the last of which continued until peace was signed. During this period the British opened emergency depots where food could be bought at reasonable prices.

Whenever the Boers were in the village there was sufficient meat and mealie meal for distribution, but during the intervening months we all had to tighten our belts. Burnt acorn coffee, kaffir-corn porridge and cabbage or turnips --- provided one had sufficient water for gardening --- was about the best we ever ate. This food shortage was one of the ostensible reasons why one of the worst concentration camps had to be established at Potchefstroom. The striking monument of blue granite just on the other side of the Mooi River near Elandsheuwel Bridge where the present road turns off to Johannesburg marks the site of all this suffering.

But let me return to the second British occupation when the food position was at its worst. A late frost had destroyed the vegetable crop, and the small amount of fruit one could expect had also been affected. Everything that could be slaughtered had already been eaten. The British had originally occupied the village in great force but gradually the troops were moved westwards to several strongly-held points to prevent a possible combined attack by Generals De la Rey and De Wet. Piet had informed Ben Pieterse about all these moves and had added that horse-sickness had appeared some months earlier than usual and had killed off like flies the British transport mules grazing in the swamp. As a result of this last calamity there was a great pile-up of tinned food, army biscuits and other edibles in the Potchefstroom camp.

When the British decided temporarily to evacuate Potchefstroom again, it was understood that they intended taking all these provisions by train back to Bank station but, as General Kemp's troops had blown up the railway line on the Potchefstroom side of Wilverdiend, that plan had to be abandoned. The officer in command thereupon issued orders that as soon as the last troops had withdrawn, a demolition squad consisting of a sergeant and twenty-five men, apart from about fifty local natives, had to drench all the supplies with paraffin and set them alight.

Ben Pieterse who had placed a couple of his Native spies amongst those working for the British, heard of these things and sent a message to Piet to see whether something could not be salvaged for the people of the village after the demolition squad had pulled out. Piet answered that Ben should send ten burghers to storm the camp before the sergeant could start his work of destruction. Ben transmitted the request to his superior officer who decided, however, that as large-scale commando movements were contemplated at the moment he could not release a single man. So Piet decided that he and Tant Betta would have to put their heads together.

They met as usual in the back room of the Zinn home.

"We shall have to recruit a commando of women to storm the camp", said Piet. "They'll never dare fire on women."

"Who says so", snapped Tant Betta. "They will probably shoot without a second warning."

“In that case we’ll have to think up some way of frightening them. Once they are on the run, we might be able to keep them at it by concerted action of a women’s commando. In the dark they will be unable to say whether the noise was made by burghers or women!”

“And how do you think you are going to manage that?” asked Tant Betta.

“I don’t know. I’ll come and talk with you again tomorrow night. Meanwhile you’ll have to discuss it with the women.”

Early the following morning Tant Betta could be seen walking in the direction of the so-called burgher rights. These were a collection of erven below the Big Furrow, between the site of the British camp and the railway station. They were holdings originally allotted to burghers who had volunteered for service in the Kaffir Wars. As the ground had to be occupied by the owner personally, the more well-to-do had allowed their claims to lapse.

Tant Betta did not trust the people of River Street, the poorest neighborhood, whom the British might have been able to bribe, while the women of the fashionable part of the village were too finicky for the impending adventure. The plot-holders were the only ones who would fit the bill. Among them were a large number of families that with great difficulty had trekked from Griqualand West when their menfolk, although British subjects, took up arms in the cause of the Republics.

The plot-holders received Tant Betta with open arms. Her proposal was one after their won hearts. Danger? Who thinks of danger when one’s children are hungry, was the general feeling.

Meanwhile Piet was playing his part as well. That night when he slipped like a shadow on to Tant Betta’s stoep he brought with him two ancient shotguns and 42 A.A.A. and B.B. cartridges, which Tant Betta’s two grandsons of thirteen and fifteen could handle. He also had a box of crackers (Gold Medal Bombay Crackers was written on the outside) which he had obtained at the time of the “Great Indian Loot”.

I well remember that exciting day. What I got out of it was a Native mirror, a tin of sardines and the mother and father of a hiding. It happened shortly after the outbreak of the war when all the Indians, as British subjects, fled to Natal, leaving behind them great stocks of goods in their barricaded shops. The people from River Street, most of them women and youths, decided that they had a claim on those “coolie goods” and broke open the stores with axes and crowbars.

Those of us who were in the streets, - it was a Saturday morning and there was no school – lent a hand and also pressed into the buildings taking whatever we could grab in passing. The shops were already half empty when the landdrost and the sheriff appeared on the scene and claiming the goods in the name of the Republic. We then had to return everything. I, however, managed to hide the sardines and the mirror in my shirt. When I proudly displayed at home I got the tanning of my life and was forced to take them back personally to the sheriff. Obviously Piet had been more fortunate.

But to return to the preparations in the enemy camp. The 500 British were supposed to leave that very night. Night came but nothing happened. Next day they were still there. Meanwhile the story of the raid on the camp ran through the village like a veld fire. A couple of hours later, a Native spy reported the story to the garrison commander. He sent for the landdrost, old and ill, and the parson, young and energetic, and warned them that he would open fire on anyone, man, woman or child, who approached the camp. The two Boers pleaded on behalf of those suffering hunger, and asked that some of the

supplies which, according to rumor, were going to be burnt anyhow should be given to the women and the children. The officer was quite sympathetic, but said that he had strict injunctions to destroy everything. He was very sorry but he to carry out his orders, and again he warned them that the women should do nothing foolish.

By the following day the main body of the garrison had withdrawn. Piet and Tant Betta held thumbs that the demolition squad should not destroy the supplies during daylight, because that would have meant the collapse of their scheme. The British, however, had heard rumors that the Boers were in the vicinity of Ventersdorp and decided to withdraw shortly after midnight, destroying the provisions just before they left. Incidentally those rumors were spread by one of Ben Pieterse's Native spies whom he had placed at Tant Betta's disposal.

The rumors gained in strength during the afternoon, and at eight o'clock this spy, panting for breath, dashed on his bicycle into the camp and shouted: "The Boers are coming along the Ventersdorp road."

Shortly afterwards the first shots were heard – Piet's Gold Medal Bombay Crackers. Then a couple bullets clanged against the corrugated iron roofs of sundry Native shacks and whistled through one or two of the tents. Tant Betta's grandsons were having a heavenly time with the two ancient guns and the buckshot.

The sergeant, a brave enough fellow, immediately ordered the paraffin to be brought up. The firing, however, increased in violence. One soldier got two bullets, or rather B.B. slugs, through his helmet. He grabbed his rifle and began returning the fire.

Suddenly a roar, as if all the rivers in the Transvaal were coming down in flood, could be heard from the other side of the railway line. It came from the burgher-rite women together with reinforcements from River Street and even some from the rest of the village. Along they swept trundling handcarts, wheelbarrows and even perambulators loaded with tins and drums which they banged furiously. The sergeant began swearing until the sparks figuratively flew from his tongue. His company however, had had enough. They felt certain that they were being attacked by thousands of Boers, and heavens knew what else besides. And there were but twenty-five of them. The poor sergeant had to sprint like a champion to catch up with them and grab his horse before it bolted. In a cloud of dust, they disappeared out of the village and along the Klerksdorp road to join their main force.

The booty was enormous. After every woman had carried all she could in relays throughout the night, after every family had been wakened to take its share, after every Native from the location had stolen to his heart's content, there was still more than half left next morning. The landdrost thereupon commandeered the few poor wagons left in the village and in spanned donkeys, mules and even cows. The remaining supplies were then carted off to the storeroom of Retief's shop the biggest in Potchefstroom and other safe places, to be distributed fairly later. In our backyard we dug a hole 13-foot-long, 12-foot-wide and 6-foot-deep and filled it with our and our neighbor's share. So much paraffin fell booty that night to us that months later we could still exchange it for potatoes with the people of Ventersdorp.

While the landdrost was busy arranging for the transport and storage of the provisions, Piet and his donkey-cart appeared on the scene. As he was nonchalantly piling condensed milk into the cart, the

landdrost called out sharply: "No one is to take another thing, especially those who hid away and did nothing to help in the night's work."

Piet began whining that he was also a Boer boy and that he was hungry. One of the women called out: "He seems to think that he is stealing pumpkins at Elandsheuwel." Everyone burst out laughing. One of the bigger boys answered: "No he is thinking he is taking the field cornet's watch." The crowd redoubled its laughter, but it began to sound ominous. Another boy picked up a bit of dung and threw it at Piet. "Here, Dung Beetle, this is what you want." We youngsters took up the refrain, and dung began showering on Piet. He started crying and retreated from his cart so that only he, and not the donkey would be hit.

Soon there was no more dung handy. One fellow picked up a clod. Then someone else tossed a handful of gravel. A third however, threw a stone. Within a matter of seconds, the dung shower became a rain of stones and Piet had to run for his life. A rock hit his head. He sprawled in the dust and the blood gushed red. Someone hurled a piece of galvanized iron from a windmill. It hummed through the air. Usually it was impossible to aim with a thing like that. This time, unfortunately, it bit into Piet's leg behind the knee. Down he went again. Then help was at hand. Dominee Albertyn who had also pushed a wheelbarrow to the camp, dashed among us, pale with anger.

"You beastly heathens, is that the brotherly kindness you learn from me at Sunday-school?" and his flat hand cracked among us like a transport-driver's whip. "I'll teach you a thing or two on Sunday. And if anyone dares stay away, I'll come and fetch him personally with a sjambok."

Astounded, we fled from his wrath. We had imagined that we were punishing a traitor. And now the dominee was treating us like a bunch of criminals. Shamefaced, and in some cases crying where we had felt the full strength of the parson's good right hand, we bolted out of range, while Piet struggled back to his cart and lispily let the donkey away.

While this scene was being enacted, Tant Betta went and hid herself behind a tent. The tears streamed down her cheeks but she clenched her teeth and said nothing. At all costs Piet's identity had to remain a secret. Not only the fate of the intelligence service was at stake, but even his life would have been forfeit had one of the Native spies discovered his double personality.

For the moment she had to remain silent and do nothing. Yet scarcely had Piet hobbled painfully to his tumble-down woodshed and cast himself on his mattress of straw than my father was there with his doctor's bag. He had been summoned by the little Bushman who had arrived at our home as if pursued by fifty thousand devils. My father examined Piet thoroughly and realized that his condition was less serious than Tant Betta had thought. Nevertheless, it was bad enough. He considered that the shock was the worst part of Piet's experience, but the boy shrugged that off. He had lived too long with old Carel to worry unduly about a couple of bruises or even little blood on his face. What did trouble him however, was the gaping wound that the iron shard had torn behind his knee. Already it had turned an angry red.

Piet watched the doctor's face anxiously, hoping to be told it was nothing serious. My father, however, looked grave for he felt that it might mean amputation or at best almost certainly a permanently stiff knee.

Kneeling next to the boy he dressed the wound with particular care and then turned his attention to the question of nursing. There was a great deal of illness in the village at the time and he would be able to see his patient only once in a while. At first he thought of moving Piet to our house but he knew the boy would be thoroughly unhappy in those surroundings. Then, looking at the eager face of the little Bushman, a thought struck him.

“Boesmantjie”, he said, “you could look after a patient for me couldn’t you? Now listen very carefully and I’ll tell you what to do every morning and every evening.” The other seemed to hesitate so he added: “Don’t worry, I’ll see the Old Missus and tell her you are staying here on my instructions.”

With that the Bushman’s qualms disappeared, and within ten minutes he had satisfied my father that he would be able to give the patient all the attention he was likely to require. And so the Bushman slept in the shack and day and night poultice and bandaged the wound as my father had taught him.

After three long weeks the gash healed cleanly and my father breathed a sigh of relief. The German Lysol, by which he swore, together with the faithful nursing of the little Bushman and the nourishing food sent by Tante Betta turned the scale.

Years later I witnessed the wonderful properties of this German medicine when it drew out a piece of steel embedded in the kneecap of a Potchefstroom undergraduate after his parents had already arranged for a very costly operation by a leading Johannesburg surgeon.

But to return to Piet. It speaks volumes for him that even during the time he was nearly delirious, he betrayed nothing by word or deed about the true state of affairs, even to the humane and sympathetic doctor with whom his secret would have been safe.

It was only long after the war that we began to realize that Piet’s physical toughness was nothing in comparison with his indomitable spirit.

THE VANISHING HORSES

The third time the British occupied Potchefstroom, they prepared to stay. Nevertheless, they had to withdraw after a couple of months as a result of the military action that led to the defeat and capture of Lord Methuen by General De la Rey. During this occupation all kinds of martial law regulations were imposed to prevent the Boers from gaining any advantages from what was still left on the farms. The regulations were particularly strictly applied to horses. There were, at that time, a fair number of saddle horses on the farms, and, when the British patrol approached, they would be driven into the bush and narrow kloofs, often in charge of youths just old enough to handle a rifle. More than one patrol that tried to pursue the fugitives was ambushed and shot to ribbons. As a result of these brushes, extra guns and bullets as well as horses complete with saddle and bridle fell into the hands of these youngsters who then proceeded to arm their friends. Later, even poultry and pigs were cached in these hiding places. The British then decided to put an end to this kind of annoyance and brought their patrols up to company strength. Sometimes they included a couple of maxims and pom-poms. The boys thereupon improved their organization and intelligence to such an extent that later they could muster fifty or sixty rifles against a patrol. Once again, the British caught it hot, especially in difficult country.

Piet regularly reported the troop movements to Ben Pieterse who in turn passed them on to the various centers. These reports proved most useful. Then the British changed their tactics. They decided to make greater use of Native spies by placing them on various farms. At the head of this organization they put Nyati, their infamous but extremely capable head spy. Then they seconded a group of renegade Boers called National Scouts to each patrol. The boys were hardly clever enough to match the knowledge and experience of these men.

And so gradually all the Boer horses kept in reserve on the farms, fell into British hands. These horses included those specially held for emergencies because of their fleetness and stamina, others which had been withdrawn to recover their condition and captured British horses which were not suitable for the rigors of commando fighting in South Africa.

In this way the British finally gathered from around Potchefstroom almost a thousand horses. These they kept in a special encampment near the North Bridge. Most of these animals had been ridden until they were fit to drop or else were in a poor condition for some or other reason. There were, however, amongst them some two hundred and fifty choice mounts. To ensure that none fell into the hands of the Boers, the British decided on drastic action. All those showing any sign of weakness were to be shot. The sound animals would be kept under guard until needed by the various regiments.

Potchefstroom got its taste of the slaughter almost immediately. More than 700 horse were killed within a month in Captain Bailey's Wood, near where the Vyfhoek settlement now nestles. The stench was terrible. When the wind blew from the east one could smell the putrefaction on the rise where the Potchefstroom University College stands today. All day long, flocks of voracious vultures circled the eastern and northern fringes of the village. In the wood itself the birds clustered so thickly in the mimosa-thorn trees that many of the thickest branches snapped under their combined weight. On the ground were dozens of obscene birds waddling about, too gorged to fly.

To the average Boer who is by nature very fond of animals, this appalling slaughter was nothing short of a cardinal sin. There was never much love lost between us and the occupation forces but the shooting of the poor horses did more to strengthen our hostility than any other deed during the war, except the

concentration camps. Most of us who lived in Potchefstroom have retained those feelings of revulsion, and even today I find it difficult to describe what the British no doubt considered an ordinary military necessity without a certain amount of heat.

The bridge and ford leading to Elandsheuwel had a large body of troops behind sand bag fortifications and other entrenchments. Attack by day was therefore quite out of the question. In the evening the horses were rounded up near the tents of the guards. Then they were corralled in a big barbed wire encampment with long canvas mangers where they received their late feed. The paddock was about two acres in extent and the animals were not tethered. At first it took the guards quite a time to drive the horses together at sunset. One evening a National Scout suggested a very simple method. Among the captured horses were seven mares and an old mule with a bell round its neck. The latter had been taken on the Van Graan's farm on the upper reaches of the Mooi River. These seven mares followed the old mule like school children. When the little cavalcade passed, the other horses would tag on. The Scout showed the British how to get the mule to graze at the far end of the pasture. As the sun touched the rim of the hills, the mule would be driven along, the seven mares would follow, and the rest of the horses would trot after. All one had to do was to allow the mule to zig-zag a bit. Once the other horses heard the bell there was no difficulty.

Piet watched the performance with great interest and thought to himself: "If the mule can lead them into the paddock, he can also lead them out." He then decided to examine the position of the guard tents. They were pitched on level ground where old man Hjule had previously sowed his lucerne until the weeds got the upper hand. The Piet noticed, and smiled secretly to himself, that the encampment lay lower than the furrow which served as millstream. The original sluices leading to the lucerne had been blocked with stones and earth. It would take time to break that dyke open. The cement forming the framework of the sluice, however, was clearly visible and was cracked and rotten, and one could prize it loose with a crowbar. After that, the force of the water would enlarge the opening. Unfortunately, the sluiceway was within twenty yards of the officers' marquee and the guard tent which held five men.

Nothing daunted, however, Piet began fashioning his plans. First he very circumspectly ascertained from the Van Graans whether the mule had been broken to the saddle. Tant Betta found that out for him. She learnt that the creature was completely tame and that children had used it to ride to school, although, having done no work for months, it might at that stage have become a little skittish. After that he asked Ben Pieterse whether any of his Native spies had been placed among the horse-guards. It appeared that there was one: a powerful, thick-set Basotho, called Stompie. At a later stage, one night Ben Pieterse arrived and he and Piet had a long discussion in the poplar thicket on Elandsheuwel.

At this stage of Piet's career, Ben had formed a very high opinion of Piet and his ability. It seemed quite natural for him to ask, "Well, what should we do?"

"How many men can you bring up?" asked Piet.

"Ten."

"That's very few. But we shall have to do our best."

The following night Piet and the Bushman crept into a ruined kraal, made out of daub and wattle, on the far side of the river. "Shortly after ten o'clock Master Ben will pass this way and give him your lantern.

