

On the commencement of my public activity - Paul Kruger

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In Chapter II of his memoirs exiled ZAR president describes the campaigns against the Chiefs Secheli, Mapela and Makapaan

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

CHAPTER II

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

COMMENCEMENT OF PUBLIC ACTIVITY

I WAS appointed a deputy field cornet as early as 1842, but my position was not one of any importance until 1852, when I was elected a full field cornet. In this capacity, I accompanied, in that year, old Commandant General A. W. J. Pretorius [1] to the Sand River, where the famous Sand River Convention was concluded.

[1] After Pretorius, who had commanded during the War of Independence against England in the Free State, came to the Transvaal, the popular assembly of 1849 elected Potgieter Commandant General for life ; but eventually, in order to avoid unpleasantness, it became necessary to appoint three commandants general all possessing equal powers. Pretorius, accordingly, became Commandant General of the Potchefstroom and Rustenburg districts where Kruger lived. - **Note by the Editor of the German Edition.**

In that same year, the expedition against the Bechuana chief Secheli took place. I took part in it as a commandant. This Secheli was protecting an other Kaffir chief, called Moselele, who had committed several murders in the South African Republic, and refused to deliver him up. The demand for Moselele's surrender was received with the insolent reply:

"Who wants Moselele can come and fetch him out of my stomach."

Secheli meant to convey that Moselele was as safely hidden with him as the food which he had eaten.

A commando under Chief Commandant Scholtz, with myself as deputy-commandant, was sent to punish him. When the commando arrived before Secheli's town, the Kaffir chief sent a messenger to Commandant Scholtz to say that he would do nothing to him on the morrow, as that was a Sunday, but that he would duly settle his account on the Monday. At the same time, he very artlessly asked for some coffee and sugar, probably in return for his amiability in "letting us off " for Sunday. Commandant Scholtz sent back word to Secheli that he had coffee and sugar, but none to give away. He promised, however, to give him pepper on Monday.

On Monday morning the battle began. I was well in front, and brought down a number of Kaffirs with my four-pounder, which I had loaded with coarse shot.

When the mountain on which Secheli's town lay was already partly taken, Louw du Plessis, who was serving the guns, accidentally hit a large rock, and the ball, rebounding, struck my head with such force that I fell to the ground unconscious. A certain van Rooyen had to help me to my feet, and at the same time bound up my aching head in a cloth.

While I was lying unconscious and van Rooyen was busying himself about me, a Hottentot servant of my brother's, thanks to his accurate aim, kept the Kaffirs at a safe distance. When I came to myself, the first thing I saw was that the Kaffirs were creeping up behind rocks and boulders, and I realized the danger to which my burghers would be exposed if they were not warned in time. I at once got up to lead the attack on the dangerous points, although my wound prevented me from carrying my musket. The Kaffirs kept up a hot fire from every cave and gorge, but, after a sharp fight, the burghers succeeded in driving them from the mountain.

My life was in danger for a second time during this same battle. One of the enemy's bullets, fired from a huge rifle, struck me on the chest and tore my jacket in two. The artful Secheli afterwards said that he had, up to the last, had it in his power to drive us back, but that, when I had once laid my hands on his brandy-bottle, I became invincible. As a matter of fact, I have never tasted a drop of brandy.

After hostilities were concluded, Commandant Scholtz sent up to the house of Livingstone, the English missionary, which was not far from the Kaffir town. Here Theunis Pretorius found a complete workshop for repairing guns, and a quantity of materials of war which Livingstone was storing for Secheli.

This was a breach of the Sand River Convention of 1852, which prescribed that neither arms nor ammunition should be supplied to the Kaffirs, and that they should not be permitted to provide either for themselves. Scholtz accordingly confiscated the missionary's arsenal, and in consequence the Boers were abused by Livingstone throughout the length and breadth of England, and slandered in every possible way as enemies of the missionaries and cruel persecutors of the blacks.

As a matter of fact, the Boers were neither opposed to the mission nor enemies of the natives.

Their principle was to allot a certain district to every tribe that kept quiet and peaceful and was willing to accept civilization; such district to be proportionate to the size of the tribe. The missionaries who wished to labor among the natives also received free grants of land for the erection of churches and for private purposes.

Even before the arrival of the missionaries beyond the Vaal, some of the Boers had instructed their native servants in the Gospel. But they were often brought into unpleasant contact with the native tribes owing to the engagement into which they had entered to deprive the natives of the arms which the latter were constantly smuggling into the country. This engagement was faithfully kept so that England might have no opportunity to accuse them of violating the treaty and, consequently, to annul the Sand River Convention, which guaranteed the liberty of the emigrants north of the Vaal.

