

I. Schrøder-Nielsen, *Among the Boers in Peace and War* (edited by I. Rudner in collaboration with Bill Nasson)

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Ingvald Schrøder-Nielson was a Norwegian who came to South Africa in August 1889 at the age of 27. He was trained as a telegrapher, but worked in the Western Transvaal as an assistant land-surveyor. He kept a diary, which was confiscated by his British captors during the Anglo-Boer War of 1899 to 1902, and he published his reminiscences in Norway in 1925 as *Blandt Boerne firedog krig* (Among the Boers in Peace and War). In 1990 Jalmar and lone Rudner completed a rough translation of the book. (They also translated and edited a number of accounts of earlier travels in southern Africa by Scandinavians; and three of these books were published by the Van Riebeeck Society.) Jalmar Rudner passed away in 2003, but lone revised and edited the Schrøder-Nielson manuscript. She was assisted with the editing process by Bill Nasson, who also wrote an excellent introduction to the book (“South Africa’s Modern Great War”, pp 11–20).

In Part I of the book (pp 23-60), Schrøder-Nielson describes his experiences in South Africa before the Anglo-Boer War broke out in October 1899; his trip from Cape Town to Rustenburg; and his work as an assistant land-surveyor in the Western Transvaal bushveld. He elaborates on the living and working conditions among the Boers, and as lone Rudner correctly points out in the Foreword, his “narrative is straightforward and honest, [and] deals compassionately and sometimes light-heartedly with the rural folk and their ways” (p 8). In Part II of the publication (pp 61–91), Schrøder-Nielson describes how he experienced the first few months of the

Anglo-Boer War, from where he was residing at Hill Side. This includes references to the Scandinavian corps of volunteers who fought on the side of the Boers and suffered severe casualties at the Battle of Magersfontein on 11 December 1899.

Schrøder-Nielson came to respect the Afrikaner (Boer) people for standing up to British imperialism; and in due course, he decided to join them in their liberation struggle. While most foreign volunteers were only in the field with the Boers during the first three (semi-)conventional phases of the war, and left after the British occupied the Boer capital cities (since the general impression was that the war was now over and that the British had won), Schrøder-Nielson joined the Boers in the field when the guerrilla phase (i.e. the fourth and final, very long phase of the war) had already started.

In Part III of his book (pp 92–169), he describes the Boer army during the guerrilla phase of the conflict; his role as part of a Boer commando near Mamagotla, west of Krugersdorp, and his baptism of fire. He refers to the British scorched-earth policy and the concomitant establishment of camps for civilians (which this reviewer prefers to call internment camps rather than concentration camps, so as to make a clear distinction between the camps of the Anglo-Boer War and the (extermination) camps of the Second World War). He also comments on the British employment of armed black people. He describes the battle at Vlakfontein (29 May 1901; not 30 May as indicated by Schrøder-Nielson, or as in note 69), as well as the battle at Moedwil (30 September 1901). He sheds light on life in the field and how he and his fellow guerrillas trekked around, reconnoitring, but also doing all they could to avoid being cornered and captured by the (numerically) vastly superior British forces, who were supported by those Boers who had forsaken the republican cause and joined the British, as well as by black people who had been recruited by the British Army.

Shortly after the battle at Moedwil, Schrøder-Nielson was captured by the British. In Part IV of his book (pp 170–201), he describes his experiences as a prisoner of war (POW). He wrote poignantly of the last hours and execution of the Dutch volunteer Piet Schuil, a young fellow POW, on trumped-up charges. Schrøder-Nielson was himself threatened with execution and was moved from one prison to another: from Rustenburg to Krugersdorp, then to Johannesburg, to Pretoria, to Ladysmith, and from there to Durban, before finally being incarcerated in POW camps on the Bermuda Islands: first on Hawkins Island, and then on Burt's Island. There, on 2 June 1902, the POWs received the news that peace had been declared on 31 May. On 12 July 1902, Schrøder-Nielson left Bermuda and sailed to New York, and from there returned to Norway.

Ione Rudner, in collaboration with Bill Nasson, annotated the text. In this regard, see pp 202–217 for 106 annotations in the form of endnotes, which – ideally – should have been printed as footnotes, enabling the reader to read the text and notes together more easily. It is a pity that over and above the information contained in the reminiscences, the editors have not

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supplied any other biographical information with regard to Schrøder-Nielson. Where in Norway was he born; what did he do before he came to South Africa; what did he do after the war, and when did he die?

These comments aside, the translators and editors must be commended for preparing the little-known but fascinating story of Ingvar Schrøder-Nielson for publication. Narratives like this one vividly bring to life the experiences of “ordinary” people enmeshed in terrible conflicts. Africana Publishers of Cape Town also deserve credit for publishing this noteworthy manuscript, 110 years after the end of the Anglo-Boer War. The publication includes a map and 24 apt photographs and other illustrations, including a group photograph of Schrøder-Nielson and six fellow POWs on Burt’s Island, Bermuda (p 194).

Anyone interested in the history of the old Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR) on the eve of the Anglo-Boer War, as well as in the conflict of 1899 to 1902, and – especially – in the experiences of the ordinary person during this period, cannot afford not to read this fascinating account. The book deserves to be read by a wide audience, and should also be part of any worthwhile Africana collection.

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