

# WITH THE BOERS IN THE FIELD—AN INSIDE VIEW

## Personal Narrative of the Adventures of Adolph De Wet, Nephew of the Celebrated General, Christian De Wet.

At no time in the history of the Boer war has there been such a dearth of authentic information, especially from within the lines of operation, as at present, and the following narrative, based upon the personal experience of Mr. Adolph De Wet, a nephew of the great Boer strategist, should be welcomed by all.

Mr. De Wet, who escaped from one of the British prison camps in the Bermudas not long ago, was born in Bloemfontein, Orange Free State, twenty-six years ago. He is the son of a farmer engineer, was educated in the South African college, Cape Town, and is as fine a specimen of physical manhood as one could desire to meet. He stands 6 feet 1 inch in his stockings, is muscular and athletic, and the grip of his hand is something to be remembered. A natural linguist, he speaks not only the Flemish Dutch used by his compatriots throughout South Africa, but English, French, Spanish and the native Basuto, and has a smattering of as many more.

At the breaking out of the war in 1899 Mr. De Wet was working in Johannesburg as an electrician, which trade he had acquired at Cape Town. Like every other young man of his nationality at that time, he started for the scene of operations as soon as war was declared. Whatever the outcome, there was a promise of adventure, and everybody at once started to secure his arms and ammunition, which had been secured for a long time against such a contingency. In fact, the Boers had a pretty good idea of what was coming weeks before Oom Paul issued his call to Great Britain, and it was well known that both the government and private individuals had for many months been accumulating munitions of war. To tell the truth, the Boers had supplies stored up for twice the number of their available fighting men, and, what is more, they doubtless have at present more than enough ammunition, etc., on hand and cached to last them for another year. Not only ammunition and small arms, but big guns, as well as foreign artillery, were provided for in advance by the wily Boers, as the British learned to their sorrow in the first months of the war, when their men were mowed down by hundreds and they were kept almost continuously on the jump. In addition to the supplies originally accumulated, the Boers since the war opened have helped themselves almost without stint from the trains and supply bases of the British which they have so frequently raided.

At the outset, according to generally accepted accounts, the Boers had not less than 70,000 men available, but Mr. De Wet says that the grand total would not amount to more than 50,000 men at the outside, and as it is well known that the Boer conscription included males of all ages between sixteen years and sixty, the term "men" in many instances might be rendered "boys."

After having cleared the towns and cities of the outlanders, or foreigners, the Boers all started off for the scenes of prospective operations, of which they had a very good notion, as the British had been mobilizing their troops all along the Natal border, and went on the supposition that "where the carcass is there will the eagles gather together." From all over the two republics bands of Boers kept wandering toward certain common centers which had been designated beforehand, and finally they met the enemy. The first skirmish of the campaign to which young De Wet had attached himself was at Modder Plat—an indecisive action, but it helped get the young bloods into fighting trim. There for the first time, he says, he heard the singing of bullets and could not for the life of him refrain from ducking. Soon after his commando met with a larger body of the enemy at Modder Spruit, and a big fight resulted, in which the British flank was turned. The Boers followed up the line of British retreat until they met a patrol at Rood Lager, where they again turned the British flank after a severe loss to themselves.

The Boers at the outset inaugurated that system of intrenchments by which they inflicted the greatest possible loss upon the enemy without suffering greatly themselves. During Buller's operations for the relief of Ladysmith and in his advance upon Colenso the Boer intrenchments extended along the Tugela river for more than twenty miles. It was while fighting in one of these intrenchments at Magersfontein that young De Wet received his first wound. He was crouching down behind a large rock when he had rolled up in front as a shield when a glancing ball filled his face with splinters and nearly put out his eyes. The scars from this casualty show on his cheek today.

Bloemfontein, rejoining early in February General Piet Joubert's command, which was laying siege to Ladysmith. He witnessed Buller's frantic attempts to cross the Tugela and was in the thick of the fight when General White made his ill advised sortie from Ladysmith and lost 2,000 men. After having been detailed to guard the prisoners on their way to Johannesburg, young De Wet returned to Joubert and was with him at the time of his death.

