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DEFEATING THE BOERS: EARLY APPLICATION OF COUNTERINSURGENCY METHODS DURING THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR

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Exercise Solo Flight

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INTRODUCTION

A war in South Africa would be one of the most serious wars that could possibly be waged. It would be in the nature of a civil war. It would be a long war, a bitter war, and a costly war ... It would leave behind it the embers of a strife which I believe generations would hardly be long enough to extinguish.

- British Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain – *Essential Histories: The Boer War 1899-1902*

Conventional forces throughout history have had to adapt to the particular conflict they are involved in based on the threat and environment. Often the advancement of weaponry or tactics in a combined fight would force the necessary change, however in the case of the South African War, the sheer will of the Boers to “fight in defence of their republics against an empire greedy for land and for the lucrative natural resources in the region”¹ caused them in the latter half of the conflict to resort to guerrilla tactics. These tactics were required to counter the highly trained professional British Forces, which at that time had a history of success in recent campaigns abroad.² The Boer employed modern smoke-free repeating rifles at significant distances which differed from conventional armies advancing in line that the British were used to.³ As a result, adaptation of tactics throughout the conflict needed to occur. The Boers’ transition to irregular warfare further demonstrated the requirement for the British to re-assess their approach to the conflict. Adaptation of tactics and methods on the battlefield, when used appropriately, can yield significant advantages to commanders allowing them to gain momentum and achieve the desired level of success. Significantly shifting the British

¹ Gregory Fremont-Barnes, *Essential Histories: The Boer War 1899-1902* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Osprey Publishing, 2003), 10.

² *Ibid*, 7.

³ Rob McClary, “Learning the Hard Way, or not at all: British Tactical and Strategic Adaptation During the Boer War 1899-1902.” (U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 1999), 3.

conventional methods of warfare to drastic barbarian tactics such as farm burning, concentration camps and starving the Boer fighters from resources, was deemed essential to counter the Boer guerrilla tactics, despite its consequences to the civilians in the region.⁴

Demonstrating the efficacy of an early counter insurgency strategy, this study will focus on the British led defeat of the Boers in the 1899-1902 South Africa War after the Boer transition to Guerrilla warfare. A historical background and timeline of the Boer War will first be presented to offer situational context to the persuasive essay. After comparing guerrilla warfare and insurgency operations, the actions of the Boers following the conventional period of the conflict will be examined to demonstrate the requirement for the shift in the British strategy within the conflict. Emphasis will be placed on the implementation of the British strategy, employing both British and colonial forces to their maximum advantage following the Boer transition to guerrilla tactics in the spring of 1900. Reflecting on the actions of the British Forces, the impact on the Boer resistance will be discussed, demonstrating their inability to maintain sufficient momentum. In conjunction with the aforementioned British actions and impact to the Boers, the analysis will lastly emphasize the post conflict concerns related to the final terms that were agreed upon, the requirements to successfully rebuild the country, and the haunting impact of the decisions made at the time of the war. Although the methods were drastic, it demonstrated that extreme measures were deemed required in order to successfully defeat the guerrilla insurgent actions in a limited period of time. Through the

⁴ Rob McClary, "Learning the Hard Way, or not at all: British Tactical and Strategic Adaptation During the Boer War 1899-1902." (U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 1999), 26.

application of early counterinsurgency techniques the British were able to achieve success in South Africa by forcing the surrender of the Boers.

Settlement and British Influence

The Dutch settled in South Africa as part of the Dutch East India Company in 1652, in order to establish a provision station in the vicinity of Cape of Good Hope.⁵ Settlement was initially formed to provide meats and vegetables to passing vessels but shortly after, the settlers and their slaves relocated inland within South Africa in order to form an independent living lifestyle.⁶ It was these farmers, known as ‘Boers’ who developed their own livelihood in the 18th century and believed that the land was theirs, as god had intended.⁷ They formed a new dialect of Dutch called ‘Afrikaans’, and developed a new race of people called the ‘Afrikaners.’⁸ In 1814, the British annexed the Cape in order to cut off Napoleon’s access to India, and in compensation for their actions, provided Six Million Pounds to Holland.⁹ In the following twenty years, the British forced the abolishment of slavery, of which the Boers significantly resented, as it formed the structure of which their livelihood was based.¹⁰ After further territorial expansion of the Afrikaners in search of new areas to reside, they eventually settled in three communities: in the Transvaal, the region of the Orange Free State, and in Natal. In the

⁵ Gregory Fremont-Barnes, *Essential Histories: The Boer War 1899-1902* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Osprey Publishing, 2003), 13.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Eversley Belfield, *The Boer War* (London, Great Britain: Ebebezer Baylis & Son Ltd, 1975), 5.