You will wait about an hour, until the moon is over there. Then you will light the lantern and walk to and fro until you hear the Khakis at the ford. While they are splashing through the river, you douse the light and make your way to the lucerne land of Master Doppies. Lie down and wait until you hear them back in the camp again. Then you light these crackers and disappear.” The Bushman nodded and the two then stole home.

Two nights later the sentinel on the western perimeter of the corral saw, what he thought, was an intermittent signal from the opposite bank of the river. He called the sergeant who, in turn, called the captain. The captain peered into the darkness and saw a light flashing on and off. He counted them: long-short-short, long short-long. It was the Bushman strolling past the irregular gaps in the wall of the old kraal. The officer peered more closely. Strange: he could not read the signal. It looked like a code. Obviously an urgent matter. He turned out twenty-five men under a sergeant to go and investigate, as a precaution he had the whole company stand to.

A quarter of an hour passed. Half an hour. Then the patrol scrunched back and reported that they had discovered nothing. The captain was wondering what his next move should be, when one after the other, six shots rang out in the direction of Doppies lucerne lands. Piet’s last Gold Medal Bombay Crackers had made their final bow. The captain whipped round and ordered another twenty-five men to join the first patrol under his most experienced sergeant. Meanwhile he told the remaining soldiers to stand easy but keep together.

After three-quarters of an hour, the augmented patrol returned and reported that they were quite certain that there was nothing living moving on either bank. They also made contact with the guards at Elandsheuwel Bridge who had confirmed that they had seen nothing suspicious either. The officer had just given the order for everyone to return to their tents when something happened again. As they reached the entrance of the camp, Stompie suddenly turned on the head Native, a giant Zulu, gave him a tremendous swipe and accused him of stolen his money. The Zulu made a grab at him and they started milling about. The officer stopped them: “If you want to fight, you will have to do it properly with your fists. And what’s more, here and now.” He felt that after the alarms and excursions of the last hour, his men deserved some relaxation.

“No tricks, however, mind you”, he said “I shall act as referee and Sergeant-Major will be the time-keeper.

The men whooped with delight. “A fight, a fight” they cried and pressed round the officer and the two antagonists.

A ring was formed. Each Native was given a soldier as second. The Sergeant-Major glanced at his watch and the fight was on. The Zulu was much stronger than Stompie, but he was clumsy and had not yet recovered from his astonishment at being accused of theft unexpectedly. Stompie was agile and courageous, and shaded the Zulu for the first couple of rounds. Suddenly the Zulu took his measure and flashed over two sledge-hammer blows flush against the Basotho’s chin. So tremendous was the second one that Stompie not only staggered back but described a complete summersault to land again on his haunches. He was just struggling upright when a soldier called out: “Where does this water come from?”

“What water?” asked the officer.

But it was an unnecessary question for Stompie had collapsed in a pool which had formed behind him.

“The furrow has broken”, exclaimed the officer. “Fetch your things from the tents.”

Someone shouted to the guards with the horses: “Come get your belongings: the millstream has broken.”

The guards sprinted for their tents. But scarcely had they left their posts than a couple of shadowy figures rose from the grass next to the wire. They whipped out their pliers and in a few moments there was a gap of about thirty yards in the fences. Someone slide up to the mule and bitted it with a halter rope. The animal bucked once or twice, and then its bell tinkled away through the gap in the direction of the river. The seven mares followed docilely and the whole mass of horses trotted behind. One of the soldiers caught the sound of thudding hooves.

“What’s happening to the horses? Where are the guards?”

The officer had barely time to shout a command when a furious fusillade rang out from the other side of the millstream. It might have been five men shooting rapidly or fifty taking careful aim, but every tent where a light glowed, and almost all had lanterns, received one or more bullets. The officer shouted to his men to take cover, but this was easier said than done because they splashed through water everywhere, and there were substantial pools in the hollows. More than one bewildered soldier wondered whether his only choice was a bullet or a watery grave. Their plight, however, was not really serious but it was sufficiently uncomfortable to take their minds off the horses.

The mob of animals thundered on to the “Deep Ford” where the Native girls used to do the village washing. There was no question of baulking the water even in the dark because most of them had come to know the ford in crossing it twice daily to and from the pasture.

Soon the whole cavalcade had crossed over and had made a wide detour past Captain Bailey’s Wood, past the stench of the dead horses and on to the road to Ventersdorp.

The following day Ben Pieterse and his commandant inspected the booty with great satisfaction. Of the five sharpshooters, for they were but five, two had slept in Tant Betta’s wagon-house, two in the dominee’s study and the other in old Carel’s woodshed together with Piet.

The next day they were smuggled with great difficulty to Elandsheuwel where they met their companions of the previous night who had brought along a number of extra mounts.

Of the 253 horses in the British corral only two remained behind: one had been bitten by a snake two days previously and the other had stumbled into a mud-hole jus past “Deep Ford”. Of the remaining 251, one was of course, a mule. This beast proved its worth more than once and campaigned with the Boers until the end of the war.

THE FALSE FORD

The following night Piet went to bed early but was soon awakened by a scratching on the door of the woodshed. It was the little Bushman with a message from Tant Betta.

“The old missus says that Master Ben wants you to go to the big clump of reeds just this side of the ford at Haaskraal at once.” Piet grumbled his assent and the Bushman disappeared into the darkness again.

Two hours later Piet carefully hid his bicycle in the long grass fringing the road some twelve miles outside the village. In the open the stars twinkled brightly but as he moved into the thicket he had to feel his way. Gradually, however, his cat’s eyes grew accustomed to the darkness and soon he noticed a couple of vague shapes ahead of him and felt sure that one of them was Ben.

He whistled twice like a night-jar and heard the other’s answering notes.

As he came up he found Ben in a towering rage. It appeared that almost as soon as the stolen horses reached Ben’s encampment, a messenger arrived from General De Wet ordering him to send a hundred of the beasts across the Vaal River and to deliver them to a commando near Vredefort that had a number of dismounted men in its ranks. The remaining horses were later to be divided among the burghers of Generals Kemp and Celliers.

Moreover, Ben was told to delegate this work to his subordinates. He himself was to try to creep through the lines near Greylingstad where one of General Botha’s chief spies would be waiting to discuss with him important alterations in the code and other intelligence matters.

Consequently, Ben handed over the one hundred horses to three of his young burghers and four trusty Natives. He made quite certain that the eldest of the three, a pale young man from the Klerksdorp called Rabie who knew the terrain well, understood what route to follow.

The youngster promised faithfully to carry out his instructions to the letter, but scarcely had he covered the first day when he did the most stupid thing. He decided, in passing, to carry off some fifty oxen on the farm of Doctor Dyer just on the other side of Haaskraal. Unfortunately, there were a number of Native guards in charge of the oxen and they immediately reported the matter to the nearest British camp at Koekemoer. To crown matters, the Native had not only seen the Boers, but also caught sight of the horses. The following morning the railway telegraph began chattering and the heliograph winked across the veld.

Rabie by now had realized that he would not be able to cross the Vaal River at Klerksdorp, and immediately made a wide circle towards the left in the direction of Potchefstroom.

At sunset, while he was reconnoitering ahead, he came across Ben, who was just preparing to slip through the British lines above the big camp almost opposite Haaskraal. Rabie breathed a sigh of relief on seeing Ben, but the latter was so furious with him for having disobeyed orders that he lashed the boy with his tongue until he was ready to burst into tears. Unfortunately, however, the situation could only be met by action. Anger would not help to mend matters.

Ben decided that the sole solution would be to drive the horses that very night half way to Hoogekraal where the Mooi River joins the Vaal, else the whole outfit, Boers, Natives, horses and oxen would be captured.

Yet it was impossible for he himself to waste most of the night in that way and still keep his appointment at Greylingstad which was even more important than saving the horses.

He made up his mind on the spur of the moment. He sent the smartest of the four Natives to Tant Betta with a message telling Piet to come immediately. And that was how it came about that Piet crept into the reeds just before midnight. Ben gripped his hand and then turned to the three young burghers.

“This boy will lead you to safety”, he said. “Just see that you listen to him and do exactly as he says.”

Piet was certainly the last person that the three hulking youngsters would have chosen as their leader, but the danger was great and their confidence in Ben even greater.

Rabie thereupon began explaining their position. “here we are”, he said “on the right bank of the river. The line of blockhouses stretching from Klerksdorp to the Vaal will all be housing sharp lookout for us. From the direction of Koekemoer a company of British are dogging our footsteps. They will either catch us or pin us against Potchefstroom. In either case we shall be finished. On the opposite bank of the river is a big British camp. With a hundred loose horses we shall never be able to slip past.”

Piet said quietly listening. As usual his mouth hung half open. He said not a word. Not even when Rabie had finished speaking. The latter looked at him as if he were dealing with an idiot, and in a sharper voice began his tale again from the beginning.

Piet allowed him to run through it a second time and then, just before he had quite finished, he said, “We shall have to drive the oxen through the river.”

“For the Khakis to capture?”

“Yes”, said Piet, “They might as well catch them.”

“Us too, I suppose.”

“No, not us.”

“And what about the horses?”

“Not them either.”

“In that case what are you driving at?” Rabie had by this time completely lost his temper.

Then Piet quite meekly indicated that they would have to sacrifice the oxen in order to save the horses. The cattle would have to be driven through the river and, in a wide arc, approach the British camp from the opposite direction. Then they would have to be stampeded right into the enemy camp.

Rabie scratched his head. “Well I know of one thing that will put the fear of the devil into an ox. Fire.”

Piet agreed and then explained that the job of getting the beasts through the river and using them as a live battering ram against the camp would fall on the three burghers.

“Yes, but what happens to the horses?” they wanted to know. “One of the Natives and I will drive them through the stream and past the camp while you are stampeding the cattle. We shall wait for you in the mimosa thorn clump on the Hoogekraal side.

Rabie and his companions glanced at one another. At last he said: "Do you know what, this young fellow has hit on something."

Like shadows the three burghers moved in among the oxen and herded them together. Quietly they drove them ahead and within then minutes the first beast was wading ashore on the other side. Moving slowly, they kept them on the move until they were some distance on the far side of the British camp. There they formed them in a half moon facing the tents.

One of them suggested making a bonfire of dried reeds to frighten the beasts but Rabie, feeling the fresh easterly breeze in his face said: "No that's not necessary. The wind is right and the grass is long."

The other two immediately began cutting sheaves of grass. These they fastened to a long rawhide thong which they drew through a buckle on the saddle. Rabie lit the bundles behind the mob of cattle and started driving on to the enemy camp. The two riders, digging their heels sharply into their mounts, ringed the terrified beats with an arc of fire on both sides until, like the encircling horns of the crescent formation of a Zulu impi the flames surrounded them except for a narrow opening at the tips. The frenzied oxen thundered towards the gap where only the white tents blocked the way.

The days were long past when one could panic a British camp with fire. The enemy had learnt their lessons during the first few months of the war. They had instructions to clear a fire break around the tents as soon as they formed camp. In this case, however, the grass grew so close to their quarters that the tents were immediately hidden from view by billowing clouds of smoke. Suddenly out of the murk and the flame the fifty oxen, mad with fear, charged into the camp. Nothing could stop them. In three seconds they were past the guards and had flattened everything in their path.

The actual damage was slight. Even the oxen were for the most part unharmed. But the temporary confusion was so great that Piet was able to drive the horses into the river and swim them past the camp, emerging on the left bank half a mile further down. The shouts of the Tommies and the light from the fire gradually dwindled as the burghers rode forwards into the night.

When the sun rose next morning, Piet, his three companions, the four Natives and ninety-seven horses -- for three of them had been lost during the darkness --- were safely ensconced in the ticket near Hoogekraal, practically at the confluence of the Mooi and Vaal rivers. That same night they intended swimming the animals over the Vaal. Once on the other side they would be comparatively safe.

After their night of adventure, Rabie and his friends looked upon their guide with quite different eyes. When therefore, during their meagre breakfast, Piet said: "I'm a bit afraid of what may await us in the direction of Koekemoer", the three burghers volunteered to re-cross the Mooi River to spy out the land. By midday they were back with bad news.

"There is a large company of British moving directly from Koekemoer station in our direction. They are proceeding but they will be here before sunset which means that we shall be captured."

Their position was desperate. The Mooi River joined the much bigger Vaal at right angles forming a T of which the former was the vertical and the latter horizontal. They were on the left bank of the Mooi River with the British approaching the right bank from Koekemoer. The Boers had to cross the Vaal River in order to gain the comparative safety of the Orange Free State on the other side, and although the big

stream was fairly lightly guarded at this point, it was still sufficiently strongly held to make the crossing impossible in daylight.

Up and downstream where the banks were less rugged, blockhouses had been built at frequent intervals and there it would be hopeless to attempt to drive a large band of horses across even during the night it was accordingly useless trying to move upstream away from the approaching British. By some means the enemy had to be deflected before they could splash through the Mooi River and reach the thicket where the burghers were concealed.

To decoy them back in the direction of Potchefstroom, even if it could be done, would serve no purpose. They would return within a very short time with greatly augmented forces. There was only one solution and that was to keep them on the right-hand bank of the Mooi River, entice them to its junction with the Vaal and there keep them occupied until well after dark. While these thoughts were chasing through Piet's mind, the other three raked a couple of cold potatoes from the ashes of the fire they had made that morning. They ate ravenously. They were quite content to leave the scheming to Piet who knew the countryside like the back of his hand. Already a plan was half forming in his mind. Yet he had to make quite certain. He stood up and walked to the bank. Then he slipped into the water and swam over.

Halfway across the Vaal River, just before the Mooi flows into it, there was a bad patch of quicksand. Any man or beast foolhardy enough to try to force his way through would be trapped. And yet to the initiated this seemed the easiest fording place as the banks are low and lightly held. For a mile above and below this spot the banks on the Free State side were so high and steep that the British had not even bothered to set up permanent guard posts. They surely sent a patrol to scout twice two or three times a week. They knew well enough that the Boers were used to crossing the river only at those places where they could do so on horseback.

The burghers were becoming uneasy when Piet returned at length. His plan was now crystal clear. They would have to drive the horses over the Mooi River and on its right bank. Then they would proceed along the leg of the "T" and enter the Vaal opposite the false ford, as the quicksand were called. Once the animals reached deep water they would swim them upstream. By doing this they would cross the mouth of the Mooi River and shortly afterwards, clambering up the Vaal River bank on the Transvaal side again and swinging left, would be safely back in the thorn thicket whence they started.

No sooner said than done. Piet and the Natives managed the horses themselves. The three burghers crossed the Vaal River without their horses just below the false ford and took up their stations on the opposite bank. In twenty minutes Piet had carried out his maneuver and had the beasts well-hidden along the trees again. Within an hour, and the sun was still high in the heavens, the British arrived. The force consisted of a Canadian company under a particularly smart officer. He was determined to get those hundred horses and, as his troop approached the river, he could see the deeply imprinted hoof tracks leading down to the water.

Next to him rode a Native scout who tried to warn him against crossing at the false ford but the captain, as he told the guide, could see with his own eyes that horses had entered the water at that spot. The Native was just beginning to argue and to point out that there were no hoof marks on the opposite bank when Rabie and his companions opened fire from the Free State side. That decided the Canadian. He ordered one round of quick fire, snatched out his revolver and stormed the ford, or what he believed was the ford.

All went well until they were three-quarters across. Then they struck quicksand. Soon the whole company was a mass of crazed horses and shouting soldiers. Had they been ordinary Tommies many, if not all would have perished. But the Canadians, themselves men of the open spaces, had more initiative and resource. Nevertheless, they lost one man and seven horses and struggled in the water until after midnight, when they managed to extricate themselves and return to the Transvaal bank. Here they lit a huge fire to warm their frozen bodies.

Meanwhile, as soon as the sun had set, Rabie and his companions re-crossed the Vaal. With the Mooi River safely between them and the struggling Canadians they drove the horses about half a mile up the Vaal River and bunched them together. Then the three young burghers crept another half mile further until they could shelter behind an outcrop of rocks within a hundred yards of the nearest blockhouse. At a signal they opened fire on this fort and its half-section across the stream. The garrisons replied with a will. While this diversion was in progress, Piet and the Natives slipped the animals into the water and soon they were safely in the Orange Free State. To his left he could hear the Canadians still struggling and from the right the crack of rifles gradually died away.

Then Rabie and his companions loomed through the night and they all spent some time resting and watching the fires below the junction where the half frozen Canadians were trying to thaw the cold out of their bones. At last Piet stood up and shook hands all round. As he was taking his leave, Rabie rather shamefacedly asked him whether he had any further instructions. It was the young burgher's way of apologizing for his former attitude and of showing his appreciation for the way in which the boy had saved them.

Piet shook his head and replied:

“Just move straight in the direction of Vredefort. You will know what to do.”

With a wave he turned his head for home and slid down from the bank of the Vaal.

When he reached the Transvaal side, Piet was desperately tired and was sorely tempted to return to the mimosa thicket and hole up for twenty-four hours. But he realized that if he was discovered so far from Potchefstroom after the events of the night his real identity would be suspected. He therefore decided to return to the village. His bicycle was ten miles away in a clump of reeds at Haaskraal but he remembered a Jewish trader close to the Hoogekraal road who had a bicycle which was usually left on the stoep at night. He crept up to the building and found the machine. The jaded horse with which he had crossed from the Free State was left loose in the yard as a fair exchange.

Wheeling the bicycle on to the road, he mounted and putting his head down he pedaled for Potchefstroom which he reached just before dawn. He cast himself on his straw mattress and slept right throughout the day.

The following morning the Little Bushman was sent to collect Piet's own bicycle from Haaskraal and quite blatantly rode it to Tant Betta's house where he hid it in the wagon shed. The British who noticed him never thought twice that any Native except their own spies possessed a machine.

THE RESCUE OF JOOP GRIMBEEK

One morning during the period which we called the third occupation, Piet was loitering along the street with his little cart piled high with manure, when Dominee Albertyn hurried urgently to him.

“Piet, I must see you at once in my study” he whispered.

Piet glanced at him and answered aloud: “No, Dominee, I can’t let you have a load until next week”, and then out of the side of his mouth he murmured: “That Native in front of the Queen’s Hotel is listening.” The parson who was as sharp as a needle, realized the position immediately. “No, Piet”, he replied, “next week will be too late for my onion seed-beds.”