This old hero of Majuba Hill, Joubert, was probably the most beloved of the Boer leaders. He had permitted the departure of the noncombatant women and children, the sick and the wounded, from beleaguered Ladysmith at the outset of the siege and was thanked by General White for his humanity and especially for his kind treatment of the British wounded. White told Joubert that, personally, he never regretted anything so much in his life as having to fight the Boers, and added that he was

rest, when suddenly the British appeared and began blazing away. Two of the Boers were wounded, and young De Wet was one of the two, a bullet passing through the calf of his leg and coursing upward, breaking his horse's back and lodging in the saddle. His horse dropped dead, and, unaware that he was wounded, De Wet seized his chum's stirrup leather and ran alongside his pony until they reached a spot inaccessible to the British. They bivouacked in the open air that night, with the sky for a quilt, and by morning the wound was very painful; so he was left at the first farmhouse, while his comrades kept on. It was more than a month before he finally reached his uncle, with whom he resided from June till Christmas.

The redoubtable Christian De Wet his nephew depicts as a quiet, silent man, determined, always cool and rarely wrong in his conclusions. He never consulted any one as to his movements.



Adolph De Wet.

sure his feelings were shared by many other officers.

It was not long after this interview with White that Joubert was taken down with enteric fever, and when at the point of death he expressed a wish to have his mattress taken out into the open air, where he could see his men and bid them farewell. It was a most pathetic sight, this vast body of rude, undisciplined men huddled about their dying chief, whom they had so often followed to victory. His last words abjured them not to be disheartened, but to put their faith in God. He expressed the conviction that everything would come out right some day if not in the immediate future. He died as he had fought, with the Bible in one hand—the veritable Bible upon which he often drew his plans and from which he derived his inspiration.

Young De Wet was at the deathbed of his chief, and after his demise he succeeded in locating and reaching his uncle, Christian De Wet, late in June. The interval having been spent in various parts of the country fighting as a free lance. While on his way to join his uncle's commando in the north of May he and several companions were surprised by a British patrol of cavalry and nearly taken. As they were mounted on small but wiry Basuto ponies, they scurried for the hills, with the enemy in close pursuit. Thinking they were secure at last, they halted for a

Always implicitly followed by his men, he would give the command to mount, and they would follow without question. He was humane, but never showed favors, his nephew having to take his chances with the rest. He never mistreated any one, as some reports would lead one to believe, but if a man was tired of following him he merely told him to get out and go home.

During his short service under the elder De Wet the younger says he wore out a dozen horses, for the work was hard, although all the men liked it after they had got seasoned, which was usually within two or three weeks. They were rarely sick, in striking contrast to the soldiers in the British army, who suffered terribly from disease and exposure. Constantly on the go, De Wet's men had little time to forage for food, and no time at all to change their clothing even if they had been able to find any. Water was always scarce, and sometimes even the small streams were in possession of the enemy. They were absolutely without a commissariat and had to live, of course, on the country, sometimes securing good food in the towns or from the infrequent farmhouses, sometimes knocking down an ox out of a span, but the chief articles of diet were blintz, or dried beef, and black coffee, with horseflesh to fall back upon in an emergency.

That they sometimes forgot or neglected to pay for what they took in the

towns or from British "Tomnies" should not be ascribed so much to lack of inclination as to lack of time. A change of clothing, especially of boots, was sometimes secured by stripping a dead man, and, according to one who knows, a dead man's boots are a great deal better than no boots at all.

It is the opinion of Christian De Wet's nephew that this man who has done so much to weary Lord Kitchener and his army will never surrender. His wife died of a broken heart, one of his sons is dead, his house has been burned and his farm destroyed, and it is very likely that he does not see much in the future worth living for, even though there may be only a forlorn hope in persistent fighting.

At the opening of the war Christian De Wet had a beautiful home three miles out of Bloemfontein and roamed the country as a stock buyer, which accounts for his intimate knowledge of the region he has so persistently ravaged and the facility with which he has escaped from his pursuers. The burning of the farmhouses has naturally incensed all the burghers in the field as well as those in captivity and their sympathies in Cape Colony. After the house burning proclamation was issued (which in effect was that every house should show its full quota or it would be burned to the ground, all the stock confiscated and the women and children placed in compounds or concentration camps) the Boers saw no other course open than to pursue the guerrilla warfare which they have conducted of late. They felt they would rather perish fighting than of slow starvation. The alleged treatment of the women and children by the British soldiers, both at their homes and in the concentration camps, has greatly incensed the fighting Boers, who declare that there will be many individual scores to settle after the war is over, whether Boers or British prevail.