⁸ Gregory Fremont-Barnes, *Essential Histories: The Boer War 1899-1902* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Osprey Publishing, 2003), 13.

⁹ Dennis Judd, and Keith Surridge, *The Boer War* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 17.

¹⁰ Rob McClary, “Learning the Hard Way, or not at all: British Tactical and Strategic Adaptation During the Boer War 1899-1902.” (U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 1999), 8.

upcoming years, the British annexed Transvaal from the Afrikaners (1877), kept the region under ‘suzerainty’ (to control foreign affairs and domestic legislation), and defeated the Zulus (Anglo-Zulu War) but were known in the region not as protectors, but as occupiers.¹¹ Throughout this time, diamonds were located in the region, and in 1880, uprising against the British occurred which restored control of Transvaal to the Afrikaners.¹² Following the defeat, the British withdrew from the hostile territory however shortly after this withdrawal, the largest deposits of gold in the world were located near Transvaal and significant British influence and an influx of tens of thousands of fortune seekers ensued.¹³ Control of Transvaal remained under the Afrikaners despite Cecil John Rhodes, British Prime Minister of Cape Colony’s foiled attempt to re-take the Transvaal government with the ‘Jameson Raid’ which was intended to regain British control in 1896.¹⁴ Faced with significant controversy in Britain over the two recent defeats of British Forces and the desire to expand the British Empire across South Africa in order to capitalize on the resources in the region, the British government positioned forces for war. Despite the lengthy efforts to peacefully negotiate British control of the region, the South African War that “had been so long anticipated, dreaded, and desired, had at last begun”.¹⁵

From the onset of the war in October 1899 the British anticipated that the resolution would be swift and relatively easy as they were confident in their abilities and

¹¹ Gregory Fremont-Barnes, *Essential Histories: The Boer War 1899-1902* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Osprey Publishing, 2003), 15.

¹² Dennis Judd, and Keith Surridge, *The Boer War* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 30.

¹³ *Ibid*, 33.

¹⁴ Gregory Fremont-Barnes, *Essential Histories: The Boer War 1899-1902* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Osprey Publishing, 2003), 21-22.

¹⁵ Dennis Judd, and Keith Surridge, *The Boer War* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 51.

experiences gained in previous conflicts. What they did not anticipate was that the British initially had significantly less forces consisting of 27,000 soldiers compared to the Boer force of 38,000 fighters that were better equipped with modern weapons and did not conduct operations in the same manner as the British.¹⁶ The Boers had intended to inflict an early defeat on the British and force the governments back to negotiations.¹⁷ This resulted in the early defeat of British Forces at Stormberg, Magersfontein, and Colenso during what is referred to as 'Black Week' (10, 11 and 15 Dec 1899).¹⁸ Throughout the conflict the British built up their forces to 358,000, which included Regular British Soldiers and colonies from within the United Kingdom, specifically 18,000 from India and 16,600 from Australia, 8,400 from Canada, and 6,500 from New Zealand.¹⁹ The Boer resistance also increased to approximately 50,000 and the two forces fought in significant battles at Paardeberg, Tugela Heights, Doornkop, and Leliefontein. In conjunction with the fall of Bloemfontein and Pretoria, by late 1900 the resolve of the Boers to continue further conventional resistance was low. Boer President Paul Kruger departed the region back to Holland and it was believed to be the culmination point of the conflict. In fact, General Christian De Wet had conceptualized the transition to irregular warfare and the Boer 'bitter enders' resistance triggered a transition to guerrilla warfare.

¹⁶ David Omissi and Andrew Thompson, *The Impact of the South African War* (New York, NY: Palgrave Publishers Ltd, 2002), 7.