Piet looked sideward at him. “Now you are playing fool with me. There is still another month before the onion beds have to be ready.” Then he mumbled again: “Tell Tant Bella to send the Bushman to me.”

The parson kept up his part of the charade. “Look here, young fellow-me-lad, none of your cheek. I know when I need manure.”

Piet shrugged his shoulders and walked away while the parson glared angrily at his back.

The stars were already out and a candle was guttering in the woodshed when Piet heard a scratching at the door that night. He pushed it open and the little Bushman with a note from Tant Betta slipped in. Piet glanced at the writing and his eyes caught the word Elandsheuwel. He read further. It was all about the Grimbeeks of Elandsheuwel, and in particular about Joop Grimbeek whose pumpkin fields had received Piet’s very close attention from time to time.

Joop Grimbeek was one of the first volunteers for the Potchefstroom commando at the outbreak of the war. He was the second son of that old pioneer Erdzak Grimbeek, the patriarch of the clan. Joop himself had fought with distinction at Magersfontein and in a number of Free State battles. After the general retreat a portion of his commando had joined General De la Rey and had taken part in operations in the Western Transvaal. The trouble to which Tant Betta’s letter referred originated in an incident at Hoogekraal just where the Mooi River joins the Vaal and the scene of Piet’s escapade with the Canadians and the hundred horses.

The complete history of the incident we learnt from Joop Grimbeek only after the war. It appeared that he and four companions had been trapped on a koppie practically at the junction of the two streams. He and one of the burghers, a De Wet from Kroonstad, were fighting the enemy off on the Mooi River side while the other three kept those on the Vaal River bank fully occupied.

Those three, unfortunately for them, had very little ammunition among them and within an hour, even after having husbanded their small supply very carefully, their bandoliers were empty. Worse still, it was yet early in the afternoon and there was no chance of sheltering behind the rocks and later attempting an escape under cover of darkness. They therefore fastened a white handkerchief to one of the guns to indicate surrender. The British officer in command immediately ordered the cease fire.

Joop and his companion, however, were on the far side of the koppie and knew nothing of what was happening. All they saw was the Tommies crowding together to the left of their position. They thereupon decided to make a dash for it. First, however, they emptied their magazines at the British, making them scatter in amazement. Two of the enemy, including a sergeant, were killed and seven

others wounded. Without waiting to see the effect of their fusillade, the Boers leapt on their horses and dashed like furies past the British. When the besiegers managed to regain their wits the two fugitives were two hundred yards away. They nevertheless opened fire and a stray bullet drilled De Wet through the head. He was dead before he touched the ground.

Among the British was a National Scout who recognized both Joop and his horse. The officer made an immediate report to headquarters. A number of similar incidents having been reported over the previous six months, Kitchener decided on drastic action. A detailed account of the incident was circulated to the commanding office of every independently operating column and a reward of £500 was offered for Grimbeek's capture, dead or alive. For some time, every National Scout and every Native spy and agent was after Joop's blood --- or rather after the £500 --- but their hopes gradually dwindled, and after six months even Joop had begun to forget in what a perilous situation he was.

And so it came about that one night while he and his patrol were lying on a hillside some ten miles from Elandsheuwel, he suddenly decided he would like to visit his family whom he had not seen for some months, and to be able to stretch his limbs in a decent bed again.

He had no qualms because he knew the farm Natives, most of whom had been in his service for years, were a trusty bunch. Unfortunately for him a strange Bushman had made his appearance at the cooking fires that night and had squatted down to join in the talk. This Bushman caught a glimpse of Joop as he slipped into the house, but the eyes of the Boss boy were in turn on the Bushman. He had served the family for forty years and watched over Joop since he was a baby. He busied himself around the fire but never lost sight of the Bushman. Just then a herd boy came up to the fire with the news that one of the three cows still on the farm was on the point of calving, and that it was having some difficulty. The boss boy got up and went to the cow. He eased it, and when the calf at last was born, he hurried to the fire. To his consternation the Bushman had disappeared. In alarm he ran round the hut. Still no sign of the Bushman. He was just wondering what to do when he heard hoofs some distance away. They drummed on the bridge over the irrigation furrow, where the farm track joined the main road. He listened intently. They were British horses. He dashed for the house and rapped on the bedroom window. "Baas, the Khakis are here." Seconds later the British reached the front stoep, while Joop, hatless and bare-footed, dressed only in shirt and trousers, fled into the fields at the back. He sprinted along a rutted footpath in the direction of the poplar thicket, and dived into an old maize pit.

This hole, cut out like a cave into an earth embankment, was a relic of the days before the White man had reached the Transvaal. In it the Natives used to store their maize crop. At that time, it was completely hidden by a weedy growth of khaki bush.

The British had no doubt about the identity of the fugitive. They soon found his clothes and recovered his horse. It was the same animal which the National Scout had identified at Hoogekraal. They immediately put the wife and daughters under house arrest and sent a couple of Native spies amongst the farm laborers. Joop's position was one of extreme danger, No water, no food and practically no clothes. And he knew he would be shot should he fall into the hands of the enemy.

The British went over the farm with a fine tooth comb but, fortunately did not discover the entrance to the maize pit. The farm Natives, even under cross-examination insisted that they knew nothing.

For three days Joop lay hidden in the pit. Twice he tried to gain the river, and each time he saw the silhouette of the guard on the bank just in time. The third night fell. Weary and famished, he decided to give himself up. He was just scraping his courage for the final step when he heard a sound of singing from the homestead. In a daze he listened. He nodded. It was a homely evening service. Then he noticed something strange. They were repeatedly singing one hymn, "Praise the Lord." The first time he felt surprised. It was not like his wife to sing that particular hymn when she knew of his predicament, and that, too, with the help of the neighboring families, some of whose voices he could recognize. The hymn kept on rolling across the fields. When it was repeated the fourth time, it suddenly dawned on him. It was a message of hope, a sign that he would be rescued.

He sat and wondered how his wife, whom he knew well enough would have been placed under house arrest, had found a solution. For this she had, in a simple but effective way.

When Joop had suddenly appeared in the house he found one of his children down with a very bad cold. The following morning his wife demanded that she be allowed to get the doctor to the child. The sergeant of the detachment occupying Elandsheuwel refused her request. She continued to plead but in vain. Finally, she managed to slip a note addressed to old Dr. Bird in the village to a Native servant. He managed to get through the guards and reach the doctor without exciting any suspicion. The old man who had known all the children since birth was surprised to hear that, without any previous symptoms to his knowledge, one of the children had pneumonia.

Old Doctor Bird was an Englishman and a very good soul. He immediately went to the provost marshal of the garrison and asked for a permit to visit Elandsheuwel. This, however, was refused. The doctor insisted but the officer was adamant. Thereupon the old man lost his temper:

"Look, Major", he said, "I am as patriotic an Englishman as you but I am also a doctor and have certain moral obligations. If you don't allow me to see a patient in a family that I have treated for five-and-twenty years, I'll have your coat off your back even if I have to take the case right to the House of Commons."

The Major wavered and went to consult the colonel. The latter became very annoyed and at first decided to confirm his subordinate's refusal. But as the major left the room, he called him back: "On second thoughts give the old dodderer the pass; his loyalty is in any case above suspicion."

When the doctor reached Elandsheuwel he found the child merely suffering from a bad cold. The mother, however, seemed almost demented from worry. She felt sure that her child was extremely ill, even though the doctor did not. Would he please ask the Dominee to come.

The old man shook his head. Worry was a very strange thing. Nevertheless, he promised to see what he could do. Driving back to Potchefstroom he called on the Dominee who had already learnt by bush telegraph what had happened on Elandsheuwel the previous night. He immediately sought an audience with the commander and beseeched him to grant permission for him to visit the sick child. Fortunately for him the military authorities at Potchefstroom had, a couple of days previously, received a circular directing them to remain on a good footing with the clergy of the Dutch Reformed Church, otherwise trouble might be expected at a critical stage of the war from the Afrikaans churches in the Cape Province.

And so the Dominee received his pass and cycled over to Elandsheuwel. The guards let him through reluctantly when he displayed his pass and he passes into the cool dimness of the farmhouse. Mrs. Grimbeek got him into the sickroom and hurriedly whispered the story to him. He comforted her as best he could, and promised to return the following day.

As soon as he reached the parsonage again, he sent his maid to Tant Betta, asking her to call to see his wife. Tant Betta was soon knocking at the front door. He let her in personally and they went into conference. After listening to him and putting one or two questions she finally told him that he would have to find Piet. The Dominee was doubtful what a scarecrow like that could do to right matters but he said nothing for his confidence in the old lady was unlimited. He immediately took his leave, mounted his bicycle and personally searched the whole village for the boy.

Piet, however, was away on a secret mission and, as I have already mentioned, he was run to earth only on the following morning in front of the Queen's Hotel while he was loafing along with his cart of manure.

The same afternoon the parson asked for another permit but was refused as the major was out of town. The next day he tried again and, after a long delay, was granted a pass, Meanwhile Piet had got a message to him to go along to the farm and organize a church service with the help of the neighbors. This, Piet hoped, would divert the attention of the guards. And turning the service over in his mind, the Dominee got an idea of conveying a message of hope to Joop by the singing of the hymn.

The service was over, the last of the neighbors had departed and the guards had taken up their positions for the night when Joop heard a handful of gravel falling among the bushes at the entrance of the maize pit. Carefully he eased himself over. A voice whispered: "Is that you oom Joop? This is Piet Pencil stub."

Piet Pencil stub? Once more the hunted man's courage and hope ebbed away. What good could a stupid halfwit like that do to help him? But the boy gave him no time to argue. It was pitch dark and Joop did not even notice the small figure enter until Piet whispered!

"Take hold of my belt at the back and follow me."

Like two beasts of the night they crawled through the blackness. Yet Piet found his way unerringly. It could not have taken them more than seven minutes to reach the poplar ticket, although to the agitated Joop it seemed an eternity. Once in the shelter of the friendly bushes the fugitive whispered:

"There are guards on the river bank."

Piet silenced him with a gesture. Feeling their way very carefully they crept over the carpet of leaves towards the river. Suddenly Piet paused, pulled a bush aside and whispered: "Crawl in."

Using his hands, Joop felt the circular entrance of a fair-sized hole. He slid feet foremost into the opening. Slowly he edged himself further into this new place of refuge. After ten yards the passage broadened out and he felt blankets under him.

Meanwhile Piet had retraced his steps and conscientiously swept a branch over their tracks. After a minute he joined the burgher in the otter's den.

“You may lie down now. Here is food and water.” Those were the most welcome words that Joop had heard for many a day. The water had come from the river and the food was cold baked pumpkin, yet he would not have changed them for the finest delicacies in the wide world.

For seven days Joop lay sheltered in Piet’s hideout. The food, however, gradually improved especially when Tant Betta found a watertight tin in her pantry that held a whole chicken, roast potatoes, mealie rice and kaffir corn.

During these days Piet had been scheming how to get the rescued burgher back to his commando. Eventually he had arranged with Ben Pieterse that he himself would bring Joop safely through the Mooi River, smuggle him from erf to erf through the village and deliver him three miles out at a point on the Ventersdorp road.

He had told Joop of the progress made when he visited him daily and on the appointed night he slid into the water with the burgher, who had never learnt to swim, firmly grasping his belt. It was a battle but at last he got his half-drowned charge safely to the opposite bank. The rest of the journey, though perilous, was fortunately much easier. Even so, it was almost four o’clock before they reached the meeting-place where two Boers with an extra horse on a leading rein were waiting.

At parting, Joop turned to his rescuer and said: “Well, Piet, I sometimes used to suspect that you know more about my pumpkins than I did myself. Today there is nothing on Elandsheuwel that I shall not willingly give if you ask for it. And I know that goes for my father and brothers as well.”

And, as it happened, it was the Grimbeek family that helped Piet on his way to that affluence which later in life he attained in the Prieska district, hundreds of miles and half a lifetime away.

INTO THE LION'S JAWS

When the British occupied Potchefstroom for the third time, they were absolutely determined to retain it. But after the crushing inflicted by General De la Rey on Lord Methuen at Tweebosch, near Lichtenburg, they had to withdraw again.

Every schoolboy knows the details of that memorable victory, but what few people realize is that the victory was made possible only by a secret mission which was perhaps the daring of the whole war. This mission was carried out by our friend, Ben Pieterse, with the effective co-operation of Piet.

By this time there was very little happening in the British lines that Ben knew nothing about, and he had come to realize that, provided one listened carefully, information of the utmost value could be picked up in the streets and bars and hotels of Johannesburg. Yet much of it was lost to the Boers as there was no central authority to gather these tit-bits and pass them on to the right quarters. He therefore decided to do the job himself although he was under no delusion about the difficulties of the task. His first major obstacle would be to gain entrance to Johannesburg itself.

In the early days of the war, Johannesburg was still a roaring mining camp suddenly rising from the dusty veld. One could have approached it easily from a dozen different directions. That was before the British had cordoned it off with barbed-wire. But once the fence with its eight wicked strands of so-called blue barb had been erected, it was almost impossible to gain access. The roads were guarded and everyone was stopped at fixed spots. In addition, the railways were by then in British hands and only those who had tickets and had been scrutinized could enter by that route. Even so, Ben decided that the only feasible method would be to use the railway. After some investigation he discovered a Hollander called Geertsema, the railway foreman at Bank station, who was a loyal supporter of the Boer cause. Ben suggested to him that he should smuggle him on a train under cover of darkness. But that would not be all. He would also have to assist him to alight safely and find him some place in Johannesburg where he could hide. Geertsema scratched his head. Well yes, he thought, he might be able to manage.

“They are loading a truck of lucerne at Welverdiend. Perhaps we can stow you among the bales. But, mark you, you’ll have to remain there until the train pulls into the goods-yard at Johannesburg. Wait there until daybreak. As soon as it starts getting light, creep out and go along to the station. I have a nephew, Marius Geertsema, in the military Lost Property Office. Tell him I sent you, and he’ll find somewhere that you can lie low.”

It all sounded so easy when Geertsema outlined the plan but nevertheless Ben knew that there might be many unforeseen mishaps. He had, however, to take chances and after thanking his friend he slipped off to collect his few necessary belongs.

As soon as darkness fell the burgher made his way to Welverdiend. In the siding he could see the goods train outlined against the stars. Everything seemed quiet except for the fireman getting up steam in the cab. Taking a quick look round from behind the galvanized iron goods shed, he slipped carefully over the rails. Once in the shadows of the train he felt reasonably secure. Now to find the lucerne truck. He paused and sniffed the air. The homely smell of fodder drifted towards him from a little distance in front. With infinite caution he glided forward until his fingers felt the familiar feel of lucerne. This was his goal. He slackened one of the ropes holding the tarpaulin and squeezed between the steel side and the canvas. Taking a firm hold of the edge of the truck he pulled himself up and on to the bales. Very

slowly he moved over the surface until he found a crevice which he widened so that he could make himself a prickly yet satisfactory hiding place.

Scarcely was he safely ensconced than the engine whistled and the train clanked out of the siding. He dozed off once or twice only to be jerked wide awake as the truck swayed over the points at Randfontein, the first of the Reef stations. Immediately afterwards the wheels started protesting as the brakes were applied and the train came to an abrupt halt.

Outside he could hear the thud of footsteps. They halted next to him and a voice rang out. "This is the one. Whip back that tarpaulin and begin unloading."

Ben tried to burrow deeper into the lucerne, but in vain. He could hear the knots being untied. He could hear the Tommies muttering as they wrestled with the ropes. Then the canvas was slowly dragged halfway across the truck and the doors clanged open. He lay in his refuge, still hidden by a fold of the tarpaulin. For ten long minutes he crouched there hearing the soldiers grunting as they lifted the bales. Their voices came nearer and he could hear their breath whistling through their noses. Only a few lines of bales were between him and the enemy and he was just nerving himself to leap up and make a dash for it, when the whistle shrilled through the night, a court order rang out, the doors clanged to, the canvas was again dragged over the load, the ropes were fastened amid oaths about the cold and the train jerked on its way. Ben relaxed and noticed for the first time that he was wet with sweat.

Just before dawn they drew into the goods-yard at Johannesburg. Waiting until he was sure that the train crew were out of the way, the burgher carefully clambered out. Around the rails gleamed dully in the first light. Taking his bearings swiftly he set off in the direction of a large building which he felt should be the station. One of the doors was open and he entered a long passage. Trying to look completely at his ease he walked along it scanning the offices as he passed.

Halfway down he paused at a door marked Military Lost Property Office. He pushed it gingerly open. Behind the counter a dark young man was huddled over a fire. Ben let the door swing to behind him.

"Are you Marius Geertsema?" he asked.

The other cocked an eyebrow at the Afrikaans accent.

"Indeed I'm not", he said in a rich Irish brogue. "That Dutch rebel would be at home now and all wrapped up in his feather bed while I have to sit here waiting for the silly soldiers who cannot even look after their property on the trains to come and claim their goods. Marius has the day off and if you don't know where he lives", and again he cocked an eyebrow, "I'm all for helping a country cousin. Here's his address." He scribbled on a piece of paper and pushed it over the counter. Ben picked it up with a muttered thanks and backed out of the office. As the door closed behind him he heard a cheerful chuckle.

His boots echoed on the cold cement but, to his infinite relief he met no one. When he emerged in the street he dropped into a saunter and turned the first corner. Glancing at the address in his hand he rapidly memorized it and dropped the paper down the nearest grating.

He had not far to go and within five minutes he was knocking at the door of a little semi-detached house. Footsteps came down the passage and the door swung open. A little bright-eyed woman stood on the threshold. "I've come from Bank station", he said, "and I am looking for Marius Geertsema."

“Come in”, she said, “I am Marius’ mother.” She held the door open and Ben entered. Without another word she marched ahead of him and indicated the bathroom. “I think it’s best to stay here awhile”, she said.

After about half an hour, the door opened again and a young man came in. He held out his hand and introduced himself. “I am Marius Geertsema”, he said, “I believe you have come from my uncle. Breakfast is ready. You had better have something to eat and then we can talk.”