[1]

[1] The missionaries seem often to have failed to understand that, for the Boers, the native question was, necessarily, not only religious and humanitarian, but also political. South Africa has room for only one form of civilization, and that is the white man's civilization; and, where there was only a handful of white men to keep hundreds of thousands of black natives in order, severity was essential. The black man had to be taught that he came second, that he belonged to the inferior class which must obey and learn.

Lest it should appear as though the friendly and reasonable position adopted by the Boers in this matter had only developed gradually in recent years, I may point out that, in 1882, Mr. Kruger spoke to the following effect in his program issued before his first election and, afterwards, in the name of his people, as President:

" Native politics in a Republic such as ours, where so many Kaffir tribes live among us and all

around us, offer very exceptional difficulties. The chief principle that must always be borne in mind is that savages must be kept within bounds, and always overruled by justice and morality."

And again:

" Much is being said about a universal native policy for the various states of South Africa. All who know the difficulties of this problem will most certainly agree with me when I say that the greatest benefactor of South Africa would be the man who could provide a completely satisfactory solution to this question. That man is perhaps as yet unborn. Meanwhile, as regards our Republic, her duty, or, rather, her mission is clear and simple. Every Kaffir tribe within our boundaries must be taught to respect the authority of our Government, and, in order that the laws, by which these tribes also benefit, may be equitably administered, they must bear their share of the public burden. When once the disastrous influence of foreigners and enemies of the Republic, who now so often try to persuade these unfortunate Kaffirs that they need not consider themselves subjects of the Republic, when once this influence has been done away with, then the time will have come when the native tribes will reap the prosperous fruit of the old principle of the Republic, by which every tribe of any importance has a fixed territory appointed to it, under the protection of the Government. For what was determined in the Convention regarding this distribution of territory is nothing more than the old law of the Republic. As for the future, I cherish the hope that some time, under God's blessing, it will come to this, that order, industry and the fear of God will make the Kaffir also a happy and contented subject of the South African Republic."

At the end of the speech delivered at his inauguration as State President in 1888, in connection with his admonition to the children and teachers to profit by the advantages of the education provided by the Republic, he added these words:

"You colored people, A short word to you too. You have a right to the protection of the laws of this Republic. Whether you make use of the opportunities given you to acquire civilization depends upon yourselves. You are free to accept civilization or to reject it. For you also I pray for the blessing of Almighty God.",

Kruger was elected President upon the first of these declarations, and he called down a blessing upon the blacks, on a solemn occasion, in his official character. This, therefore, permits us to draw definite conclusions as to the attitude of the people in regard to this question. - **Note by the Editor of the German Edition.**

The next war in which I took part under Commandant General Pretorius was that of 1853, against the Kaffir chiefs Mapela and Makapaan, in the Waterberg district, near Makapaanspoort. This was an expedition to avenge the foul murder of Herman Potgieter, brother of the late Commandant General.[1] This Potgieter was a splendid shot and a great elephant-hunter. Mapela had sent for him, saying that there happened to be an exceptionally large number of elephants in his territory. Moreover, he asked Potgieter to come to see to his cattle, which were in Mapela's charge, the latter receiving the milk of the cows in return for his trouble: an arrangement which had been made at Mapela's request.

[1] Commandant, afterwards Commandant General Hendrik Potgieter, who is so closely connected with the history of the Kruger family, had, in the meantime, died, at the beginning of March, 1855, and his son Piet had been appointed to succeed him as Commandant General for the Lydenburg and Zoutpansberg districts. - **Note by the Editor of the German Edition.**

On receiving this message from Mapela, Potgieter set out with his son Andries, a few burghers and his colored groom. When they arrived at Mapela's, the wagons were, as usual, deposited in the Kaffir town.

At first, the Kaffirs were very friendly in their conversation with Potgieter and his companions, and described to him the place where the elephants were to be found. Suddenly, however, they fell upon the whole company, killed Potgieter's son and companions and dragged Potgieter himself to the top of a hill, where, shouting and dancing for joy, they skinned him alive in the presence of his groom. The poor man was not released from his sufferings until his murderers had torn the entrails from his body.

The groom, who was allowed to go free, afterwards showed me the spot where this butchery had taken place.

While Mapela was engaged in this horrible business, Makapaan, in a time of peace, when nobody suspected any harm or danger, suddenly attacked a number of women and children who were quietly traveling from Zoutpansberg to Pretoria. The two chiefs had arranged that they would between them murder all the white people in their respective districts. When these foul deeds became known, it was decided that the Kaffir chiefs should be punished.

General Piet Potgieter, the nephew of the so cruelly murdered Herman Potgieter, set out with 100 men from Zoutpansberg to avenge the murder.