¹⁷ Malcom Riall, *Boer War* (London, United Kingdom: Brassey's, 2000), 22.

¹⁸ Lord Carver, *The National Army Museum Book of the Boer War* (London, United Kingdom: Sidgwick & Jackson of Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 1999), 50-52.

¹⁹ Martin Marix-Evans, *The Boer War: South Africa 1899-1902* (Oxford, Great Britain: Osprey Publishing Ltd, 1999), 13.

Guerrilla Warfare and the Boer Insurgency

The transition to guerrilla warfare forced the British Forces in South Africa to change their operational strategy in order to effectively counter the Boers. Guerrilla warfare at that time can be associated with an insurgency as the conventional methods of the conflict ceased and the governmental leadership of the conventional Boer forces departed the conflict. Early Counterinsurgency Doctrine on counter-guerrilla operations defines guerrilla warfare as the “overt combat element of the insurgent operation ... organized under military concepts to conduct military and paramilitary operations”.²⁰ This force typically works towards the goals of the insurgency through irregular warfare techniques including covert and clandestine operations. The guerrilla force in South Africa, commanded by General De Wet was significantly outnumbered by the British but employed guerrilla methods of fighting to continue the conflict for another year and a half with the aspiration to protect their lands and decrease the British desire to participate in a drawn out conflict. Guerrilla forces typically utilize hit and run tactics employing speed, flexibility, and deception to gradually erode the capability and will of the adversary as part of the overall insurgency.²¹ Often the key goal of any insurgency is to overthrow the government, however in this conflict the government in power in the region (Afrikaners) was under threat by the British and when conventional methods of warfare were unsuccessful due to the sheer size and capability of the British Forces, a different strategy needed to be adopted. De Wet’s resistance in the latter half of the conflict, was the last remaining effort of the Afrikaners to retain control of the region. De Wet was regarded in this conflict as the “most elusive commander in the field” and was

²⁰ US Army. Department of Defence, FM 90-8, *Counter-Guerrilla Operations* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1986), 2-1.

²¹ Bard O’Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books Inc, 2005), 35.

compared on a number of occasions to Rommel in the Second World War as he was difficult to locate and defeat.²² De Wet's strategy was to use terrain and manoeuvrability to attack vulnerabilities in the British such as the lines of communication and sustainment of the force. Counterinsurgency Doctrine suggests that in order to achieve successful prolonged operations, an insurgent force must align their efforts with the following principles: gain support for insurgent movement, provide psychological victories, lesson the government control, tie up government resources, and weaken the resolve of government military forces.²³ These principles will subsequently be related to the Boer Insurgency.

De Wet had significant local support for his movement as his forces were operating in the land occupied by Afrikaners for over a century and were fighting for their sovereign interests. Local Afrikaners provided logistical support to the Boer fighters by delivering provisions for sustainment and lodging while the Boers prepared for engagements. The locals aided in concealing the Boer weapons and blending the forces into the communities after engagements.²⁴ This made locating and defeating the Boers challenging by conventional British Forces. The Boers had the ability to move under the cloak of uncertainty and attack at vulnerable locations having a significant psychological and physical effect on their adversaries. The Boers capitalized on their knowledge of the terrain and employed traps and ambushes to their tactical advantage. The effectiveness in conducting hit and run raids even shifted the perspective of conventional Boer leaders

²² John Selby, *The Boer War: A Study in Cowardice and Courage* (Bristol, Great Britain: Bristol Typesetting Co Ltd, 1969), 210.

²³ US Army. Department of Defence, FM 90-8, *Counter-Guerrilla Operations* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1986), 2-2 - 2-3.

²⁴ Raymond Sibbald, *The War Correspondents: The Boer War* (Great Britain: Bramley books, 1997), 179.

such as Louis Botha, instilling increased support from the Boers.²⁵ As one of the most successful leaders in the conventional portion of the war, Botha understood that this would be the most effective manner in order to continue the resistance against the British, and the protection of the Orange Free State.