Over the table Ben broached the subject of getting a job in Johannesburg for he knew that unless he could move freely in the city without exciting suspicion his mission would be fruitless. But jobs were not easily come by at that time. After they had each made a dozen suggestions, he had a sudden brainwave. He remembered his cousin, Chris Pieterse, who was working for the British in the local Native Administrative Offices. If only he could get a similar job, he would have the perfect alibi. No one would ever suspect a British official of having any connection with the Boers.

The difficulty, however, was how to get such a post. He turned the problem over in his mind throughout the long day. The only solution seemed to take over his cousin’s job. Unfortunately, although there was a slight family resemblance, it was too faint for the one to pass as the other. The whole scheme would need careful planning.

This Chris Pieterse was one of the few members of his family who had deserted the Boer cause. And yet perhaps in his case there was some excuse. His wife had been one of the Millers of Glencoe in Natal and her only loyalty was to Queen Victoria. Chris, on the other hand, was a Transvaler, born and bred in Charlestown, near Volksrust.

When war was declared he had immediately volunteered and had invaded Natal with the commando raised in Wakkerstroom. Some months afterwards matters began going badly wrong for the Boers. Lord Roberts had taken Pretoria and Chris came home again. There, away from his brothers-in-arms he finally capitulated under his wife’s nagging and took a job as clerk and interpreter under the British Native Administration in Johannesburg. He spoke Zulu fluently as did everyone from Volksrust. The youngest children were usually able to chatter away in Zulu to their nursemaids long before they could speak Afrikaans to their parents.

Chris consequently found the work easy, yet once he had taken service with the enemy he seemed to lose all his moral fiber. In fact, he lost his very self-respect and became a confirmed gambler and a heavy drinker. He often spent a whole night away from home, gaming and gulping the most poisonous brews until he was scarcely able to do his work properly the following morning. By dint of judicious questioning, Ben learnt all this from Marius and a couple of his friends. The next step was obvious.

For the next two or three nights Ben kept careful watch on the house that Chris occupied in Braamfontein. From the shadows opposite he saw his cousin shamle out in the dusk. Twice he followed him to Fordsburg where he suddenly vanished into a Chinese location. This was a part of the town that Ben well remembered from his days as detective. He consequently tried to find out whether there was a gambling den anywhere in the neighborhood. After drawing many a blank, someone mentioned the name of Ho Sing. In a flash Ben suddenly saw the light.

Ho Sing? Yes, he knew him well enough. He was a cultured Chinaman who, in the early nineties had run the best known casino in Shanghai where large sums changed hands nightly and where one could meet

people from every country in the world. After some years of prosperity, however, he was unfortunate enough to incur the enmity of the local mandarin who confiscated all his property and almost succeeded in having him murdered in one of the main streets of the city.

After a narrow escape, Ho Sing dropped everything and fled his native land. Finally, he arrived in Johannesburg via Delagoa Bay in Moçambique and set up a small trader dealing with the miners. Here at last he felt safe. He had, however, underestimated his enemy, and one night he was set upon by an assassin, one of the professional hatchet men from Shanghai, whom the mandarin had sent all those thousands of miles after him. He had already received one sharp blow from the murderer's axe when Detective Ben Pieterse appeared on the scene and sprang into action. The assassin immediately tried to turn his weapon on Ben who plucked out his revolver and shot him so neatly between the eyes that he died without a sigh.

Ho Sing was almost pathetic in his gratitude: "You have restored to me that life which I had already lost. Now it is yours to do with what you will."

Ben had forgotten all about the incident until he again heard the name of Ho Sing. "Fancy now", he thought to himself. "This is a real lucky break of Ho Sing is running a casino again and my cousin is one of his patrons."

A night or two later Ben arrived at Ho Sing's back door and asked to speak to him. The Chinaman turned pale with fright when he saw his visitor for he realized immediately that the Boer was not in the service of the British. But he was a man of honor. He invited him into his home and asked him what he could do for him.

"Well", said Ben, "in the first instance, you can give me some information. Does my cousin Chris Pieterse sometimes come here?"

"Yes."

"Does he drink here also?"

"Yes, we give all our patrons free drinks even though they spend as little as Mr. Pieterse."

"I want you to slip something into his drink which will knock him out so that I can take him away", said Ben.

At that the Chinaman became almost paralyzed with fright.

"It might mean the death of both of us", he quavered.

"I know that, but remember, you once said that your life belonged to me."

Ho Sing recovered himself and made a deep oriental obeisance: "So it is, and so it will remain, but we cannot talk here. It is safer in my private office. There over a cup of tea he took the Chinaman into his confidence. Eventually they agreed on a plan.

Two nights later anyone peering into a back room of Ho Sing's house would have seen Chris Pieterse asleep and snoring on a settee.

At ten o'clock the next day he was still asleep when two Chinese servants brought a coffin into the room. They placed Chris in it nailed it down. Then they carefully carried it to a hearse standing outside.

The horses ambled along from Fordsburg to the gate in the barbed wire fence at Braamfontein, just where Milner Park begins today. The guards stopped the vehicle. Ho Sing dismounted and displayed a permit to take the body of his nephew to the house of his brother in Auckland Park some distance outside the wire.

The sergeant grinned: "I didn't think you Chinks died also. I thought that was reserved for us Christians", and he waved him through.

That night Ben, carrying out the rest of the plan and following the corpse, crawled through the wire. The guard, hearing an unfamiliar sound, emptied his magazine in the Boer's direction. Ben lay flat on his stomach while the bullets whistled over his head. Then crouching low, he wormed his way forward inch by inch until he was out of danger. Finally, making a wide detour, he reached the Hong Kong Laundry, run by Ho Sing's nephew in Auckland Park. Giving a pre-arranged signal, he was cautiously let in and guided to a room at the back where he found the "corpse" who was perfectly conscious and sober by that time. Without waiting for his cousin to speak, Ben said: "Here you are Chris, you just sign this letter of resignation and recommend me for your post. If you don't I shall put a bullet into you and you will disappear down the nearest mine shaft."

"You'll never murder a member of your own family", the other tried to brazen it out.

"Oh won't I? Here is an execution warrant signed by General De Wet, condemning you to death for treason." The so-called warrant had been forged by Ben specially for the occasion. Nevertheless, it produced quick results.

"And if I sign it", his cousin asked, "What will happen to me?"

"You will be taken from here by our people and kept captive as long as it pleases General De Wet."

By this time Chris was really frightened.

"Will my life be safe", he wanted to know.

"You have my word for it", replied his cousin.

Without any further protest, Chris signed the document with a trembling hand. Shortly afterwards he was removed by a number of men belonging to the commando of General Cillers with whom Ben had got in touch through the two Geertsemas who worked the railway telegraph with a code of their own. Ben took his leave of Ho Sing and immediately made his way back to Johannesburg. Knowing the lay of the land, he managed to creep through the wire and past the guard who seemed to be dozing without much difficulty.

Four days later he succeeded in obtaining the desired post of interpreter-clerk, not because of the recommendation given him by Chris --- at which the chief merely laughed as he had been on the point of dismissing Pieterse anyway --- but because Zulu linguists were as scarce a rain in the Kalahari Desert.

Within the first week of his appointment, he managed to find work in his department for some of his Native spies who had followed him to Johannesburg. Thus they were able to smuggle reports to Boer

sympathizers who then managed to get them to the generals in the field. In this way Ben was able to convey important particulars about the strength of certain British columns to both General Botha and General Beyers. His chief interest, however, was naturally concerned with what might happen in the Western Transvaal.

One day he had a great stroke of luck and then was plunged into the depths of despair all within two hours. For some time, he had been treating at the local bars the civilian secretary of a member of Lord Kitchener's staff. This young man was always in financial difficulties, and at the time when Ben met him he was prepared to do almost anything for money. The Boer sounded him very carefully and eventually took the risk of offering to pay him for military information. One of the burghers of General Celliers' commando had brought him close on £1,000 Kruger sovereign in case of eventualities. The first information he bought was of slight military value but as he increased the price his victim became thoroughly reckless. Eventually one morning as they were standing at a bar, the young man offered Ben the complete set of instructions issued to Lord Methuen for a sum of £500. Ben paid without hesitation.

Any battle plans were of the utmost importance to the Boers, but for certain reasons those of Lord Methuen were particularly important. This commander was by no means the military fob that many of his colleagues were. He was one of the few British commanders who had both courage and initiative to depart, when necessary, from an agreed plan. He was therefore more dangerous to the Boers. After a little espionage, the Boer commanders were usually able to determine how most of the British commanders were going to dispose their troops and what they intended doing. But Methuen was an incalculable quantity.

The particular importance of the plan of action which Ben obtained lay in the fact that one could accurately determine what Methuen would have to do whether he liked it or not. It amounted to this: After the disastrous defeat suffered by part of his army at Ysterspruit hem together with some twelve or fifteen hundred men, would have to advance from Vryburg, where he was in camp, to Lichtenburg in order to prevent the whole British position in Western Transvaal swinging in favor of the Boers. It was also clear from the plan that Methuen's line of advance would have to follow the course of the Great Harts River. And so indeed it came about. The plan of action had therefore to be dispatched to General De la Rey immediately.

When Ben sent for his chief Native spy, however, he learnt to his dismay that the Kaffir had been arrested ten minutes previously by the military police on a charge of theft. Two other Natives who he might have been able to use had also disappeared off the face of the earth. They evidently thought that the head boy had been arrested for espionage and that it would be their turn next. All Ben now had at his disposal was one poor creature who was hardly to be trusted as a messenger. Still the report had to be handed to General De la Rey personally and without delay. In despair he wrote a letter in a primitive code to Piet, bidding him to come to Johannesburg. This he handed to his remaining spy.

Fortunately for him, this Native was better than Ben had imagined and managed to deliver the note to Piet without any mishap. If Piet had a sense of humor, which he had not, he would have burst out laughing on receiving the latter. As it was, he merely shook his head. How on earth did Ben imagine he could reach Johannesburg, and call on him in the offices of the Native Administration? Turning the problem over in his mind he paced the streets the whole morning. That afternoon as he was loitering past our house in Church Street he heard the sound of raised voices. He paused and saw my father in a heated argument with a British sergeant: "But, my good man", said the doctor, "it's out of the question I

have to sit up the whole night with a patient who has the most extreme form of heart disease. I have to give him continual injections. I've just left his bedside to mix his medicine." The sergeant answered roughly: "You will be at the charge office at seven o'clock or we will come and fetch you with a couple of bayonets. Here is the summons."

In passing I should like to tell you something about my father. As an army surgeon he went through the Jameson Raid, the siege of Mafeking and the battle of Modder River, When Cronje surrendered, he managed to escape with his ambulance, and after many vicissitudes he again reached Potchefstroom. During the fourth occupation of the village, he was accused of espionage and taken to the old fort in Johannesburg where he was lodged in the condemned cell for four long weeks, thereafter kept in irons for months. Shortly afterwards our whole family was arrested. We were, however, not charged with any specific crime and after a great deal of anxiety and suspense were turned loose in the streets of Johannesburg to fend for ourselves.

But to return to Piet, listening to the conversation between the sergeant and my father. The summons which the soldier had left behind was an order to travel as hostage by train to Johannesburg that very night. This procedure had been evolved by the British to discourage the Boers from blowing up trains. These incidents occurred with the connivance of the railway personnel. The Republican Railways had a number of the original drivers and guards from Holland still in their employ. These men were generally good friends of the Boers. The greater majority of them were rough diamonds, more at home with oaths than singing hymns, but none of them had a cowardly hair on his head. They provide us with information about the running of the trains and then calmly made the journey on the one marked for blowing up. To counter the frequent attacks on the trains, the British evolved the hostage system.

Our landrost as well as the generals in the field lodged many a protest against this procedure, but the English disregard their pleas, even today a lawyer would find it difficult to say with certainty where or not the British action conflicted with International Law. In any case, it was in connection with this system that the sergeant had handed the summons to my father.

The old man gave a deep sigh. To go, would mean the death of his patient. To refuse would mean arrest and imprisonment, and the sick man would still be without medical care. He was just wondering whether he could persuade old Doctor Bird to give the injections when Piet broke in: "Doctor, have they a name on that paper?"

My father scrutinized it: "No. All it says is: 'You are hereby ordered to report to the charge office at seven o'clock together with your overcoat and blankets', and it is signed by the commanding officer".

"Well, Doctor, just give it to me. I shall see that someone else goes in your place. They will never guess".

My father hesitated. "But, Piet, if it ever leaks out, it would place both of us in a dangerous position".

"No one will ever know", Piet answered so calmly that my father handed over the note without another word.

Nobody would have ever dreamt of choosing Piet as a hostage. He would have to ensure that someone else reported to the station – but he, Piet, would catch the train to Johannesburg. Hurrying home, he washed himself properly and dressed in his Sunday best, which largely consisted of an old khaki

overcoat. Hidden away in an inside pocket was a purse with money which Ben had given him for emergencies.

After that he began searching all the bars systematically. In the back room of the Queen's Hotel, he found old Carel fast asleep. He shook him awake: "Oom", he said, "the Khakis want you at the charge office".

Old Carel rolled to his feet. Since the British first arrived he had earned many a penny by fetching and carrying for the officers. Consequently, he never lacked for drinks. Piet took him firmly by the arm and they weaved an unsteady course up the street. They had almost reached the charge office when old Carel hung back in suspicion.

"What do the Khakis want with me at this time of the night. I'll go along tomorrow". He begged and pleaded but old Carel suddenly jerked his arm away and started rolling back to the Queen's Hotel. Piet was in a quandary. He had to see the night's work through. He could not change his plan at the last moment. He huddled in the shadows opposite the charge office. Ten minutes passed, twenty, a half hour. Suddenly the door was flung open. A square of light stretched itself over the road. Then nine civilians shambled out. Behind them came a British guard. From the office the corporal's voice rang out:

"That's the sergeant's lookout. I can't wait any longer for number ten. They'll have to fetch him with a bayonet tomorrow".

A number of soldiers doubled up and fell before and behind the nine hostages. A sharp command and they began marching in the direction of the station. Piet peered from the dark to see who were in the party. He recognized them all from Dominee Albertyn down to old man Taschner, the German watchmaker, no bigger than Piet. Suddenly he made up his mind on the spur of the moment. If he turned up his coat collar to hide his scrawny neck, nobody would notice the difference between him and the old watchmaker. Like a shadow he followed the party.

When they reached the station, it was obvious that they were late, for they were immediately hustled to the front portion of the train. Piet edged his way into the group. One by one the hostage climbed into the truck, after having shown their summonses to the non-commissioned officer on guard. Piet squeezed against number nine and flashed his paper. The Englishman scarcely looked at it and clanged the doors shut. With a whistle the train jerked out of the station. There were no seats so they squatted on the floor. One of the hostages glanced curiously at Piet and a look of recognition flashed into his eyes: "Good heavens, boy..." But before he could say anything else, Dominee Albertyn broke in:

"Ah brother, there is something I want to ask you". Even he did not know what he wanted to ask, but after a short whispered conversation, no one else displayed the least surprise at Piet's presence.

The train clattered through the night. The blockhouse system had not yet been brought fully into force, although just past Welverdiend, a couple of shots rang out, the train and the hostage drew in to Johannesburg station safely at nine o'clock next morning. The Boers were lined up and told they had to present themselves at the station at three o'clock that afternoon. They were thereupon dismissed.

Piet had reached Johannesburg, but his troubles had only begun. He had not the faintest idea where the offices of the Native Administration were, much less how he was going to find Ben. In fear and trepidation, he approached a military policeman who, however, spoke English only. Emboldened, he

approached another half a dozen with as little success. Then he spoke to a Native policeman who at last understood him. He told him he was seeking his cousin named Van Jaarsveld who previously served in the Imperial Light Horse and was now working for the Native Administration. The police boy new the building, and for a shilling he deserted his beat and accompanied Piet.

Wandering in, the youngster approached the first person he saw who, however knew no one name Van Jaarsveld. Nor did anybody else. Piet started whimpering and asked if he might look in the various offices for himself.

The chief clerk understood Afrikaans. He was a humane man and allowed Piet to walk down the passage and peer in at the doors. In the very second office, he stared straight into the eyes of Ben Pieterse, but without batting an eyelid, he went on. After ten minutes' search for his imaginary cousin, he left the building still sobbing.

He walked as far as the next corner and sat down on an empty ash-can. An hour passed and Ben swung out of the door and walked past. Piet waited until he had turned the corner and sauntered behind him. After going some distance, he found him sitting on a bench in Joubert Park. Ben was reading a newspaper. Out of the corner of his mouth he explained that he was supposed to be on his way to the station to see if his cousin who, incidentally was still safe in the hands of General Cilliers' men, had arrived from Pretoria. The Ben mumbled: "Take the newspaper when I leave". He continued to read for another five minutes and then flinging the paper down on the bench he stifled a yawn and got to his feet.

Piet carelessly took up the sheet and glanced at it. After a while he, too, rose and strolled over to a lavatory on the station. Carefully he cut the two center pages apart. Inside was the report written in code on the finest tissue paper. He hit it under his shirt and went in search of a cup of coffee and a bite of food.

Thereafter followed the long wait until the train left on its return journey to Potchefstroom. Even to Piet's iron nerves the suspense was terrific. It was not lessened by the fact that when they had assembled at three o'clock one of the hostages was missing. A non-commissioned officer walked up and down cursing the late comer and shooting baleful looks at the little knot of alien Boers. Piet tried to make himself as inconspicuous as possible and at length they were ordered into the train. At the last moment, just as they were pulling out, the missing man came tearing down the platform with his coattails flying. As he came abreast of the truck containing the hostages willing hands reached out and pulled him aboard.

While the train jolted on its way everyone had something to tell of his day in Johannesburg. Only Piet remained strangely silent, but none of the others noticed that. The journey itself was uneventful and at six o'clock the next morning the hostages were allowed a cup of coffee on Potchefstroom station before being sent home.

That night after dark Piet slipped through the Native location on his bicycle and some hours later, just before dawn, he curled up beside his machine in the long grass near Buffelsdoring halfway between Potchefstroom and Klerksorp. And so, travelling in the dark and hiding up during the day he made his way across the Western Transvaal. On the second night his way was suddenly barred by a bearded figure. He had reached the first outpost of General De la Rey's commando.