At the same time, Commandant General Pretorius left Pretoria, with 200 men, on the same errand. I was second in command of the latter's commando.

Before these two commandos had united, the Kaffirs made a night attack on Potgieter's laager, but were fortunately repelled. After the two commandos had joined forces, the Kaffirs were driven back into their mountains, where they hid in caves and ravines. The joint commandos kept them imprisoned in these caves in order to starve them into surrender.

After the Kaffirs had been besieged for some time and suffered greatly from famine, without our getting any nearer to effecting our object, I endeavored to end the matter and bring about a surrender by stratagem. With this object in view, I crept in the dark, unseen, into the cave where the Kaffirs lay hidden. I sat down among them and began to talk to them in their own language, as though I were one of themselves, and suggested that it would surely be better to surrender than die of hunger. I also said that I was certain that the white men would not kill us, and offered myself to go to the white men to treat with them. Suddenly an armed Kaffir exclaimed:

"Magoa! " (White man!)

But this dangerous moment also passed, for, when the Kaffir shouted "Magoa!" all the others fled deeper into the cave, and I jumped up and ran after them, right into the back of the cave. The Kaffirs now began to hunt for the white man, looking for him in every direction, except where he was, in their very midst. When they had quieted down a little, I once more addressed them in their own language, and urged them to surrender.

Finally, I succeeded in bringing 170 or 180 women and children out of the cave, and it was not until I was outside that they perceived that it was I and not a Kaffir who had been talking to them. My intention had really been to effect a voluntary surrender of the Kaffirs, and thus to get hold of their guilty captains. But I was unable to attain this object and we had to continue the siege.

Commandant General Pretorius was very angry at my imprudence, punished me severely for venturing to go alone among the Kaffirs in their caves, and ordered me away from the caves. Before the siege was over, I had one more narrow escape from death. In one of the fights, Commandant General Potgieter was hit by a shot fired from a crevice in the rocks. He was standing close to the edge of a rocky wall, giving directions to his Kaffir, when the fatal shot struck him. Potgieter fell down into the midst of a Kaffir trench. I saw this happen, and rushed down at once to try at least to save the body.

The Kaffirs aimed a furious fire at me from the loop-holes in their entrenchments, but the burghers answered the fire no less heartily ; and I was able to leap over the wall of the entrenchment, to lift the body over the wall, leap back, protected by the smoke of the powder, and bring the body safely back with me. Potgieter was a big, heavy man, and I had to exert all my strength to carry my dead

friend back to his people.

One of the Kaffirs who had been captured said that he could show us some hidden caves where elephants' tusks lay in heaps. Pretorius sent me with this Kaffir to fetch the tusks. While on this expedition, I came upon a number of blood-stained garments which had belonged to the women and children murdered by the Kaffirs, as well as remains of portions of human bodies which the Kaffirs had roasted on the spit: roasted shoulders, arms, etc.

The Kaffir who was to show me where the tusks were hidden also wore clothes which had clearly belonged to murdered white men. When at last we reached the cave where the ivory was supposed to be, the Kaffir tried to escape, and it cost me a great effort to recapture him. The elephants' tusks were a mere cheat.

Soon after this, the resistance of Makapaan's men came to an end. It had been found impossible to induce them to leave their caves, and they had shot every one who approached. There was therefore nothing for it but to starve them out. Many hundreds died of hunger. A small portion of them escaped through underground passages into the mountains. Several were captured and brought before the court-martial. I was out hunting at the time, and before I came back they had all been shot under martial law. It was absolutely necessary to shoot these cannibals, especially as none of the culprits were delivered up and the chief had disappeared.

The children of the tribe, as soon as they fell into the hands of the Boers, were ingeboekt, that is to say, portioned out among Boer families and kept under strict legal supervision until they came of age.

The commando now turned its attention to Mapela, Makapaan's ally. I did not join this expedition at first. Commandant General Pretorius sent me with a small commando to Maraba's town, where we had heard that a large number of Makapaan's cattle had been stored. I was to look into this matter and attack Maraba's town if it offered any resistance. But I met with none. Some of the Kaffirs fled, and the remainder surrendered.

The latter declared that they had some of Makapaan's cattle, that they had never shared in his crimes, and that they were quite willing to restore such of his stolen cattle as were in their possession. This was done, but only a thousand head were discovered. As soon as I had possession of the cattle, I returned, leaving Maraba's Kaffirs unharmed. I reached the other commandos in time to join them on their march against Mapela.

But Mapela's Kaffirs had also fled for the greater part, so that there was practically nothing to do. A few wagons, some chests, and other things which had belonged to the murdered whites were discovered on a kop near Mapela's town. These goods the commandos carried back with them.