The Boers attacked the British rail lines of communication and logistic supplies in order to cut off the force's sustainment. At Vaal Station using two considerably strong Boer forces, one would occupy the attention of the British Forces while the other attacked the rail lines and blew up the bridge near Greylingstad.²⁶ The Boers attacked the construction trains, and forced the British to allocate further resources such as the Mounted Infantry and Artillery to the protection of the rail lines.²⁷ This also led to further British convoys required to transport supplies. Without having the ability to move supplies by rail, the Boers targeted logistical convoys on 4 June 1900 near Vredefort Road where the stores and ammunition destined for the depleted Highland Brigade were captured.²⁸ The strategic attacks on convoys and logistical elements reinforced the principle that the Boers forced the British to tie up government resources in the form of manoeuvre units to protect the vulnerable supply lines of communication. As a result, this reduced the British control and decreased the resolve of the conventional forces.

With the requirement to gather their own sustainment resources, Boers conducted many raids of British camps. The British did not anticipate that the Boers could fight such distances and endure great hardships, but in the name of protecting their lands using speed and surprise to their advantage, groups of Boers would attack the camps to secure

²⁵ *Ibid*, 189.

²⁶ Raymond Sibbald, *The War Correspondents: The Boer War* (Great Britain: Bramley books, 1997), 183.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 189.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 188.

the necessary resources to continue operations.²⁹ On 7 June 1900 an eighty man contingent of Boers led by De Wet attacked the British stores depot in Roodewal, resulting in 142 casualties while capturing 486.³⁰ In this raid, the Boers seized significant food and ammunition to sustain their forces which cost upwards of 500,000 British pounds.³¹ It was attacks like these that sustained the Boer Commandos and depleted the resources of the British. This caused the British to focus additional attention on their internal defences and security of their vulnerable logistic supplies.

Continuous attacks by the Boers into the vulnerable underside of the British fighting forces caused a significant shift in warfare forcing the adaptation of a counterinsurgency strategy. It seemed that there was “no end to the havoc that they could create by attacking lines of communication, garrisons, store depots, and the like”.³²

British Strategy

In order to be defeated, the guerrilla must be understood and substantial force must be applied to their weaknesses. As such, the techniques used in one guerrilla conflict may not be successful in another, which places a greater emphasis on understanding how the specific insurgency operates and is supported for prolonged operations. Lord Kitchener, the Commander-in-Chief of British Forces South Africa devised a ruthless shift in the tactics based on the guerrilla warfare actions of the Boers.

²⁹ Rob McClary, “Learning the Hard Way, or not at all: British Tactical and Strategic Adaptation During the Boer War 1899-1902.” (U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 1999), 11.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 24.

³¹ Rob McClary, “Learning the Hard Way, or not at all: British Tactical and Strategic Adaptation During the Boer War 1899-1902.” (U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 1999), 24.

³² Dennis Judd, and Keith Surridge, *The Boer War* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 185.

In order to counter the insurgency the three-prong approach of Kitchener consisted of: scorched earth, internment, and containment as it would affect the Boers directly and also the public support for the Afrikaners.³³ Each of these concepts will be further explained, demonstrating how the British Forces were employed and what actions were taken to fulfill the new strategy. The impact that these actions had on the Boer Commandos will then be examined in the subsequent section.

Scorched Earth

Knowing that the local Afrikaners had been providing assistance to the Boers in the form of provisions and staging locations, Kitchener directed that farms be burned if evidence revealed that they had been supporting the Boer effort.³⁴ Often homes despite flying a white flag of neutrality had been housing Boers, so they were targeted by the British Forces.³⁵ Thousands of farmsteads were destroyed or rendered inhabitable in order to deprive the Boer Commandos any form of sustenance, lodging or ability to gather human intelligence on the British Forces, thus reducing their range of operations. After burning the farms, the livestock was either slaughtered or commandeered by the British Forces. The sheer magnitude of these actions was initially difficult for regular armies to perform as families were removed from their livelihood in order to send a message to the Boers. Over the course of the conflict, a level of dehumanization from the British Forces occurred, in which many of the soldiers viewed their actions as just and

³³ Gregory Fremont-Barnes, *Essential Histories: The Boer War 1899-1902* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Osprey Publishing, 2003), 62.

³⁴ Lord Carver, *The National Army Museum Book of the Boer War* (London, United Kingdom: Sidgwick & Jackson of Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 1999), 168.