IN THE CAMP OF GENERAL DE LA REY

Through the darkness of the camp, a powerful tenor voice could be heard in song. Piet's guide stopped and pointed forward: "That is Johnny Alberts. He is your man. He is Ben Pieterse's representative at the General's headquarters". Piet walked in the direction of the tent from where the voice floated.

Johnnie was one of the most popular members of De la Rey's commando. He had been born within the sound of the Steelpoort River in the district of Lydenburg. When he grew up he decided to take Holy Orders. The war, however, found him still a theological student with the voice of a Caruso and an unusual knowledge of explosives. He glanced up from cleaning his rifle as the flap of the tent was pulled aside and a shrunken boy with an old-young face stood before him. "I am Piet Pencil stub", he said. Johnnie looked at him incredulously. Was this the intrepid agent about whom Ben Pieterse was always talking?

He indicated a stool. The boy immediately launched into his story and when he explained what he had managed to smuggle out of Johannesburg the burgher realized why Ben considered Piet his master spy. He immediately took the papers to the General's tent where the precious documents were handed over personally to Oom Koos, as the Boer commander was affectionately known to his men. The general said nothing at the time but when, next day, Johnnie asked for permission for Piet to accompany him to the council-of-war which was to discuss the counter-attack against Methuen, his request was immediately granted.

With shining eyes and high hopes the two entered the barn where the meeting was to be held. It was however, not so much a council-of-war as a debating society concerned with every conceivable subject under the sun. For almost three hours they discussed the camp for women near Groot Marico, and what supplies they should provide. Then followed an exhaustive enquiry on the prospects of the maize crop in those areas that had not been overrun by the British. For yet another hour General De la Rey heard complaints on a number of other subjects before he described, in ten minutes, the military position, with special reference to the plans of Lord Methuen. Then General Kemp said a few words, General Cilliers agreed with a nod of the head, and the officers went their separate ways,

During the first two hours Piet had listened with the greatest interest. After that his head dropped on his breast and he knew no more. It was a complete reaction after the tension of the previous week. The almost inhuman nervous strain of his adventures had exhausted his frail body. General De la Rey noticed him dosing without realizing the reason. When they walked out of the barn he gruffly said to Johnnie Alberts: "Tell your friend that a council-of-war is not a fit place to sleep".

Most writers about the Boer War assume that commando strategy was something static. The very opposite is true, and it was not until nearly two months after the outbreak of hostilities that the Boers found their best fighting form and tactics. To begin with when the older leaders were still in charge they had simply repeated the moves of 1891, namely to surround and lay siege to certain fortified towns and to concentrate the bulk of their armies against the main British armies marching up with the railway from Natal and the Northern Cape respectively.

During the first few months of the war, these tactics were eminently successful, and heavy defeats were inflicted on the enemy. Eventually far superior numbers told, as they were bound to do in the long run, and when Lord Roberts did burst through the Boer lines he carried all before him. By the time the

commandos regained their morale, most of the Free State and the Transvaal had been overrun by the British. Then the younger leaders took over, and the war became tough.

To begin with, and as the inevitable reaction to the period of headlong flight, the commandos were inclined to storm almost any position. But it soon became clear that that type of warfare would prove far too costly for an army that had no reserves to draw on. Then the real Boer military genius asserted itself. They concentrated on attacking columns on the march. In this kind of fighting, horsemanship, deadly shooting and a natural flair for surprise, coupled with individual gallantry, carried the day. This was particularly the case on the wide plains of the Western Transvaal, where, as I have said, the British had no railway to rely upon beyond Klerksdorp.

It was this type of attack that General de la Rey intended to put into operation against Lord Methuen. Thanks to the detailed information obtained by Ben and conveyed by Piet, the Boers knew to within a couple of miles where the enemy would encamp every night. As the British reached the Great Harts River, the commandos closed in on their columns under cover of the dark. They lay wrapped up in their blankets during the night, not daring to light fires. The stars were still out when they heard the reveille ringing out in the British lines. Just before daybreak the enemy moved off, and minutes later the Boer commandos charged.

Piet did not take part in the great battle against Methuen. To be quite honest, he was still sound asleep when the Boers deployed to take up their position. At the first fusillade, however, he was wide awake and, dashing to the top of the koppie he witnessed the Boer attack in the grey light.

After the enemy had been put to flight, he was one of the first to reach the field of battle where the supply wagons fell to the Boers. Poking around, he discovered a wagon with a red flag. Three of the draught mules were dead, lying on their sides in grotesque attitudes while the fourth stood bewildered by. Pulling the canvas cover aside, he noticed that the vehicle was packed with dynamite. Without hesitation he stopped the first man to pass, by chance, a field cornet named Beukes and said: "Please help me move this wagon".

"You go to blazes" the officer replied, resenting the youngster's impertinence.

"But don't you understand, it is full of dynamite".

"Full of dynamite?" asked the field cornet with quickening interest. "That is a different matter".

"Yes", said Piet. "We can't leave it here. We must get it away at once".

They managed to catch a couple of mules, dragged the dead ones aside, and two hours later the wagon was safely hidden in a thicket some miles away. That evening when the field cornet was busy explaining the events of the day round the camp-fire, he concluded by saying: "That boy was either the bravest or the most stupid youngster in the whole army, for he strolled about without a gun while the bullets were still whistling in all directions".

Even today no one knows what the British intended doing with the explosives. But it did not worry Johnnie Alberts who rubbed his hands with glee: "Now we shall be able to blow up the whole railway system as far as Johannesburg".

Without waiting for grass to grow under his feet, he started preparing his plans for the following night. He asked Piet whether he wanted to join him. Piet nodded and as soon as darkness fell, five mounted men leading a pack mule- incidentally the same old beast we last met with a bell around its neck as it led the captured British remounts through the Mooi River – disappearing into the night.

After a lengthy detour around the blockhouse system, they struck the Potchefstroom-Klerksdorp railway line some miles west of Koekemoer station.

With eyes as big as saucers, Piet watched Johnnie preparing the fuse, and a few minutes later saw railway sleepers and a portion of the line sailing thirty yards through the air. He turned to Johnnie and asked him how long it would take the British to repair the tracking his chin

“Well now”, said Johnnie ruefully, scratching his chin, “That’s a pity. They have learnt their lesson so well that they put a detachment of fully equipped engineers on every train. So you see they usually are able to repair the line in a couple of hours.”

“Will they be able to repair a bridge as quickly?”

“No but unfortunately all the bridges are guarded by block houses or other fortifications. You can’t get near them.”

“Well, why don’t you blow up the trains themselves?”

“I’m afraid it’s very difficult to work out the distance the train has yet to run and the length of the fuse so that the explosion will occur exactly when the train passes over the dynamite. Of course you realize everything must be done under cover of darkness. During the day they send an armored train up and down the line to keep us at a distance.”

Piet said nothing but after getting back to the camp he laid awake the rest of the night turning the problem over in his mind. The next morning while they were enjoying coffee and pilfered jam which they spread an inch thick on their army biscuits, Piet suddenly said: “I know how we can blow up the train during the night.”

“How?” asked Johnnie.

“We fasten an old gun to the rail. Then we attach a cord to the trigger. From a distance we can give it a tug and it will fire a bullet into the dynamite.”

“That’s a brainwave. We might as well give a try”, said Johnnie.

Two nights later they successfully performed the experiment. As the dust and smoke subsided, the party of Boers opened fire on the train and captured it within half-an-hour. Three nights later they ambushed another, but the shot was delayed too long and only the last truck was blown up. The British immediately uncoupled the crippled carriage and got away with the rest of the train. The following night the explosion was premature and the train managed to reverse. Although it all sounds very simple, the action was not completed one-sided. Snipers on the train had already killed one of the Boers and wounded several of the others, while the string-puller was always in danger of being blown up himself. In addition, the party had to make their way past Klerksdorp to their destination every time, for that was the terminus of the Potchefstroom line. Johnnie had begun to feel that unless he destroyed a train it was not worthwhile exhausting himself and his men. On hearing this Piet said:

“I’ve thought of a way of making absolutely certain.”

“How?”

“We take an old Martini, remove the butt and cut off the barrel as well as the trigger guard. Then we bury the loaded stub under the rail in such a way that the unguarded trigger is pointing upwards just below the line. The weight of the train will press the rail down, touch off the trigger and send a bullet into the dynamite”.

Johnnie laughed in triumph: “Heavens, fellow, you seem to hide some real brains in that queer head of yours”.

They decided to test the new method without delay. And they succeeded. The English however, were not long in devising a counter-plan. They coupled two empty truck in front of the locomotive, and the shot went off too soon. They then simply reversed the train at speed. That meant, failure, and when this happened the third time in succession Johnnie felt that they had at last come face to face with the real poser. For two days Piet scratched his head before he found the solution.

“I know what”, he said to Johnnie Alberts, “We’ll bury a plank through which we drive a long nail under the rail. The engine which is the heaviest, will press the nail deepest into the ground. Then if you bury the stub of your gun so that the trigger is underneath the plank and slightly deeper than the length of your nail, the other carriage will not depress the line sufficiently to for the shot. The engine, however, will do so”.

Again they put their theory to the test and again succeeded. The British thereupon evolved another counter-measure. Every ordinary train would be followed by an armored one, complete with searchlight, which would be switched on to prevent the Boers from approaching the derailed train to plunder it. For a week, Piet did not know what to do. “There is only one way”, he said at last. “We shall have to let the ordinary train pass, and blow up the armored one. Then we shall have to ambush the first train further in front and out of range of the Maxims”.

“I agree, but how?” asked Johnnie.

“Well the armored engine is very much heavier than the other. We measure its weight with the plank and the nail and set our first gun accordingly. The lighter engine will pass unharmed over the explosives; then we can catch it further forward with a gun whose trigger is set a fraction higher”.

No sooner said than done. Within a fortnight they had crippled two armored engines and had ambushed three ordinary trains. In fact, even by the end of the war, the enemy had not found an effective counter to Piet’s device. Their only solution was to extend the blockhouse system and to make it as difficult as possible for the Boers to approach the actual railway lines.

But interesting as these train raids were, Piet had other duties to attend to. And so one evening after sunset, he approached Johnnie and, without warning, held out his hand.

“Well, Johnnie, it’s time so say goodbye”.

“Where are you off to now?” asked the other in amazement. “I have to get back to Potchefstroom”, said the boy, “Ben will be expecting me”.

“If you must, you must”, replied Johnnie, “But have you said goodbye to the General?”

“No, why should I? He doesn’t like me does he? He accused me of sleeping in the council-of-war”.

Johnnie wrinkled his brow. He had never mentioned General De la Rey’s remark to the boy and Piet was about twenty yards off when it was made. The only conclusion he could come to was that Piet’s ears were as sharp as his eyes, and those were phenomenal.

And so Piet departed from the camp of General De la Rey, with a thorough knowledge of explosives and an even greater admiration for his original hero, General De Wet.

NYATI, THE MASTER SPY

I remember one of our generals saying to me after the war: "If there was one reason for our defeat I should say it was the activities of the native spies recruited by the British". I am inclined to agree with him, for these Native spies practically neutralized the advantage that Boers possessed because of their knowledge of the terrain and the mobility of their commandoes. There were tens of thousands of these spies. In fact, almost every second kraal Kaffir was in the service of the British, even though it was only to the extent that he knew he could always exchange information about the Boers for money or food at the nearest camp. Many a Boer was caught or shot through the treachery of these creatures. Their acknowledged leader, one who stood head and shoulders above the rest was a Native who in time became as notorious as he was intelligent and ruthless. His name was Nyati.

The early history of Nyati does not redound very much to the credit of our people although it touched only one Boer family. During the early days of the Republic there was a system of "booking in" young Natives taken captive in the wars against the surrounding tribes. They were indentured until they were 18 years old. There were those among my people who called it slavery. We preferred to regard it as a safety measure. In any case, we felt that we could not abandon the little waifs who were left deserted in the kraals when their tribe was routed. They would have died of starvation and misery even when the tribe had merely temporarily fled after a commando had descended on them to punish them for pillage and murder. So when our people came across these starvelings they could do little else than take them into service and train them.

That was the law of the frontier, and Nyati, as he was later called, was found after one of the many Native wars and "booked in" to a family whose name I shall not mention. On the whole, these little waifs lived well. They were absorbed in the farm life and learnt skills which made them useful members of the community. Nyati, however, was unfortunate. His master was a stern man, although just. The wife, however, to put it plainly, was an unholy terror. Not only Nyati but even her own children had a hard time. Her family had to grin and bear it but Nyati, being unshackled by his ties of blood, managed to run away to Natal where he found refuge in an English mission station.

And here in Natal, on the other side of the towering Drakensberg Mountains, he, a Basotho lad, was given the Zulu name Nyati, the Buffalo. Had they name him Ingwe, the Tiger, it would, in the light of his subsequent career, have been more fitting. After he had been given a thorough grounding and education in both English and Zulu, he again deserted and, after many adventures, found himself, shortly before the war, in a circus in Cape Town. According to reports, he even became a performer in the ring. His skill in throwing knives, at which Natives are not normally very adept, lent strength to his story. When war was declared, he immediately offered his services to the British. As he was intelligent and spoke not only English and Afrikaans, but a half dozen Native dialects as well, he was accepted immediately.

Right from the start he gained a reputation, not only for great courage, but also for cold-blooded and even ruthless methods of counter-espionage. It was said that he never captured an enemy spy; he always used the knife to good effect.

During the second half of the war, he dedicated himself to two objectives: firstly, he tried to make a British spy of every raw Native, and secondly to trap every Boer Native spy and kill them off one by one. His greatest pleasure was to track down Boer agents and unmask them. His minions were especially

dangerous to small bands of Boers who may have decided to pitch camp for the night. Their refuge was closely charted and reported to the British within the hour. Many a group of Boers was surrounded in the chill morning light and either captured or shot. Later, however, the Boers learnt to counteract these tactics by unsaddling, lighting their fires and then ostensibly going to sleep. As soon as the fires died down they would transfer camp stealthily a couple of miles away and relax in safety for the remainder of the night.

In order to trap the Native allies of the Boers Nyate developed his own technique. He would worm his way into their confidences, either by pretending to be a British deserter or else a Native witch doctor. In either case he easily discovered which were the most important spies, and murdered them silently. He had gained such a reputation that the British, without approving of his methods, had been forced to give him a free hand.

Soon after the third occupation of Potchefstroom he began to suspect Piet, but somehow he could never get any real evidence against the boy. At the same time, he had a feeling that this ostensibly half-witted youth --- for Piet looked as if he was still in his early teens --- was a threat to the British. He was one of the few that had noticed Piet wandering round old Hjule's mill before the horses had been stolen, and he immediately connected him with the incident.

When the British occupied Potchefstroom for the fourth time, Nyati was attached as spy to the officer in command and was directly responsible to him. He thereupon decided to give Piet his undivided attention. And Piet, in an animal way, immediately felt that he was being watched. His own instincts became sharpened. Even his routine visits to Dominee Albertyn and Tant Betta ceased. The little Bushman no longer slipped into the woodshed under cover of darkness. The river bank where the rush of the water drowned the fugitive's words was their only meeting place.

Meanwhile Ben had left Johannesburg and had joined the burghers in the field for his cousin had managed to elude his Boer guards and might have presented himself unexpectedly at his office. Consequently, for some time Piet was completely out of touch with the older man as the commando moved rapidly about.

Night after night Piet lay in the woodshed, waiting for something to happen. Then it came without warning. In the darkness he heard a scratching on his door. With infinite caution he pushed it carefully open. Against the faint light he saw a British officer. Without blinking an eye, he scrutinized the face and, to his relief, recognized Ben in disguise. The burgher slipped past the boy and squatted down. For a long minute they stared at each other and then without preamble, Piet said that he felt he could no longer remain in Potchefstroom under the watchful surveillance of the dozens of Native spies. He realized that Nyati was watching him like a lynx. The British agents were closing in on him. Two weeks he had been unable even to drive his vegetable cart to the British camp.

Ben said he was sorry but he could not allow Piet to leave at that particular time. He had a particular assignment for him which could not be delayed. His voice took on an edge as he said that he wanted to know the exact number of canon in the British camp. Piet stared at him with disbelief. He shook his head. The assignment was impossible. The artillery depot was strictly out of bounds. Ben insisted sharply. He stood up abruptly. There was no time to argue. The information was urgently needed. He would return the following night. Meanwhile he had to pay a visit to the British camp at Frederickstad. Piet shrugged his shoulders. He could promise nothing. He would see what he can do.

With a straight back, Ben strode into the night. He knew that had been a bit short with Piet, but then he was dissatisfied with his whole organization. He had a number of setbacks just a time when success was vital. In fact, the course of the war rested on the next decision of the greatest strategist of the Boer command --- perhaps the only one --- General De la Rey. His task was to keep the British armies occupied on the Highveld and in the Western Transvaal so that General Botha could break through to Natal. This would be a diversion that might have far-reaching results on the disposition of the British forces. In fact, to put it bluntly, it seemed the only way of keeping the war going until the hoped for European intervention took place, or the British Cabinet came to the conclusion that the price of subjugating the Republics was too high, as happened in 1881.

The Boer command therefore had to know the British artillery strength in the Western Transvaal and to immobilize it as far as possible. The only feasible way of putting the enemy guns out of action was to capture the horses used for drawing the limbers or to destroy their food supplies. This was but part of the plan of campaign, but a most important one. The main artillery camp was Potchefstroom, while the most important provision depot was at Frederickstad. That was why Ben had come to see Piet who would have to discover the artillery resources in the camp on the outskirts of the village. After that Ben would himself see to the destruction of the supplies of hay and lucerne at Frederickstad.

Ben had previously delegated the destruction of the fodder to one of his Native agents but he had heard nothing from him for weeks. Only much later did he learn that Nyati had suspected his spy and had lain in ambush for him one night. Ben's man, fortunately for him, had spotted his assassin in time and had made his escape. But he had lost his nerve and did not pause until he reached Mamogali's kraal on the other side of Pretoria.