Young De Wet's home was burned to the ground, and early in January, last year, after a brief furlough, he started out again to rejoin his uncle. The British were by this time so numerous that he had to abandon his horse in order to escape observation, and on the second morning out, while marching on foot toward the town of Lindley, he and his companions were surprised by a patrol of cavalry, the Derbyshire grays. He started up a small kopje, but was pursued, and just as he reached the crest a bullet struck him in the right foot, inflicting such a wound that he was crippled and captured. Taken to Bloemfontein, he was placed aboard a train with some thirty comrades and sent to Cape Town. He received no medical attention until he reached the hospital at the fort, where he remained for nine weeks, and then was placed on board a transport bound for St. Helena. That island was taxed to its utmost capacity by Cronje and his men (captured the year before), so after two months' detention the later arrivals were again placed on board ship and sent to the Bermudas, where they arrived about the middle of April.

According to young De Wet, he and his comrades were treated worse in the Bermudas than at St. Helena. Food, he says, was not only scarce, but poor in quality. Distributed among the prison camps on several islands in Hamilton bay, the Boers were given tents and blankets (without either coats, mattresses or hammocks) and turned loose within barbed wire barricades. Their life in the open air was agreeable, for he had become used to it on the veldt, but the food was worse, they say, than any they had while serving with De Wet, consisting of a scant ration of "burgoo" in the morning, an apology for a stew at noon and the same sort of stew, with tea, at night. Fresh water is always scarce in the Bermudas, so their supply was distilled from sea water, and sparingly supplied at that. Cleanliness, he says, was impossible, as not only had the great majority of the prisoners the same clothing on their backs which they wore when campaigning in South Africa, but they were compelled to do their washing in salt water without soap. They were taken out to bathe in the sea at intervals. Each prison camp was inclosed within an entanglement of barbed wire, which the prisoners called the "dead line," as while De Wet was there at least one man was shot for touching it.

Few outsiders know of the heartrending scenes enacted within the wire inclosed prison camps in the Bermudas, so near to our coast. The very monotony and heat and the eternal glare of white coral rock and whitewashed buildings are distressing enough, but when added to these discomforts are the confinement, the forced inaction and continual espionage of guards with loaded rifles the condition of the prisoners may be imagined as almost intolerable. Not only are the able-bodied Boers confined here, but decrepit old men and boys of tender years.

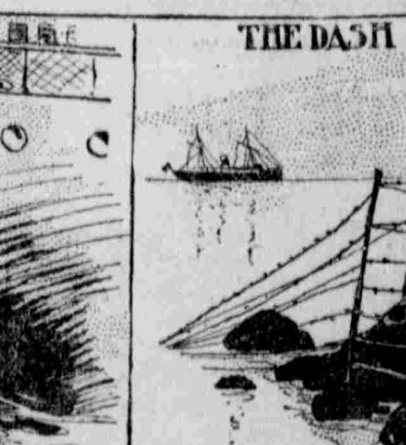
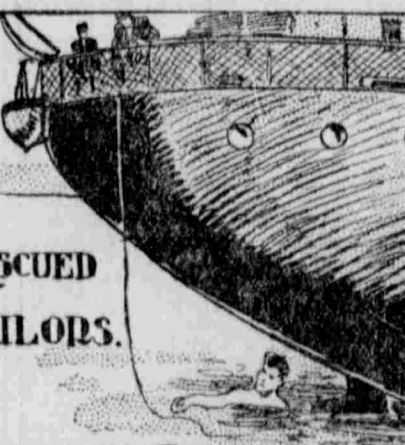
"I was determined from the first," says Mr. De Wet, "to take advantage of any opportunity to escape, and, after one unsuccessful attempt, which gave me some suggestions as to the proper course to pursue, I made another break for liberty and succeeded. I had noted a small tramp steamer out in the bay, and one night in October after supper and prayers were over I contrived to get down to a corner of the compound where the fence ran into the water. I waded in, crawled under the wire and then struck out for the ship's lights, which I could see gleaming in the distance. The steamer was probably three-quarters of a mile away, but I am a strong swimmer the effort necessary to reach her was not exhausting until I was within about a quarter of a mile, when the tide turned against me, and I had to swim for my life.