³⁵ Carman Miller, *Painting the Map Red: Canada and the South African War 1899-1902* (Africa: University of Natal Press, 1993), 313.

that the families were as much to blame as the Boer Commandos.³⁶ It was also acknowledged by some soldiers that the Boers were often indistinguishable from the civilian population.³⁷ Kitchener justified the reasoning for the farm burning as it cut off the primary method of sustainment of the Boer Commandos, but the actions not only affected the Boer Commandos and civilians, but the forces conducting the destruction. British soldiers initially questioned the relevance of the farm burning as it was quite a barbaric action and was difficult to observe the families when their farms were being destroyed. Overall the farm burning did eventually achieve the desired chokehold on the sustainment of the Boers, but the displacement of families became even more of a substantial factor to deal with.

Internment

Due to the significant numbers of women, children, and elderly evicted from their farms after the devastation by British and colonial forces, refugee camps were established to adequately house the dislodged personnel. Known at the time as concentration camps, similar camps had been employed by the Spanish against Cuban guerrillas with the intent to care and provide protection for the families whose farms and livelihood had been destroyed.³⁸ Moving the families to camps also psychologically impacted the Boer Commandos, as their families (and livelihood after the conflict) were now being directly impacted by the war. An unfortunate consequence of having significant numbers of

³⁶ Dennis Judd, and Keith Surridge, *The Boer War* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 192.

³⁷ Chris Madsen, "Learning the Good and the Bad: Canadian Exposure to British Small War Doctrine in South Africa, 1900-1901" *The U.S. Army and Irregular Warfare, 1775-2007*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2008), 104.

³⁸ Gregory Fremont-Barnes, *Essential Histories: The Boer War 1899-1902* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Osprey Publishing, 2003), 64.

personnel residing in these overcrowded camps was that it was unhygienic and became a breeding ground for disease such as pneumonia, measles, and enteric fever.³⁹ Despite the efforts to provide for the families in the camps, at least 25,000 Afrikaner personnel died in the camps by the end of the war.⁴⁰ This was a bitter consequence for what was considered as an acceptable action to take following the ‘exceptional’ circumstances of farm burning that was deemed required by the British government.⁴¹ Although the camps did provide a degree of stability for the families, it had a significant effect on the Boer Commandos’ will to fight.

Containment

Restricting the freedom of movement of the Boer Commandos and containing their forces was a key contributor to the end of the war. Kitchener focussed attention on adjusting the tactics of his conventional forces, and reinforced the weaker elements of sustainment as it was frequently targeted by the Boers. Instead of using infantry, mounted rifles were tasked to protect the rail and supply lines of communication to ensure the sustainment reached the British Forces due to their increased speed and flexibility.⁴² Kitchener’s forces erected blockhouses made of corrugated iron, sand bags, and stone which were located initially along the rail lines for protection, however they were then connected with barbed wire and telecommunication lines to restrict Boer access to the

³⁹ John Selby, *The Boer War: A Study in Cowardice and Courage* (Bristol, Great Britain: Bristol Typesetting Co Ltd, 1969), 216.

⁴⁰ Dennis Judd, and Keith Surridge, *The Boer War* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 196.

⁴¹ Chris Madsen, “Canadian Troops and Farm Burning in the South African War,” *Canadian Military Journal*, (Summer 2005): 52.

⁴² Carman Miller, *Canada’s Little War* (Toronto, ON: James Lorimer & Company Ltd, 2003), 69.

surrounding area.⁴³ Throughout the conflict, approximately 8,000 blockhouses were erected and spread out as a network across 6,000km of the previously occupied Boer republics.⁴⁴ The blockhouses significantly restricted the Boer freedom of movement, limiting their ability to not only stage for their raids, but also sustain their forces. Arguably, the focus of these increased fortifications was to not only protect Kitchener's sustainment lines, but restrict the Boer Commandos movement so much so that it would lead to the inevitable capture of De Wet. In the attempt to capture De Wet, the British Forces often shaped the movement of the Boer Commandos in a manner that forced them against the blockhouse and wire entanglement lines to cease their hostilities.