It was all this uncertainty that had made Ben so irritable. He was willing to take risks, and expected his subordinates to do likewise. That was partly the reason why he was determined to get to Frederickstad in the uniform of a British officer. It was a foolish gesture for the camp was comparatively small, and he should have realized that every Tommy, or at least every non-commissioned officer, would know every lieutenant stationed there.

But Ben was annoyed, and consequently reckless. He cycled along the white ribbon of road, quite openly and he was almost on top of the British sentries before he realized that he did not know the password, and that even the most stupid soldier would turn out the guard if a strange lieutenant presented himself in that state of ignorance.

At the last moment he decided on caution. Laying down his bicycle on the side of the road, he stalked the guard-tent. The British at Frederickstad had been lulled into complete security for they knew that the nearest Boer commando was on the other side of Klerksdorp. They had not even bothered to enclose the camp with barbed wire. The guard-tent contained but one soldier, and he was half asleep. There were, however, many fires and lanterns scattered throughout the camp, and nothing would have been easier than to spot a figure moving against the light.

Ben therefore decided to distract the guard's attention. He noticed a couple of curs milling around behind the tent. Two of these mongrels were raring for a fight without having sufficient courage to fly at each other's throats. Ben was a crack shot. He was still more accurate at flinging a stone. Groping around for a suitable missile he found a piece of quartz about the size of a matchbox. Taking careful aim, he swung his arm twice and let drive. Even at fifty yards, it hit one of the curs on the ribs with the force

of a bullet. The beats already bristling with nervous tension, let out a yelp which was a mixture of anger, pain and fear and sprang at its antagonist. Within a couple of seconds every dog in the camp had joined in with a noise that could be heard miles off. The soldiers hurried to the spot, and Ben slipped past the guard entrance.

He found the forage depot with ease for it was right in the center of the camp and covered about two acres. But then Ben's troubles began. On three sides of the depot there were walls of galvanized iron, ten feet high. The fourth side was guarded by two sentries, marching up and down. At first Ben crouched in the shadow of the iron fence and tried to throw lighted matches over the top and into the bales of lucerne. But in vain, for the matches were extinguished long before they reached the forage. Ben started reproach himself for his stupidity. All he need to have done was to have brought a couple of rags which he could have soaked in paraffin. But it was too late for self-regrets, although he took a vow that he would never again set out on a mission while he was angry.

His matches were almost exhausted, and he began to fear that the sudden burst of light might be seen, when he got a fresh idea. He remembered a trick from his school days when, despite parental warnings, he used to play with matches. One of the most popular dodges was to break a match in half and press that part with the head perpendicularly against the striking surface of the matchbox with the thumb of the left hand. After that the match would be flicked with the right fore-finger. The head would ignite, but would flare up only when it had touched ground some yards away.

Ben decided to try the trick. At first he had no success but slowly the old skill reasserted itself, and finally he smelt lucerne burning. Unfortunately, a couple of soldiers had seen the flare of matches and as he slunk away from the fence, a non-commissioned officer yelled "Hey, what do you think you are up to?"

Without wasting any breath in reply, Ben dashed off. Soon the camp was in uproar and a couple of shots rang out, but within five minutes he had eluded his pursuers and lay in the darkness outside watching the soldiers with lanterns dashing hither and thither. As he watched, things began to happen. While he was still straining his eyes to see whether the fire had taken in the forage-store, the wind which had blown gently the whole night suddenly rose to a hurricane strength. He smiled in the darkness. Already he realized that the British would be extremely lucky not to lose the whole camp beside the forage. And so it turned out. More than half the tents all the lucerne and other forage, and the whole commissariat was engulfed in flames. It was a calamity of the first magnitude for the British arms in general and Western Transvaal.

As he turned away, he got an unpleasant shock his bicycle was nowhere to be found. Search as he might, it had disappeared without a trace. The only explanation was that during all the commotion in and around the camp a Native vagrant had stolen it. His elation at the successful mission slowly waned. He was tired and exhausted and did not look forward to the many miles of foot-slogging between there and Potchefstroom.

He was just about to start hiking through the night when he saw a train approaching from the direction of Welverdiend. Opposite the camp the train pulled up and little black figures dashed towards the fire. Waiting for them to pass, Ben made a detour and approached the train from the back. No one noticed him as he slipped nearer, nor when he squeezed between the last two trucks and climbed on to the coupling. After a short while he heard an officer blowing his whistle and shouting to the men to climb in as they were already two hours late. The driver blew his whistles and the train jerked forward. Ben

found his perch most uncomfortable, but he clung on as it was much better than footing it to Potchefstroom. Just the other side of Boskop the train started panting up a steep incline and almost came to a halt. Ben decided that this was where he and the train would part company. He turned sideways and jumped, unfortunately the belt of his khaki overcoat caught on some projection and instead of rolling to the ground, he suddenly found himself suspended in midair. Then to make matters worse, the train topped the rise and at once began gathering speed. Ben unbuttoned his coat and tried to slip out. The hook that had caught him, however, was one of those sharp ones with which tarpaulin covering trucks were usually fastened and it had penetrated not only his coat but had also embedded itself in his Sam Browne underneath. He was now in a most precarious predicament. Before he could open his clasp-knife to cut himself loose the train was already travelling at a dangerous speed.

There was, however, no time to lose. Every second magnified his danger. In desperation he hacked at his belt. Slowly he found it easing around his waist. Then suddenly he found himself falling. As he touched ground, he felt a shock of pain: lights danced before his eyes and then blackness enveloped him. He must have lain there unconscious for several hours, and when he came to it, he felt as he had been mangled in a thrashing machine.

Painfully he opened his eyes. He was laying on the railway embankment. Above him the sun was beating down and the flies had settled on the dried blood on his face and arms. No one was in sight. Slowly he dragged his bruised body over the sharp stones towards a bush which was ringed with a friendly patch of shade. He paused in the shadow and shook his head once or twice. The mist cleared before his eyes. He had to get away from the railway line at all costs. Half crouching he stumbled forward to where a thorn tree stood stark against the sky. When he gained its shelter, he saw a donga, eroded deep into the veld at his feet. In the rainy season it would be the course of a rushing torrent gouging the plain, but now it was unexpected refuge in a flat world. Half sliding and half rolling he made his way to the bottom. There, surrounded by milk bushes he found a small but fairly clear pool of water from the last storm and buried his aching face in its coolness. Then having slaked his thirst he rummaged in his pocket and found a couple of broken army biscuits which he started to chew.

The next twelve hours were nearly the longest of Ben's life. His mission was only half accomplished. The forage depot had been destroyed but the information about the guns were important. He to reach Piet, and reach him soon. Yet to approach Potchefstroom in the soiled and tattered uniform of a British lieutenant would be stark lunacy. Hour after hour passed, and eventually nature asserted itself. He fell asleep, and awoke to the coolness of the evening.

Now he could emerge in safety. He could hear the Native curs in the location of Potchefstroom baying dismally. Still stiff and sore, he scrambled out of the donga and made his way across the commonage to the banks of the Mooi River. Then he limped along River Street to Piet's woodshed which he reached just before midnight.

But to return to Piet. When Ben left him he started turning the problem of getting information about the guns over in his mind. The next day he in spanned his donkey and drove over to the camp with a load of vegetables. After he had concluded his apparently legitimate business with the cook he pretended to try to sell some of the vegetables out of hand, and moved in the direction of the artillery park. There he managed to dispose of his last cabbage, and he slouched from tent to tent trying to beg a tin of jam. Finally, he found himself next to the tarpaulin barrier that cut off the forbidden part of the camp. With a quick glance round, he wriggled under the canvas. In a minute he had counted the rows of guns, had

made a mental note of the ammunition dumps and was just preparing to crawl out again when felt a heavy hand on his neck. He slipped to the ground and looked up, right into the cruel eyes of Nyati. The Native drew his knife.

Piet knew that he would be a corpse within a couple of seconds and gave a shriek which could be heard a mile off. Simultaneously he drove both his heels at Nyati's shins. The spy was forced to release him and stand back as a couple of Tommies came running up. Piet whimpered like a baby and pointed at the Native's knife. At the same time, he slipped a couple of small pieces of cordite from his inside pocket into his mouth. As we boys had learnt earlier in the war when we first started opening British cartridges one could eat cordite, but it gave you a splitting headache, increase the pulse rate and contracted the pupils of the eyes to pin points. Scarcely had Piet swallowed the cordite when he was dragged to the guard-tent. The officer in command was notified that a young Boer had been found in the artillery park and thereupon decided to hear the case himself. Nyati was the first witness and related how he had kept watch on Piet who had obviously according to plan moved nearer to the forbidden zone until he finally had crept under the canvas.

Piet whimpered that he was merely trying to beg a tin of jam. The general considered the matter. He knew Nyati as a most useful spy but he also knew him to be absolutely ruthless. If he thought he had caught a spy he would have been prepared to fabricate any evidence in order to have him placed against a wall and shot. The general looked at Piet again. He was loath to have a child of twelve years shot, and Piet looked no older. The general was still considering the matter when Piet played his trump card. He began whining even louder than ever and biting his finger nails. By this ruse he managed to get a small piece of soap which he carried for that very purpose into his mouth. Within a few seconds froth flecked his lips and he fell to the ground. The general postponed the investigation and sent someone hurrying for a doctor. The medical officer was away in the village and a youngster, who had qualified shortly before, appeared in his place. He saw the foam on the boy's lips, felt his rapid pulse and drew back his eyelids. Someone asked him whether it was epilepsy. The doctor had not the faintest idea what it was but said gravely: "It might be quite serious. He must go to hospital at once".

Piet was carried off and the general considered the unpleasant incident as closed, especially as Nyati had said nothing further. But Nyati had his reasons for silence. He would eliminate Piet in his own way.

In the hospital a motherly matron fussed over the boy. Although she was thoroughly experienced, she had never come across such symptoms before. She watched over him while he gradually recovered, and about seven o'clock, through a nurse who understood Afrikaans, he indicated that his family would be most anxious as they did not know where he was. The matron knew nothing about Nyati's accusation and had received no special instructions about the patient. His pulse was again normal as were his pupils, so she let him go.

Piet, however, remembered the expression on Nyati's face when the general had dismissed the case. He knew that the Native would try to murder him as soon as possible, and that he would do it in such a manner that no one would ever know about it. He therefore approached his shack from the unusual direction of the Wesleyan Church. Like a ghost he slipped into the woodshed, shot the bolt in the door and took his "weapon" from its secret hiding place. The weapon consisted of an old Martini rifle without a butt and sawn off at the barrel so that one could grip it as an over-sized pistol. The he lay flat on his stomach with his ear against the door.

The hours passed slowly. Someone was approaching the hut. He did not move until he heard the cry of the nightjar. Then there was silence. There was a scratching at the door and then a low whisper. With infinite caution he edged over. Again there was a whisper: this time more urgently. It was Ben. Swiftly he rose to his feet and, with infinite caution slid bolt back. The burgher stumbled over the threshold and stood in the darkness. Once he was inside, Piet secured the door again and slapped his hand over the older man's mouth. Ben understood and remained silent.

So they waited. Another twenty minutes passed then Piet's head swiveled round. There was a faint sound of a twig snapping close to the woodshed. Someone was carefully approaching the door. Once more the boy clapped his hand to the other's mouth. Then he slipped to the floor. On hands and knees he crept to the back wall of the shed, lifted away a plank and squeezed outside. Like a phantom he moved towards the front. He reached the corner. There came a half-suppressed oath, a knife flashed in the starlight and simultaneously Piet's weapon spoke. Nyati had at last met his fate. Although the cartridge had contained only a half charge, at a distance of twelve inches the heavy bullet had gone right through the Native's chest. He went down like a bullock that had been pole-axed.

Ben slipped outside and the two stood in the shadows looking down at the corpse.

"Do you think anyone heard the shot?" Piet's eyes gleamed white in question.

"No, I don't think so. It's some distance to the nearest British guard post, unless one of their patrols is in the neighborhood".

For a half an hour they waited, scarcely daring to breathe. Nothing happened. Finally, everything remained quiet except for the frogs croaking in the swamp, the boy turned to Ben: "I think it is safe now. Help me in span the donkey". Without a word the burgher obeyed. When the cart was ready they lifted the spy and laid him on the rough planks, Piet took the halter and led the beast in the direction of the Devil's Hole. Ben followed with a heavy piece of rail and a length of stout wire.

At the swamp they fastened the weight to the corpse and push both into the inky depths. For a long time they stood at the edge of the river. At last Ben jotted down all the details of the canon and other armament in the artillery depot. Then he disappeared into the night, while Piet slowly led the donkey back to his shack.

For weeks the British searched for Nyati but in vain. Many years later a skeleton was recovered from the pool when it was drained during the construction of the golf course. It was recognized by chance by a Cape Town dentist as that of the spy by a special tooth he had fitted to replace one that had been knocked out during Nyati's circus days. The Milner government, however, letting bygones be bygones, took no further action to solve the mystery of the death of their master spy.

FIRST COME COURAGE

It was in March, 1902, that the British captured seven burghers who had laid down their arms under oath almost two years previously. They had, either under compulsion or voluntarily, joined the Boers again. Two were caught at Elandsheuwel when they came to visit their families. Three surrendered near Skandinavia Drift on the Vaal River, and two were captured in a skirmish before a block-house near Klerksdorp. One of the latter was Jan Pieterse, a brother of Ben.

The British thereupon decided to make an example these seven. Lord Roberts had previously issued many warnings that would shoot those who broke their non-combatant oath. His successor, Kitchener, decided to carry out that threat at the first opportunity. The capture of these seven was there for his first chance to apply martial law in such a way that those who had already laid down their arms would in future rather flee to the British lines than risk being commandeered by the approaching Boers and consequently be forced to break their oath.

The seven appeared before a court martial and were summarily condemned to death. The military prosecutor demanded a public hanging, but the judge-officer recommended death by firing squad and suggested the stone wall of the post office on Church Square as the place of execution. This verdict was submitted to Kitchener.

The stricken families pleaded for the lives of the men, but the commander-in-chief confirmed the sentence and dismissed all petitions. The Boers were furious. General De la Rey threatened to shoot in retaliation the first fourteen enemy officers he captured. The British, however, knew he would never dare to do so because it was contrary to International Law, and the Boers had always lived by the letter of that law. Despite their fury, it was plain that Kitchener was judicially correct in his decision that anyone who had laid down his arms under oath and then broken his word, whether under compulsion or not, was by international usage liable to the death penalty.

The British headquarters decided to postpone the execution until the whole of South Africa, including the Boers on commando, had heard of the decision. They wanted every family who had a husband, or son, or brother in the field to realize the terrible consequences of the decision. It was all part of the British war of nerves against the Republics.

When the news filtered through to De la Rey's Western Transvalers, their blood boiled. They converged on his tent in dozens begging him to storm Potchefstroom. At that time General De la Rey with seven hundred men was encamped on the western side of Klerksdorp. There were three thousand British troops in this village and twice as many in Potchefstroom. No general with any sense of responsibility could make such a forlorn attack to save seven men. With a heavy heart he explained that to the burghers. They then understood but many had tears in their eyes and some wept openly. The day was a Sunday.

After the service that evening, Ben Pieterse reported to the General, "Oom Koos", he said, "My brother is one of those seven. Will you allow me and some of my companions to see what we can do? The final day is three weeks off".

"How many of your companions?"

"There are ten of us in all, Sir".

The General looked him straight in the eyes: "You may go. Come safely back; the Republic needs you".

When Ben's companions heard of the General's decision, they wanted to mount immediately, and if Ben had consulted his own feelings they would have set off the same night. A man of his experience, however, realized that hastiness would have made a near-impossible assignment completely impossible. They therefore spent the whole of the next day collecting tinned foods, captured from Methuen, of which they still had a great supply. They needed the food for they probably would be unable to make a fire for days running. Then they had to pick their horses, for only salted animals would serve because of horse sickness. There were weapons and ammunition and many other details to prepare as well. The maximum ammunition was necessary for it might so fall out that five of them would have to hold up a whole regiment while the other five went about urgent tasks.

When once the other Boers heard of the expedition, there was no difficulty in collecting supplies. They were told to take whatever they thought necessary. In fact, the burghers were so enthusiastic that Ben feared that the Native camp-followers would get wind of the project and he would consequently never have been quite sure that the news had not leaked out to the location at Klerksdorp which swarmed with spies. His fears were, however, groundless, as proved later.

The most difficult decision was the route to follow to Potchefstroom. The block-house system was just then at its height. Actually, the camp of General De la Rey at Leeudoringstad was surrounded by lines of block-houses. That, however, did not make the burghers lose any sleep. One line of block-houses ran parallel with the Rhodesian railway from Fourteen Streams to Mafeking. Another linked Klerksdorp with Mafeking via Lichtenburg. The third joined Klerksdorp and Ventersdorp, which in turn was coupled with Potchefstroom. From our village the fortifications ran along the bank of the Mooi River and then along the Vaal to join the first system at Fourteen Streams. A further line joined the Vaal River with Klerksdorp.

The easiest route was also the longest but Ben's companions had not sufficient patience for a detour.

"I propose", said the youngest and most daring of the ten, a red-headed youth name Ferreira who later became a solicitor in Pretoria, "that we breach the Ventersdorp line, blow up one of the railway block-houses, and advance as far as the location at Potchefstroom. There we can make further plans".

Their leader wanted to argue the toss, but the other eight immediately agreed with the youngster. Then Ben said: "I first want to talk with Johnnie Alberts. He knows that part of the country much better than any of us."

In spite of his youth Johnnie was no fool. For a long time he sat thinking. Then he said: "You know, Ben, the proposition of that red head is not as rash as it sounds. The British will expect some other attempt at rescue, and will assume that it will come from the safest quarter. They will probably guard the normally weakly-held fords across the Vaal River in strength. I think you ought to carry out Ferreira's suggestion".

Ben stood up. "Right oh", he said. "Will you provide us with the necessary dynamite?" Although there was but one case left, Johnnie nodded assent.