"After being about an hour and a half in the water I succeeded in reaching the vessel, caught hold of her anchor chain and tried to crawl aboard. Finding this impossible, I dropped back into the water and swam around to the stern, where I rested by placing my feet on the propeller blades and hanging on to the rudder, more dead than alive. Fortunately one of the sailors happened to look over the rail and, seeing me there, passed me the flag halyards, by the aid of which and with his assistance I managed to reach the deck. I didn't stay there long, but immediately ascended to the stokehole as fast as my numb legs could carry me. The second engineer, whose watch it was, finding me warming up before the furnace, asked me who I was, and upon receiving the requested information was as kind as any man could be. He knew well enough the risk he ran, but he hid me in a coal bunker, where I remained for nine hours, or until the steamer had left the harbor. A coal bunker is not the coolest spot in the world, and when I emerged I was about as exhausted as I could be and live, but it served to hide me while the British officers searched the ship. The captain, who was not aware of my presence, threatened to take me back, but was persuaded to carry me along, and after an eventful voyage, during which I stoked for my passage, we arrived in New York harbor.

"I had at last reached a free country, but was still in a state of anxiety, not knowing but that I could be extradited. And then, again, as my hasty departure did not permit of my taking what few belongings I had in the compound, my total possessions consisted of a suit of overalls, a pair of shoes and a cap, together with 75 cents in cash which my friend the engineer had given me. Like poor old Robinson Crusoe, I began to think I had had a "dreadful deliverance" indeed, for, though I was a free man, I was without friends and almost destitute in a strange land.

"I was hungry, however, and, wandering into a restaurant on the Bowery, I got some cheap food and then inquired of the proprietor if he could give me something to do. He promptly advised me to jump into the river and wash myself, but after awhile agreed to let me wash the dishes of the establishment during the daytime and sleep on a chair in the kitchen at night. Two weeks of this sort of life was about all I wanted, and having recovered my strength and pristine cleanliness somewhat, I started to look for a more congenial position, taking the first that offered, as section hand on the Pennsylvania railroad. The change of climate from the mild Bermudas to the inclement north, together with my lack of warm clothing, brought on an attack of pneumonia, recovering from which I made my way south as far as Jacksonville, Fla., bringing up at St. Augustine. There I found employment in a hotel as electrician and stayed until the last of February, returning north again after the work was finished and taking up my residence in New York city, where I hope an opportunity to return to my native land will offer. The Boers are far from being beaten and will hold out to the bitter end, which is still a long ways off, and at the present time they need every able-bodied man and boy in their ranks."

TRUMAN L. ELTON.



### RANDOM COMMENT.

In Poland it is a penal offense to speak Polish in any public resort. No kissing ever occurs in Japan except between husbands and wife, not even between a mother and child. A Parisian lampmaker makes his rounds on a bicycle, with a long torch carried over his right shoulder. He guides the wheel with his left hand and

is so expert that he lights the lamps without dismounting. A Manchester (England) man has celebrated two silver weddings, having lived twenty-five years with each of his two wives. The arrival of a number of locomotives in France constructed at Munich has naturally had a very ill effect upon

Gaulic public opinion, which is becoming irritated at the importation of so many foreign locomotives when the home concerns are said to be crying aloud for orders. That the state should purchase American locomotives and other companies should give out contracts to a Vienna firm may be excusable under the circumstances, but the purchasing of locomotives from Germany, which may eventually be at

war with France and is supplying what is classified as war material, is intolerable to the Gaul. It is said that a foreman stereotyper in a London printing works has had a curious windfall. Going to a sale of musical instruments, he purchased an old harpsichord for 30 shillings because, having a hobby for fretwork, he fancied the wood of the front panel. When he got his purchase home, he dissected

it. He then discovered that the harpsichord had a double back, and presently between the boards he found very old Bank of England notes, the total face value of which amounted to \$150,000. In a new building attached to some boiler works in Germany a novelty in windows has been introduced. The ordinary panes of glass were impracticable on account of the nearness of the work to the railway lines, so pneu-

matic glass stones have been used. From the outside the appearance is the same as the so-called "Butzen" panes. They are translucent and at the same time as strong as the stone wall in which they are set. They will stand any pressure or blow that the walls will stand. The British handicappers are putting heavy burdens upon the representatives of American stables in the races of the

coronation year. Yankee horses have won so many honors and prizes in England that they are now treated with a wholesome respect in every contest for which they are entered. Of all the newspapers published in the world 68 per cent are in the English language. It has been stated that in Italy a murder is committed every two hours on the average.