Adaptation of British tactics focused on deteriorating the Boer fighters' capacity to continue operations on the physical and psychological planes demonstrated a "distinguishing feature of evolving doctrine ...to deal with irregular opponents who refused to give up in South Africa".⁴⁵ The British had a profound impact on the Boer resistance by reinforcing their own lines of communication and building combat power to take the fight to the Boers, while simultaneously affecting the sustainability of the Boers by targeting the support network. It was these actions that set the conditions for the final battles and the eventual cessation of the conflict.

⁴³ Dennis Judd, and Keith Surridge, *The Boer War* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 214.

⁴⁴ Gregory Fremont-Barnes, *Essential Histories: The Boer War 1899-1902* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Osprey Publishing, 2003), 65.

⁴⁵ Chris Madsen, "Learning the Good and the Bad: Canadian Exposure to British Small War Doctrine in South Africa, 1900-1901" *The U.S. Army and Irregular Warfare, 1775-2007*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2008), 103.

Impact to the Boer Resistance

Using unconventional methods to counter the resistance of the Boers, De Wet and his Boer Commandos were now faced with the consequences of transitioning to guerrilla warfare. Not anticipating the severity of the British response, De Wet was forced to consider the ramifications to his Commandos and also the way of life for the Afrikaners who were caught up in the conflict. The actions of the British and Colonial Forces countered the aforementioned basic principles that the insurgency needed to maintain prolonged operations. The impact of Kitchener's three-prong approach on the Boers will be examined through the physical and psychological factors, restrictive mobility, and forcing the change to the mindset; demonstrating how the drastic barbaric measures played a pivotal role in shaping the end of the conflict. As a result, the effect on the Boers was significant and it was only a matter of time before the resistance would fold, leading the British to victory.

Physical and Psychological Impact

The destruction of farms by the British did not initially have the desired effect on the Boer resistance that the British had intended. It was anticipated that once the supply methods of the Boers were severed, the desire to protect the people would outweigh the resistance, and would thus force a surrender of the Boers. Conversely, the farm burning reinforced the resistance and strengthened the 'bitter ender' resolve of the Boers, to increase their raids and attacks to have a larger impact on the British.⁴⁶ The attacks did increase, however the magnitude of 30,000 farms destroyed over the course of the final years combined with the knowledge that civilians were dying in the concentration camps

⁴⁶ Gregory Fremont-Barnes, *Essential Histories: The Boer War 1899-1902* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Osprey Publishing, 2003), 65.

did force an eventual shift in the Boer perspective.⁴⁷ With the concentration camps over capacity, some civilians were left abandoned and elements of the Boer Commandos were forced to provide the necessary support.⁴⁸ The actions of the British in starving the Boer Commandos from supplies, and disconnecting them from the civilian population who supported them, did achieve the desired effect in the latter half of the guerrilla campaign. After taking prisoners, the Boers could not sufficiently feed the British troops, so they stripped the soldiers of their supplies and released them.⁴⁹ Overall, the continued destruction of farms and livestock throughout the war “made life intolerable both for the families and the commandos themselves”.⁵⁰ This led to the inability of the Boers to maintain irregular operations for a prolonged period of time.

Restrictive Mobility

The Boer’s manoeuvrability was drastically affected by limited resources following the destruction of farms, and the lack of freedom of manoeuvre due to the blockhouse strategy. As previously discussed, they were dependant on the raids of supply lines and British camps for their sustainment, but with the complex network of blockhouses and wire entanglements, their sustainment became significantly more challenging. Notwithstanding the fact the Boers were aware of the British defences, the strategic placement of mounted units such as the Canadian Mounted Rifles to secure vulnerable supply lines became the deterrent as the formations were highly mobile and

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 86.

⁴⁸ Leopold Scholtz, *Why the Boers Lost the War* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 124-125.

⁴⁹ Carman Miller, *Canada’s Little War* (Toronto, ON: James Lorimer & Company Ltd, 2003), 80.