And so it was decided. That same afternoon, the ten burghers and Johnnie with two companions and the old mule set off in the direction of the Ventersdorp-Klerksdorp system of fords. This line was not yet completed and Johnnie anticipated no difficulty in slipping through a gap which he knew.

Unfortunately for him, in the fortnight that had elapsed since he had last visited the spot, the British had erected another block-house. Just as they were about to clip the wire, they were met by a withering fire from a clump of mimosa thorn trees a couple of hundred yards further on. Taking it to be a British patrol, they stormed the thicket only to discover, too late, that it was the new block-house. There was no time to retreat. They leapt from their horses and stormed the fort from three sides. Fortunately for them the British became confused, else not one burgher would have lived to tell the tale. Without a casualty they managed to reach the walls, Ben poked his rifle through the gap and shot one of the defenders. The others surrendered immediately and the Boers breathed a sigh of relief at having overcome that danger.

The firing, however, had been heard by an enemy patrol about a mile off. They wheeled and galloped for Klerksdorp which they reached before dark. The officer in command immediately concluded that it had been an attack on the railway line. Fortunately for him, but unfortunately for the Boers, there was an armored train in the station, waiting to leave for Potchefstroom. The driver was told to delay until dark and then, without lights, to steam as silently as possible five miles short of Koekemoer station and to wait there.

Meanwhile Johnnie had decided to blow up the large block-house three miles from Koekemoer on the Klerksdorp side, simultaneously cut the wires and allow the ten burghers to gallop through.

Right from the beginning they ran into trouble. A soldier in the fort spotted one of Johnnie's companions making for the wire, and opened fire. The Boer was compelled to dash for shelter without accomplishing his mission.

The second fellow was also observed. He was wounded in the arm, and forced to retreat. All this firing had focused the attention of the Klerksdorp side of the block-house. In the confusion Johnnie managed to stalk from it from the other direction. Silently he placed the dynamite in position, lit the fuse and managed to creep back unharmed.

Meanwhile the wire had not been cut. Ben, however, remembered once have a British officer in flight gallop full tilt in a fence lifting it at right angles. The wire had parted and the horses had gone through with hardly a scratch, as they proved when later they overtook the fugitive. They immediately decided to try the same dodge. Ben would take the lead, and the rest would follow in a bunch. Just as they nodded agreement, the dynamite exploded, the block-house flew into the air and they galloped for the barrier. Unfortunately, the wire was not the light kind used on farms, but a heavy black-blue type. As they touched it, both Ben and his horse were thrown to the ground. The animal was unable to rise and Ben staggered about in a daze. So violent was the blow, however, that the fence was down, and the other nine went through. They were just about to clip the other set of wires on the far side of the railway line when they heard rumbling. Within second the armored train was on them. The second wire parted but already the searchlights were gripping for them and the Maxims cracked out. The Boers rode like the wind, but before they were out of range, another four horses were down, and Ferreira had a bullet in the shoulder. He dropped behind and a couple of hours later, groaning in agony, he managed to cross the line again. There Johnnie was waiting for him. He had witnessed the skirmish from a safe distance and had decided to remain a while longer. He got Ferreira on to the dynamite mule and back they jogged to the camp.

As so, by an unfortunate succession of mishaps, Ben's daring adventure almost ended in failure at the outset. The position of the nine on the far side of the railroad was anything but secure. With only five horses at their disposal, they still had to gain sanctuary in Potchefstroom before daybreak. Fortunately, the British thought they had been involved merely in an ordinary attempt to wreck the railroad. Had they connected the night's adventure with a proposed rescue of the seven in Potchefstroom goal they would certainly have captured the raiders. They could have combed the whole countryside between Potchefstroom and Klerksdorp without any difficulty.

We learnt only after the war that the British had, in fact, expected a rescue attempt but they had assumed that it would be launched either by some residents of Potchefstroom, or else a combination of commandos would storm the village in force. In the latter case they had already decided that the prisoners would be shot out of hand at the first sign of a rescue.

Ben and his eight companions did not make Potchefstroom that night. In the dawning they had reached Haaskraal on the banks of the Mooi River where they took refuge in the large clump of reeds, from which Piet had engineered the stampede of oxen. Fortunately, it had rained very hard during the previous couple of days, the river was a raging torrent and the British were unable to send out their usual patrols. Nevertheless, the nine spent a most miserable day. They stood up to their knees in water expecting at any moment to be seen by wandering Natives who were all potential British spies. To pass the time, they discussed all manner of plans, all of which, however, were equally impossible. Finally, Ben decided to be firm. In future they would take the safest route, even though it was the longest. Under no circumstances would they again endanger the adventure by impatience. No one challenged Ben's authority. They were willing to abide by his decisions and there could be no lack of resolution on his part because they knew how his brother's predicament was constantly preying on his mind.

They decided to swim the flooded river that night. On the other side they would swing in a wide arc past the British camp and approach Potchefstroom from the direction of Frederickstad. By midnight they had passed Potchefstroom and were in the vicinity of the hut of "Gegund". All the while they were moving at a trot. Every half-hour, one of the riders would swing himself from his horse and, holding the stirrup, lope next to his animal in order to be able his dismounted companion who had been trotting alongside a chance to ride for the next stage.

They woke old "Gegund" whom they knew to be thoroughly trustworthy. With pride he used to call himself "one of Oom Paul Kruger's Natives". They decided to swing back in a circle past the East Bridge till they reached the poplar thicket at Elandsheuwel. The old man looked at them: "If Baas can reach that place, it would be good. The soldiers don't go there any longer. But they have many eyes around the bridge".

Ben decided that their only chance would be to distract the attention of the sentries, else they would never be able to slip past with the horses. For a half an hour he sat and thought. Then he asked the old Native: "Does old man Hjule's millstream still run?"

"Yes, my baas".

"Let's look."

Before they left he asked whether "Gegund" had any tar or paraffin, or anything else that would burn well. Yes, he still had a half a tin of tar which he had used for his wagon, before the British commandeered his oxen.

"Good", said Ben, "bring it along".

They slunk beside the river to near where the millstream was diverted. Ben handed "Gegund" a golden sovereign and a roll of wire. "You wade across and collect a bundle of dry willow twigs and branches. Bind it with the wire and smear it with tar. When the moon..." for there a clear waning moon..." when the moon is just there, light the bundle and push it into the millstream".

"Yes, baas, thank you, my baas", the old fellow said.

For almost two hours, the nine men hid in the shadows and watched. Suddenly they saw a bright light near old Hjule's mill moving, seeming overland, in the direction of the Elandsheuwel bridge. Immediately there was action amongst the bridge guards. Commands rang out lanterns were lit and a strong patrol set out in the direction of the mill. Like shadows the nine men slipped past the bridge and found refuge in the poplar thicket on Elandsheuwel.

There was a strange thing about this wood. It covered about ten acres, and in the rainy season became an island as soon as the Mooi River rose in flood. On one side it was bordered by the river and on the other side by a strip of field which lay about ten foot lower than the surrounding countryside. No one could approach the wood during the rainy season except by a narrow path, known only to the farm folk. If one missed the path one had to struggle through deep mud and water in which one could neither swim nor walk. The nine were therefore reasonably secure. And in the middle of the wood there was an old gravel-pit where one might even kindle a fire.

The first night Ben slept little. Only then did he realize what he had undertaken. The next day the company rested. Ben sat in the shadows and thought. The others were prepared to follow him, but it was he that had to make the plans. He sat in a stupor. At last he realized that he would have to rely on Piet to find the solution. He needed someone with more inside knowledge.

Gradually his attitude towards Piet had changed from first that of a teacher who had to show him everything, then the superior officer. Now he was a helpless man in need of aid and guidance. In his desperation he could only turn to his disciple, not the master. The whole day the other watched Ben. But when the sun started setting they wandered over to the stump where he sat.

"Well, Ben what is the next move?" they asked. Their leader looked up with clouded eyes: "I can't say until I have seen Piet Pencil stub".

Piet Pencil stub? They looked at one another in amazement. They had heard of him and seen him in camp, but no one cherished any high regard for him. As far as they could remember, he had not even taken part in the battle at Tweespruit but had lain fast asleep. Nobody, however, put his thoughts in words.

Yet Ben sensed their feelings. "I know", he said, "what you think. You consider him a strange creature, but I can assure you that he is much more than appears to be and is the only one who can help us just now, I shall try to meet him tonight".

And when the slow midnight came, Ben dragged a hollow willow log from the bushes and pushed it in the stream. A year before he had fashioned this half boat from a log in order to be able to get his clothes across without a wetting. Pushing the log and his clothes before him, he breasted the flood, and within five minutes had reached the opposite bank. Clambering up the other side, he dried himself, donned his clothes and trod the path carefully through the swamp. At two o'clock, he awakened Piet by throwing gravel at his door. Cautiously Piet pushed the door ajar, greeting Ben, and then indicated that the place swarmed with spies and entreated him to return immediately to the poplar thicket, where he would meet him the next night.

Another long day passed. Exhausted, the nine slumped on the ground. Then midnight struck and Piet was in their midst. The two Boer sentries never even saw him. The secret of the otter's den was still jealously kept. Ben whistled to the guard and the ten of them squatted round the small fire in the gravel pit.

Without preamble Bern said: "We intend getting the seven men out of prison. What do you think of that?"

Piet looked at him and then answered deliberately: "Impossible". The others jump to their feet. Only Ben and Piet remained squatting on their haunches.

"He's scared. Why should we waste our time on a coward", they cried?

Ben said nothing. Piet remained silent. The others raved, begged, threatened and argued. Piet said no word. Ben was dumb. If Piet said it was impossible, there was no need to argue. Ben felt like his life draining from him. Would he have to resign his brother to a firing squad? And not only brother, but another six men also? If that was so, he would rather die beneath the British bullets himself. Then he recollected his trump card. He remembered how Piet idolized General De Wet. He licked his dry lips and said: "I should have told you from the beginning that we were sent by General De Wet. I suppose I shall have to return and tell him that you refused to help". General De Wet! The name hit Piet like a blow. His head sank on his breast. There was a clamor of conversation around him; still he sat on his haunches. After five minutes he has made up his mind: "I shall meet you here again in a week's time", he said, and before a hand could be put out to detain him he had vanished like a ghost from their midst.

An hour later, he crept on to his straw mattress in the woodshed, but he closed no eye that night. He knew that it was impossible to rescue the seven men from prison. Yet if General De Wet had commanded him, it had to be done. He concentrated his whole mind and his whole soul on the problem: "How?"

How would he get them out of the cells? How release them from the prison? How spirit them out of the village? The second proposition was the most difficult. Storm the entrance and blow open the door? With ten men? That was suicide. Blow up? Why not blow up the whole prison? Then one might also blow up the seven prisoners. Could one destroy a portion of the prison? That part where the guards were housed. Perhaps one might. If one knew where the guards slept.

In early light Piet repaired to Tant Betta his load of vegetables. They were closeted together for a long time. Then he left. She overtook him as he was driving in the direction of the prison. The guards knew her. They summoned the prison warden. He was an ancient ex-sergeant-major who knew her to be the

sister of Lady Williams. He saluted. What could he do for her? Not much, but she would like the seven prisoners to have some vegetables. She would gladly pay for them being cooked.

The warden preened himself. He knew how to treat people, especially those who might prove useful. He, himself, would see that the vegetables were prepared properly. Ah, the vegetable boy? Let him bring his cart in.

Tant Betta thank him profusely. She would see to it that his action was reported to the British headquarters. The warden smirked. A few word from Sir Edgar Williams might mean all difference in his career.

Tugging his donkey, Piet entered the gateway, and stealthily looked around. The guard-room was on the south-side. The fifteen soldiers in charge of the prisoners lolled in the sun before the door. The cells were ranged next to them; but on the other side, on the north east there was a long passage where the condemned men might meet for – well perhaps for a divine service.

“Here you are, Dung beetle, come here”, one of the guards who had been a National Scout called out.

Piet slowly faced about and unloaded the vegetables.

That night a handful of gravel rattled against the Dominee’s study window. Dominee Albertyn himself opened the door: “Oh, Piet, it’s you. Come in”.

“No, Dominee, you won’t catch me. Who is to pay for the vegetables I took to the prison this morning? Tant Betta said you would pay”. And out of the side of his mouth he muttered: “I must see you at midnight in the cow-byre”.

“Well, Piet, I suppose the church will pay, seeing that you can’t even give your own people who are on the point of death a little succor”.

The boy disappeared muttering.

When midnight struck, Piet and the parson met in the stable. The dominee sat on a bale of hay and Piet stood before him: “Do you visit the condemned men every day?” he asked.

“Yes. I see each in his cell daily”.

“Please will you try to get them into the long passage every night between ten and twelve for a service?”

“The British will never allow it”.

“Then Tant Betta will have to help”.

“But why? What are you planning?”

“Dominee, we must save them”.

“Of course. But how?”

“I don’t know myself yet”, and Piet looked into the distance.

The parson suppressed his curiosity and promised to do what he could to arrange the service. He had unlimited faith in Piet after the Joop Grimbeek incident. Yet it took ten days, and all the influence that Tant Betta could bring to bear with the unconscious aid of her British family, before the service could be arranged in the prison.

Meanwhile Piet was scouring the countryside to lay his hands on a supply of dynamite, not only to breach the wall but to knock out the guards as well. If only he could get half a case, although a full one would be better.

He went to Tant Betta for help. She thought for some time. "I wonder whether one cannot obtain some from the Machavie mine. The only difficulty is that it is occupied by the British who would never allow me to approach within miles".

Again Tant Betta considered the problem. At last she said: "There were a number of shares in the mine that my husband left me. I think I'll try and get a permit to visit the place".

When she approached the commander of the Potchefstroom garrison, he refused to issue a permit. He, however, summoned the officer of the guard from the mine so that Tant Betta could question him. When he arrived the old lady told him that she was terrible afraid of a fire breaking out in the mine, exploding the dynamite and blowing her shares to kingdom come.

The young lieutenant laughed: "Don't worry, Mrs. Zinn. There are only one and a half cases of dynamite on the mine property, and they are kept in the powder house right away from the shaft". Tant Betta was deeply grateful, and the officer took his leave of the charming, if slightly childish, old lady.

When Piet met Tant Betta again, she gave the orders. "Piet", she said, "you must find out immediately how far the nearest Boers are from the Machavie mine. I've ascertained that there is a case and a half of dynamite in the powder house".

Piet cocked an eyebrow: "What do your Natives say?"

"They have heard of a troop belonging to General Kemp, somewhere between Ventersdorp and Klerksdorp but on the other side of the line of block-houses".

Two nights later Piet crawled up to a fire near the spot indicated. He whistled like a Nightjar, the spy signal. The fire disappeared as a blanket was thrown over it, and a voice called out softly: "Who is it?"

"One of Ben Pieterse's people", he replied.

"Come nearer. We belong to General Kemp's commando".

At the fire, Piet found the party consisted of three men and field cornet Van Vuuren. He had heard of Piet, but did not feel inclined to attack the Machavie mine on his simple say-so. Finally, he promised to wait for a week until Ben himself could bring him instructions.

Piet was far too level-headed to become angry. He felt, however, that this additional delay would dissipate almost to vanishing point their slim chance of rescue, for as the fatal day approached, the British would tighten their precautions. Yet he said nothing, had a bite with the burghers and then disappeared into the night.

The following Sunday after dark Ben and his company were still waiting in the poplar thicket. They had come to the end of their tether. During the past week they had held interminable councils of war. And all the while they spied out the land. They discovered that one man at a time could reach the village, but no more. For nine of them to enter the dorp, rescue seven from the prison and then escape was indeed impossible. They had reached the stage when they were almost prepared to storm the British camp merely to end the unbearable tension.

The Piet appeared like a shadow and the men relaxed. "I think we have a chance", he said. A sound between a sigh and a sob escaped Ben. The others remained silent. "We shall have to blow up the rear portion of the prison with the guard-room and get them out that way".

"But blow it up. What with?"

The Piet patiently explained about the dynamite at the Machavie mine. Ben almost had a fit when he heard how field cornet Van Vuuren wasted time. Meanwhile, Piet explained the guards at the mine had been doubled as most of those at Machavie station had been moved to the mine. It would therefore be necessary to distract their attention by an attack at another spot. He suggested the railway line near Klerksdorp: perhaps at Koekemoer despite its strong fortifications. Even though they did not succeed in taking the fort, the news of the attack would be telegraphed to Machavie and the mine garrison would immediately be recalled to strengthen the guard at the railroad.

Without hesitation Ben accepted this proposal, and within two hours he and four of his men were on their way to contact Van Vuuren's party. Nevertheless, it took them several days to locate them for, despite his promise, the field cornet had moved his camp quite a distance nearer Klerksdorp.

Although he had taken little notice of Piet, Van Vuuren realized, once Ben arrived, how unfortunately his delay must have affected the whole project. He immediately volunteered to lead the assault on Koekemoer personally. This gesture somewhat mollified Ben who had intended giving him the dressing-down he richly deserved.

They decided on the spot that the field cornet would send for the rest of his commando that night, burst through the block-house line with forty men and attack Koekemoer station. If he succeeded, it would mean a serious blow to the British. In any case it would result in the withdrawal of the guard from the mine and enable Ben to get the dynamite.

Towards evening the next day, Van Vuuren and his Boer lads attacked the station. They leapt their horses over the sandbags and were in the middle of the fortifications before the British realized what was happening. Five minutes later it was all over and the whole garrison of 100 hundred men had been captured.

Now they had to hurry for they knew that the railway telegraphs would have sent the alarm both to Klerksdorp and Potchefstroom. An armored train could reach Koekemoer from Potchefstroom within two hours, while a cavalry regiment could be on the spot from Klerksdorp within half that time. They immediately loaded their horses with all the booty they could carry and burnt the rest. The disarmed captives were told to fall in under the command of their officers and were dispatched down the line in the direction of Machavie. The armored train, making particularly fast time and not even stopping to pick up the surrendered British column, reached Koekemoer within an hour. There was, however, some confusion at Klerksdorp and the cavalry regiment did not make its appearance until the following

morning. This enabled Van Vuuren who otherwise would have been caught in a pincers movement, to slip back again through the line of block-houses.