Mapela's punishment was not effected until many years later, in 1858. Meanwhile, he had committed several other outrages ; and it had also become necessary to take away the fire-arms which he had managed to obtain. A commando under General Schoeman, with myself as assistant general, set out against him. But Mapela had entrenched himself on the summit of a high kop, consisting of sheer rocky walls on every side. I called for volunteers to storm this fortress, and about 100 men came forward. With these, I went in the night, unseen, to the foot of the mountain. The commando now took off their veldschoen, so as noiselessly to climb the steep gorge that formed the only way to the top, and thus surprise 48 the Kaffirs. I went first with a patrol, and had got half-way up the mountain when we were discovered.

A sentry allowed me to come up quite close to him, and then fired. Fortunately the gun refused. I did not notice the man until I heard the click of the trigger; I aimed and shot him dead at my feet.

Thereupon the Kaffirs who held the gorge began to fire from every side. My gun-carrier fell. I myself ran back as fast as I could to my comrades.

" Forwards ! " I shouted. " On with your veldschoen, and have at them without mercy ! " So the pass was seized and we took up our positions on the top until daybreak. The Kaffirs had retired still further, but charged when they caught sight of the first group of burghers, consisting of about 15

men, preparing for the attack. By the time, however, that they were still fifty paces off, this handful of burghers had been reinforced and now numbered about 100 men. Our fire mowed down the blacks in rows, and they rushed away in wild flight. From the rocky plateau, another road, or rather a ladder of trees, led down to the further side. Here the fugitives flung themselves down, and more were killed in this way than fell in the actual battle. The trees were hung with dead men, for all was thick forest below. Mapela himself escaped.

I had hardly returned from the first unsuccessful expedition against Mapela when, in December 1853, I had again to go on commando, this time against the chief Montsioa, who lived on the hoogeveld between Schoonspruit and Marico, on the Harts River. This chief had taken advantage of the very severe weather, accompanied by a heavy fall of snow, to steal a large number of cattle from the Boers, and had, at the same time, murdered one of the cattle-owners and then fled to Setlagoli in British Bechuanaland. When the Boer commando which had been sent against him reached the neighborhood of Setlagoli, it suddenly found itself in the midst of an enormous swarm of locusts. The Kaffirs had also seen this swarm, and when they saw the dust raised by the approaching commandos, they thought it was the locusts, and allowed the enemy to approach their town without preparing to receive him.

When the commando was close to the town, Commandant General Pretorius sent me [1] to the captain to explain why the commando had come, and to demand that Montsioa should come out to justify himself. The captain, however, was not in the town, and I had to go on to the capital ; and, before I had reached it, the Kaffirs suddenly attacked me and my escort. I was some distance in front of the others, and my position was most critical. My horse was quite exhausted. Flight was out of the question.

[1] Kruger was a commandant, but, in this case, acted as an adjutant to the general. - **Note by the Editor of the German Edition.**]

I rode on at a walking-pace, so as not to attract the attention of the Kaffirs. When the foremost Kaffirs were quite close to me, four burghers came hurrying up, and this first drew the Kaffirs' attention to my person, and they turned against me. I now forced my horse into one last gallop and charged the Kaffirs, to make them think that my horse was still in good condition. This stratagem succeeded; the Kaffirs turned and fled, and I and my four companions got safely away. I took my exhausted horse hack to the other cattle belonging to the commando, and proposed to go on foot, with the others, against the Kaffirs. Commandant Schutte tried to persuade me to relinquish this plan, as, being on foot, the Kaffirs might easily take me prisoner; but I replied: "Most of the Kaffirs are on foot too, and, if it comes to running, the Kaffirs will not catch me easily." When Schutte saw that I was not to be persuaded, he told his groom to give me his horse and return to camp. So I rode on to the battle. The Kaffirs numbered about 500, while the burghers who had gone on ahead to oppose them were only 40 men in all, and of these a few had remained behind with the wagons and the cattle. Our small band, however, managed to cause the Kaffirs considerable loss and to put them to flight. Our losses were only a few wounded.

The commando also succeeded in recapturing the cattle. With the cattle were several Kaffir boys, who were sent back to their town by the general that same evening, under my protection. I was also instructed to tell the chief that the Boers had not come to fight him, but only to fetch the stolen cattle, and that we would come the next day to negotiate about this. I went close up to the town, set the boys free and returned to camp. The released captives delivered their message correctly, but it never came to negotiations, for the chief fled that same night. We did not pursue him, but returned to our farms with the cattle which we had recovered.

Source: http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page72308?oid=643150&sn=Marketingweb+detail&pid=90389&utm_source=Po