⁵⁰ Lord Carver, *The National Army Museum Book of the Boer War* (London, United Kingdom: Sidgwick & Jackson of Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 1999), 204.

aggressive in the protection of their resources.⁵¹ With significant numbers of British Forces in South Africa and emphasis placed on the sustainment lines, the fight was taken to the Boers. Kitchener's intent was to shape the movement of the Boer forces to the blockhouses, similar to a push line when hunting, but it initially trapped only a fraction of the Boers it was intended for as the techniques was being developed.⁵² Units such as the Lord Strathcona's Horse were directed to locate and capture De Wet while significant masses of British Forces moved in four columns of troops advancing in sweeping motions to capture Boer Commandos.⁵³ These actions commonly referred to as "The New Model Drive" accounted initially for 800 Boer prisoners, including De Wet's son.⁵⁴ The tactical adaptation of the British using the network of blockhouses and massive sweeping movements restricted the movement of the Boers significantly and led to an average of 2,000 Boers captured a month.⁵⁵ The stranglehold by the British was significant as it decreased the operational initiative of the Boers who were only able to achieve a few isolated successes such as at Bakenlaagte and Groenkop.⁵⁶ Regardless of their efforts, the mass of British Forces caused a significant restriction in the Boer's ability to manoeuvre and continue the campaign.

Changing the Mindset

⁵¹ Carman Miller, *Canada's Little War* (Toronto, ON: James Lorimer & Company Ltd, 2003), 69.

⁵² Gregory Fremont-Barnes, *Essential Histories: The Boer War 1899-1902* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Osprey Publishing, 2003), 69.

⁵³ Carman Miller, *Painting the Map Red: Canada and the South African War 1899-1902* (Africa: University of Natal Press, 1993), 343; Dennis Judd, and Keith Surridge, *The Boer War* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 215.

⁵⁴ Leopold Scholtz, *Why the Boers Lost the War* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 127; Dennis Judd, and Keith Surridge, *The Boer War* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 215.

⁵⁵ Martin Marix-Evans, *The Boer War: South Africa 1899-1902* (Oxford, Great Britain: Osprey Publishing Ltd, 1999), 151.

⁵⁶ Leopold Scholtz, *Why the Boers Lost the War* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 126.

Due to the lack of sustainment and restrictions in mobility, the Boers were unable to conduct devastating blows to the British Forces in the last strides of the conflict which shifted the mindset that the Boer resistance could not be victorious. Although the Boers were willing to continue operations under extreme pressures throughout the conflict, without a permanent base to stage from and the livelihood of the Afrikaners being destroyed, the situation became exhausting. Knowing that civilians were aware of the health conditions in the concentration camps they would rather stay on the veldt, which directly affected the Boers who were forced to protect them during the winter months.⁵⁷ With all the hardships imposed by the British, it was arguably the turning point in the campaign when the Boer leadership reflected on what was left to fight for. In letters to Kruger in December 1901, Boer leadership remarked that the “country currently lies in ruins”.⁵⁸ Realizing the situation, this indeed was the ‘bitter end’ and De Wet wrote “What were we to do? To continue the struggle meant extermination. Already our women and children were dying by the thousands, and starvation was knocking at the door – and knocking loudly”.⁵⁹ Knowing that it was over, it was at this moment that the Boer resistance ceased hostile actions and negotiations of their surrender occurred.

Post Conflict

Realizing the war was unwinnable by the Boers, on 15 May 1902 negotiations commenced in Vereeniging with sixty delegates from the Transvaal and Orange Free

⁵⁷ Gregory Fremont-Barnes, *Essential Histories: The Boer War 1899-1902* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Osprey Publishing, 2003), 68.

⁵⁸ Leopold Scholtz, *Why the Boers Lost the War* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 123.

⁵⁹ Martin Marix-Evans, *The Boer War: South Africa 1899-1902* (Oxford, Great Britain: Osprey Publishing Ltd, 1999), 155.

State to ensure that peace would be achievable in South Africa.⁶⁰ Kitchener acknowledged that the Boers did not desire to be part of a British colony, so a generous peace agreement in the form of the Treaty of Vereeniging marked the surrender of the Boers on 31 May 1902.⁶¹ Despite the irregular approach to the latter half of the conflict and the unorthodox methods that caused devastation to the farms and land, the Boers and British found terms that they could agree upon. This demonstrated the desire to rebuild the country despite being under British official influence.