He and his men were in fine fettle. The Koekemoer victory was a substantial success and, as such, renewed proof that the Boers of Western Transvaal did not regard the war as over.

Meanwhile Ben's part had gone according to plan. The British were recalled to the railway line at the first news of the attack on Koekemoer, and he had been able to lay his hands on the dynamite with the greatest of ease. The fighting had drawn the enemy in the opposite direction to that taken by Ben and, by keeping close to the marsh ground bordering the Mooi River, they had no difficulty in getting back to their retreat.

On their way they had handed the dynamite to the little Bushman and one of Tant Betta's grandsons as they slipped past the location.

While they had been away, Piet had been extremely busy. He had already found a possible solution to rescuing the seven prisoners without blowing them up together with the guard-house. The final link in the chain: getting them out of Potchefstroom, was now the real problem. He arranged for Van Vuuren and his men to stage a demonstration on the other side of Ventersdorp. They would take up their positions on the night before the execution between Machavie station and Potchefstroom. There they would wait with sixteen horses for Ben's company and the seven prisoners.

Piet considered the possibilities of getting them out of the village again and again, but after he had gone over the ground carefully, it became clear that the only way he could get them out of the village was by rail. And then only if the soldiers on the Square were drawn off or else occupied in some other way. The prime problem therefore was to find some means of conveyance on the railroad. A train, or else an engine seemed the answer. He consulted Tant Betta. She sent for a rusty railway employee she knew, a Hollander named Oudegeest. He was a mild looking man with the head of a Shakespeare and the courage of a lion. Carefully he listened to Tant Betta, and then declared flatly that stealing a locomotive was out of the question as they were strongly guarded day and night. Perhaps he could steal a hydraulic trolley, such as the gangers used, which might hold the sixteen. There was actually one in the sheds, waiting to take a ganger and his men back to Bank the next week. If they agreed, he would see that it was ready.

Tant Betta almost jumped for joy. To her the rescue was as good as accomplished. Piet said nothing. He merely rubbed his long nose in thought. He still had no solution for engaging the large company on Church Square, and the smaller one at the station. The latter were but twenty-five men. If they dashed the prison, they would have to pass the graveyard. Five of Ben's men would be sufficient to hold them back, for the moon was getting big, and in its light the lynx-eyed Boers would be able to aim reasonably well.

But what of the two hundred on Church Square who probably would be standing to as the time for the execution approached? They would have to be decoyed. He might draw them himself. Then he could gallop past. Himself on a white horse which would be seen clearly in the moonlight. Perhaps three of Ben's men in khaki uniforms could pursue him? They could fire their rifles. Khaki overcoats and khaki helmets would be sufficient disguise. A white horse? Old man Hjule had a white stallion and he was as tame as a lamb. Pity about the white horse. It would probably get a bullet. Well provided General De

Wet was satisfied, he did not mind if he fell also. He sat and thought. A long while he sat. Then his plans formed clearly in his mind.

At midnight – six hours before the execution, - Piet suddenly appeared in the midst of the group in the poplar thicket. He was ready. He did not bother to sit but stood as he outlined his plans. When he had finished he told them to saddle three horses at once. The best two should be left in the wood. Perhaps they could be fetched later. The other three would certainly fall into British hands.

While they were preparing the horses, Ben walked over to Piet and placed his hands on his crooked shoulders. “Piet”, he said, “I am sorry to have dragged you into this thing. That business of the white horse, and you on its back – that worries me”.

Piet glanced up with half a smile: “That is our only chance. Tell General De Wet I did my best”.

Ben looked at him a long moment and then walked over to his gun and his little bundle. The others gathered round the boy. He told them to wait until they notice a fire near the Elandsheuvel bridge. The moonlight was too bright for them to cross otherwise without attracting the attention of the guards. By this time they had such implicit faith in Piet that they never even wondered who would light the fire.

Within a few minutes the flames flared up, lit by Tant Betta’s little Bushman. It was Doppies Bezuidenhout’s barn. Piet knew that the old traitor was not only sympathetic towards the British but that he also had the prettiest daughters and the best peach brandy in the neighborhood. Every Englishman was his friend and the whole guard on the bridge turned out to help extinguish the fire. While they were busy, with this labor of love, the Boers slipped into the water. One of the horses prove fractious, but Ben who was an even better swimmer than Piet, managed to drag it through.

Clambering up the opposite bank, they followed Piet through the reeds, and past the Devil’s Hole. On reaching River Street, Piet disappeared into the woodshed and returned with three khaki helmets which he gave the three riders to wear with their military coats. He and the other six would meet them on the empty plot behind the parsonage. He counselled them to ride quite openly as if they were a British patrol.

Piet and the others slipped from plot to plot until they reached the dominee’s house where the mounted men were waiting. There they split, five of them in the direction of the graveyard, and Ben towards the railway line near Laurie’s pig sties. He found Oudegeest waiting with the trolley. Making sure that everything was in readiness, he moved towards the south wall of the prison.

Piet’s white stallion was awaiting him in the dominee’s cow byre. He patted the beast and mounted. He edged his way out of the garden and into the deep shadows of the cypresses on the pavement. Like a rock he sat in the saddle, but the animal felt the tension and moved restlessly until the boy dismounted. The three burghers sat their horses like images on the empty plot to his right.

Piet still was not certain what the British on Church Square would do when the excitement started. They might converge on the prison in one or two columns when they heard the explosion. Whatever happened they had to be forced to follow him and the three burghers would have to make as much noise as possible to drown whatever was happening at the graveyard.

Meanwhile in the prison, Dominee Albertyn had appeared as usual for his service at ten o’clock. The prisoners were restless and when, at half-past eleven he announced another hymn, the oldest one

among them said: “Dominee, I am, as you know, a good churchman, and I am grateful for the comfort of this service, but should we not try to get some rest, even though we don’t sleep, so that tomorrow we may be able to behave like good Transvalers?”

The minister looked him straight in the eyes and replied: “The peace of the soul is infinitely more important than the peace of the body. There is sufficient reason to continue with the service”.

His back was turned to guards and, as he spoke, he did a strange thing. He slowly winked his right eye. The seven saw the sign and the waters of hope flowed over them. The youngest, he had been scarce seventeen when eighteen months previously he had laid down arms under oath, fell on his knees and began sobbing. The others started the hymn, and it is certain that never before or never afterwards was a hymn sung with such fervor in our village.

One o’clock tolled out. Then half-past. In the shadows outside a figure glided towards the south wall of the prison to where Piet’s manure cart, minus one wheel leaned drunkenly against the corner. The cart was loaded with manure but the figure knew where the fuse lay which led to the dynamite beneath. He was but a shadow in the shadows. Stealthily he moved until he had reached his objective. A match flared. The fuse spluttered. The figure melted away.

Thirty seconds later the night was riven by sound and flame. The wall crumbled and the guard-house collapsed. Those of the guards who were not either dead or injured were so shocked that they could not handle their guns.

The minister staggered backwards and shouted “Run”.

“But....” And one of the prisoners leapt forward to help him

“Run, else a miracle has happened in vain”.

None of the seven was injured – neither was the minister and they ran like hares, as they emerged through the rent in the wall, someone called from the railroad: “This way”.

In a split second they were at Ben’s side and dashed for the pig sties where the trolley stood.

The rumble of the explosion had scarcely reached Church Square when Piet vaulted into the saddle. As he grabbed the reins he heard shots from the direction of the station: the guards there had begun moving towards the prison and the five burghers ambushed them at the graveyard. The British recoiled, dashed for cover and then took up position to return the fire. Without waiting, however, the Boers turned and sprinted for the pig sties.

By now the Square was in commotion. Commands rang out and the horses moved restlessly. The officer in charge displayed unusual level-headedness. He ordered half his men to horse: one column to take the right-hand road and the other the left to the prison. Piet and his three companions waited in a cross street between the two columns. That was what he had been hoping for. But which column would reach him first? He wanted to swing left towards the river and the whirlpool before which the three burghers could then branch off and join the others at the pig sties. If the left hand column reached their street first they were lost, for then they would be caught in the trap, between the station, the Cantonments and the guards at the North Bridge and Elandsheuwel. They would be able to delay the enemy for long

enough to give the others time to escape but they themselves would either be killed fighting or else be captured and put against a wall.

The Boers sat tensed. The British rumbled up the streets. Which column was in the lead?

Left?

Right?

Suddenly the right hand column swung into their street. Piet released the fretting stallion. The animal shot forward like an arrow from a bow. Thirty yards behind him the three burghers thundered. They yelled and fired and whipped their mounts while shouting in English loudly enough to be heard all over the village.

“It’s he. There he goes. Stop him. Stop him”.

The British sprang into action. Clapping their spurs to their mounts they followed after. Piet shot past the next street and saw the second British column scarce thirty yards away. At the corner the two columns almost collided. They were, however, old soldiers: those in front galloped faster, those behind reined in a bit, and the two columns mingled to pursue the fugitive.

Three streets further, the white horse swung left and the burghers followed. At the next corner, however, the three swung right again, leaving the white horse to thunder alone towards the river.

The leading British checked their steeds as they saw the other three disappearing, but the white horse was their quarry and they took up the chase again.

The stallion went like the wind but the leading British horses were even swifter. As Piet reached the swamp, the Englishmen were on him. They spread out, but he swung slightly left to the whirlpool. He gained the bank with only yards to spare. Mercilessly he pressed the stallion which leapt as if to clear the broad stream. With a splash that could be heard at Elandsheuvel they landed in the middle of the river. Piet disappeared into the dark depths. The British pumped volleys into his unfortunate mount but they glimpsed no sign of the rider.

Meanwhile the other three had reached the pig sties. They leapt from their horses in a flurry of dust and on to the trolley which had already started moving. Oudegeest, his work completed, melted into the shadows of the nearest trees. Fortunately, the rail ran downhill. The Boers pumped the lever like demons. Ten miles per hour, twenty, thirty, forty. The wheel whined and the trolley seemed to fly. Fortunately, none of the turns were sharp. Even so, most of the time the vehicle seemed to be moving on two wheels. They whistled through the night. Now they were approaching the first block-house. The guard shouted something and opened fire. He missed. Then a volley rang out, but the aim was bad.

The men clung to the trolley two deep.

Now the second block-house loomed through the night.

Again shots. Again no one was hit.

Then came the lights of the Machavie station guarded by its block-house. The brakes squealed. The trolley shuddered to a stop. The men tumbled off and with a last volley at the fort, sprinted for the

clump of mimosa trees where, according to arrangement, Van Vuuren and his men were waiting with spare horses.

Meanwhile Potchefstroom was like an ant-heap which had been stirred with a stick. Kitchener was immediately informed of the escape by telegraph. By eight o'clock the next morning his answer had been received: "I expect those responsible to be dealt with most severely". The first to feel the lash was the head warden who was reduced to the ranks. When the trolley was found near Machavie every Hollander employed on the railways including two outside carpenters in the village, was placed under arrest and within forty-eight hours they had all been deported over the frontier at Komatipoort. Oudegeest almost died with laughter for amongst them were two Dutchmen with strong British sympathies who were by chance on a visit to Potchefstroom.

The next scapegoat was Dominee Albertyn. They took him the next night, and sent him handcuffed to the Fort in Johannesburg. The Moderator of the Church in the Cape Colony, however, protested and he was released within three weeks and allowed to return to Potchefstroom, although still under open arrest.

Two days later they came for Tant Betta and sent her to the concentration camp. They could prove nothing but they suspected everything. She said, however, long anticipated this and had laid her plans to continue the intelligence service accordingly, Twice or three times a week, the little Bushman would crawl through the camp wire and gain certain information which was later transmitted to the Boers.

One night a stray shot by a guard wounded the Bushman in the stomach. Then the game was up. Despite the hysterical protests of her family in the Cape, it was decided to deport her as a captive to Mauritius. She was put on a train and arrived in Durban on the day that peace was signed. She was released after a month.

Today she rests, after a full and happy life in the shadow of the old cypresses in the village churchyard.

The little Bushman is still alive. Tant Betta's family, according to her wish, looked after him well.

Piet's part in the great adventure was discovered when a Native detective recognized those parts of his cart that remained after the explosion. The military police visited old Carel's house in River Street and took the old man to the Cantonments. There he remained while under open arrest. During his stay, however, he used his time to become friendly with the Native batmen, and he helped them polish off many a bottle of stolen liquor, until one night, rolling home after having partaken of too much champagne belonging to His Majesty's Tenth Hussars he slipped off the bridge over the Big Furrow and into the water. The next morning his corpse was fished out stiff and cold.

The British never found the rider of the white stallion. They searched the water and the banks for a body. In the poplar thicket they discovered the two horses and the remains of a fire. Their total booty therefore consisted merely of five live horses and a dead one.

Little did they realize that, while they were searching the wood, the person they were seeking was crouching anxiously beneath their feet biting back his pain. When the stallion hit the water he landed on his side. Piet slipped off but was struck on the hip by one of the flailing hooves. He, however, felt nothing at the time and reached the otter's den without difficulty. There he undressed and wrapped himself in a blanket.

When he awoke the following morning he could not move one leg. He was so exhausted that he lay in a semi-coma for some hours. It was almost night when he was driven by hunger to open some of the tinned food that Ben had secreted near the exit to his hide-out.

It was then that he discovered that he would not be able to walk for some time. At first that did not worry him in his relief at having carried out General De Wet's command, for he felt quite sure that the sixteen had got away.

Above him he was aware of the British patrols in the wood, but after a week they left and Piet began making plan to join the Boers again. He knew that his days as a spy were over, for in this, his greatest adventure, he had not bothered to hide his identity.

His immediate problem was how to escape with a stiff leg and no transport. Long he sat at the entrance of his lair and stared at the waters. Then suddenly he knew. The river would carry him. Placing his clothes, a couple of tins of food and a blanket on the hollowed-out willow log, Piet slipped into the stream under cover of darkness. He would drift with the Mooi River until he met friends. For three days he paddled. He moved by night and hid, ate and slept during the day. After the third day, he could move his injured hip slightly.

Fifteen days later drifting down the Mooi River and later the Vaal, he reached the first Boer outposts on the far side of Klerksdorp. Within a couple of hours he was in the presence of General De la Rey, who, with a lump in his throat, thanked him on behalf of the whole Western Transvaal.

But when Piet learnt that it was not his beloved General De Wet who had sent Ben Pieterse to him, he wanted to run away. They could calm him only when the general promised to submit a full report to General De Wet. Still he hesitated. Once more the general sent for him and told him that he could present the report himself with Ben Pieterse as companion. And then for the first time Piet's face broke into something that looked like a smile.

Without wasting time, they rode off the same evening. It took them however, three weeks to locate General De Wet near Wepener in the Orange Free State. Meanwhile the tale of the rescue had spread throughout South Africa. Everyone was talking about it. The burghers in the field regarded it as an omen of encouragement. If fewer than a dozen men could outwit six thousand British, the war was not over by a long chalk.

I shall remain silent about the emotions of the men concerned in the rescue. Yet, perhaps, on second thoughts, I might mention one incident. When the sixteen fugitives had crossed the road at Machavie and found Van Vuuren waiting with horses, they swung themselves into the saddles. But as Ben attempted to raise himself, his knees gave way. And there he stood with his face on the leather and wept: he, the warrior with nerves of steel, he who feared neither man nor devil, sobbed like a child.

When Piet presented the report to General De Wet, the old soldier took both his timid hands in his.

"Piet, my son", he said, "once I told you that Potchefstroom should be proud of you, Today, I say, we are all proud of you".

HAIL AND FAREWELL

One question remains to be answered: how have I managed to assemble all the details of Piet's exploits as we, his contemporaries, never knew him for what he was? Well, a good deal became public after the blowing up of the prison. Later, during 1905, when General De la Rey was staying with us in Potchefstroom, he added further information. But the full story reached me only a short while ago from a friend, also an old Potchefstroom boy, then the magistrate at De Aar in the Cape Province. He has rather a gifted pen so I'll quote his letter at length:

"I had an experience the other day which will, I am sure, surprise and interest you as much as it did me. There was a Commando Day at Prieska in the North West Cape. You know, one of those occasions ostensibly set aside for rifle practice, but when everything of social, agricultural and military interest is crowded into an interminable programme.

Being the nearest first-grade magistrate and an old soldier to boot, I had to put in an official appearance. The shooting was good – as it should be among these springbok poachers – and I spent most of the day at the butts. Towards evening we forgathered at the local hotel, the mayoress distributed the prizes and I shook hands with all and sundry.

When I was just about ready to drop – it had been a tiring day on the range – the local commandant pushed forward a youngish old man who seemed vaguely familiar.

"Landrost", he said, "allow me to introduce Mr. Pieter Beukes, one of our foremost sheep farmers".

Frankly the name meant nothing to me, but I noticed the Boer War D.T.D. decoration on the man's coat. As you know, this decoration had, with two exceptions, been exclusively reserved for officers. So I repeated somewhat emphatically: "Mr. Pieter Beukes?" "Yes", said the little man, "Mr. Pieter Beukes, or should I say, Piet Pencil stub?"

And would you believe it, it was the one and only Potchefstroom Piet. He was about the same size as when I knew him, still round-shouldered, but otherwise a wiry, energetic fellow who obviously was conscious of his position in the community and carried himself with assurance.

I all but embraced him. "Man alive, I am glad to see you. But where in Heaven's name where have been since you blew up Potchefstroom prison forty, no nearly fifty years ago"?

Before he could reply, I turned to the commandant: "No further introductions, my good friend. I've got a big job of cross-examination to do".

He grinned in reply: "I knew just what would happen, so I put Piet last on the reception line", he replied.

Well, to cut a long story short, I spent that night on Piet's farm, a really first class place. He is married to one of the Strauss family, you know, the ostrich farmers from Oudtshoorn, and has a crowd of healthy children. In fact, there are one or two grand-children as well.

At first it was difficult to get him to talk about himself. I was nevertheless determined and gave him no rest, indeed literally we did not get to bed until 3:30 a.m. The result I shall forward you by registered parcel as soon as my typist has put my notes in legible form. Don't you think that the story of Piet should be published"?

Well, I agreed with my friend. And that is how this book came to be written.