Both sides of the war paid a heavy price based on the number of casualties that were inflicted throughout the conflict. Approximately 7,000 Boers died and British losses amounted to 22,000 in which two-thirds were due to disease.⁶² The war cost the British government over 200 million pounds, and as much as 63,000 Boer families made claims to the government for the devastation caused to the country after the conflict ended.⁶³ The economy was devastated, and the civilian livelihood needed to be re-established. As a result of the controversial but effective counterinsurgency methods employed by Kitchener, the British made plans to rebuild the country and repatriate the families. Costs associated with the remediation and repatriation amounted to approximately 16.5 million pounds and the reconstruction continued for decades.⁶⁴ It is evident that the three-prong strategy imposed by Kitchener was effective in forcing the Boer surrender, but following the conflict significant efforts to rebuild the country were necessary.

⁶⁰ Dennis Judd, and Keith Surridge, *The Boer War* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 287.

⁶¹ Martin Marix-Evans, *The Boer War: South Africa 1899-1902* (Oxford, Great Britain: Osprey Publishing Ltd, 1999), 155.

⁶² Gregory Fremont-Barnes, *Essential Histories: The Boer War 1899-1902* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Osprey Publishing, 2003), 86.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Gregory Fremont-Barnes, *Essential Histories: The Boer War 1899-1902* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Osprey Publishing, 2003), 88.

Throughout the conflict, the decisions made by Kitchener to resort to such barbaric tactics received mixed reviews. Those in support of the Boer War and the British colonization saw the methods as required to cease hostilities in the shortest period of time possible. As a result of the Afrikaners supporting the Boer Commandos, the targeting of civilians was deemed as acceptable by the British Government. With that in mind, there were those aligned with Liberal Party leader Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman that disagreed with Kitchener's barbaric three-prong approach, as civilians and destruction of property should not be targeted by military forces.⁶⁵ In accordance with the 1899, Hague Conventions restricting these types of actions, the opposition party used this argument to degrade the British Forces action in South Africa.⁶⁶ Kitchener acknowledged the terrible conditions in the camps and worked to resolve the nutrition and medical concerns.⁶⁷ This as a result, added to the mixed degree of public support in the United Kingdom. Despite Kitchener's methods, the government was aware of the British actions in South Africa and the methods were deemed justified as the Afrikaners were supporting the insurgency. If the conflict lasted much longer however, the controversial methods may have forced the British Government to end the conflict.⁶⁸ Fortunately the actions by the British did eventually lead to the Boer surrender which led to the end of the devastation and further suffering.

CONCLUSION

⁶⁵ Donald Lowry, *South African War Reappraised* (Manchester, NY: Manchester University Press, 2000), 195.

⁶⁶ Michael Lackman, "The British Boer War and the French Algerian Conflict Counterinsurgency for Today." (U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 2006), 25.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Dennis Judd, and Keith Surridge, *The Boer War* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 11-12.

Throughout the Boer War (1899-1902), the British successfully adapted their tactics to the changing methods of warfare by the Boer forces. Commencing in a conventional approach, the Boers quickly realized that they did not have the size or strength to fight the British once they had massed their forces in South Africa. The transition to guerrilla warfare in 1900, led to many Boer victories by severing British supply lines, attacking camps, and sustainment facilities. Realizing the shift in warfare, and understanding what elements supported the Boer insurgency, Kitchener's three-prong approach of scorched earth, internment, and containment were a bold response as a counterinsurgency strategy. These actions by the British eventually forced the turning point in the war, leading to the victory by the British and colonial forces. Overall, this demonstrated that this counterinsurgency strategy enabled the British to force the surrender of the Boers achieving the desired end state making the Afrikaners part of a British Crown Colony.

As evident in this analysis, the British intent of colonizing South Africa did not come without challenges or significant costs. This study has identified that adaptation of tactics to counter guerrilla acts, not only affects the opposing forces but also the civilian population and the country where the conflict takes place. It is worthy to note however that with any counterinsurgency conflict, once the adversary has been defeated, the ground must be held in order for reconstruction to occur. In the case for South Africa, it took decades to rebuild the Country's livelihood and despite the cessation of hostilities, the aggressive actions of Kitchener and his forces will never be forgotten.

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