

## Pietermaritzburg in the Great War: corporate patriotism and civic sacrifice

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### Perspective and sources

This article is an account of the civic war effort of the city of Pietermaritzburg in the Great War. It is based on corporation records in the Pietermaritzburg Repository of the KwaZulu-Natal Archives,<sup>1</sup> with additional information from the *Corporation Year Books* and *Natal Directories* as well as several other works on the war period. Its perspective therefore is largely that of the town council and public officials, and its focus is on the maintenance of public morale, the raising of funds for war-related purposes, and the recruitment and support of men for military service.<sup>2</sup>

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1. The corporation records in the Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository comprise the Minute Books of the Town Council and its committees and subcommittees and the Letter Books of the Town Clerk. The records of the corporation departments are not on deposit; it would appear that they are retained in the various departments, if they still exist.
  2. The onset of the centenary of the war has been accompanied by a revival in historical scholarship, manifest in a range of books and articles. Two international societies have been formed with dedicated journals. Much of the literature is concerned with the "home front", but relatively little of it pertains to South Africa. Surveying the last quarter century, one finds, apart from general political and specifically military histories, only one book, B. Nasson, *Springbooks on the Somme: South Africa in the Great War 1914-1918* (Penguin, Johannesburg, 2007) which deals with civil society and civilians during the war. H. Phillips, "Black October": The Impact of the Spanish Influenza Epidemic of 1918 on South Africa", *Archives Year Book for South African History*, 53, 1 (Government Printer, Pretoria, 1990) falls within the period, but is narrowly focused, as the title indicates. The periodical literature is more plentiful. B. Nasson has written "A Great Divide: Popular Responses to the Great War in South Africa", *War and Society*, 12, 1, 1994, pp 47-64; and "War Opinion in South Africa, 1914", *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 23 2, 1995, pp 248-276. J. Lambert has written "Britishness, South Africanness and the First World War", in P. Buckner and R.D. Francis (eds), *Rediscovering the British World* (University of Calgary Press, Calgary, 2005), pp 283-304; "Munitions factories ... turning out a constant supply of living material": White South African Elite Boys' Schools and the First World War", *South African Historical Journal*, 51, 2004, pp 67-85; and "South African British? Or Dominion South African? The Evolution of an Identity in the 1910s and 1920s", *South African Historical Journal*, 43, 2000, pp 197-222. Similarly, little appears on Natal: K. Hiralal, "The Impact of the First World War on the Indian Commercial Class", *Historia*, 46, 2, 2001, pp 426-440; G. Vahed, "Give Till it Hurts': Durban's Indians and the First World War", *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, 19, 2001, pp 41-60; P.S. Thompson, "The Great War", in chapter 1 of *The British Civic Culture of Natal South Africa 1902-1961* (Brevitas, Howick, 1999), pp 15-24; and "The Natal Home front in the Great War (1914-1918)", *Historia*, 56, 1, 2011, pp 101-132. There are tangential references to local African politics in the period in N. Cope, *To Bind the Nation: Solomon kaDinuzulu and Zulu Nationalism, 1913-1933* (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1993); and H. Hughes, *First President: A Life of John Dube, Founding President of the ANC* (Jacana, Auckland Park, 2011). There are several works on the British home front which, while not dealing with South Africa at all are relevant because English-speaking Natal mirrored attitudes and actions "at home" in many ways. These include A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (Macmillan, London, 1965, 1989); A. Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008); M.C. Hendley, *Organized Patriotism and the Crucible of War: Popular Imperialism in Britain, 1914-1932* (McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal and Kingston, 2012); and C. Pennell, *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012).

Pietermaritzburg was the capital of the province of Natal. It had been the capital of the Colony of Natal, which became part of the Union of South Africa in 1910. In spite of its Dutch name the dominant polity of the city was British in background, culture and outlook. It was perfectly natural that its support of the mother country on the outbreak of the war was instantaneous and unconditional.

The city was a self-regulating community under the control of a British colonial bourgeoisie. Its administration and operation were governed by a town council, which elected a mayor and deputy mayor and appointed officials. The wartime mayors, Percy H. Taylor JP and MPC and (from August 1918) Albert E. Harwin JP, provided real leadership in the prolonged crisis. The city was divided into eight wards, each of which elected two councillors, and the sixteen constituted the town council. The council had several committees -- Town Clerk's and Town Treasurer's, Public Works and Health, Police, Fire Brigade, Electric, Tramways, Market, Togg – which had oversight of the various departments that maintained and developed the public facilities on which the community depended. Most important, with general oversight, was the Finance and General Purposes Committee, of which all councillors were members; it normally met weekly and functioned as a committee of the whole.<sup>3</sup>

Governance remained a European preserve, even though people of European origin (16 731) made up just under half the borough's total population of 34 881 in May 1918; because the historical accidents of settlement were such that other groups – Coloureds enjoying white privileges (1 038), Indians (7 604) and Africans (9 519)<sup>4</sup> were deemed to lack the knowledge and cohesion necessary to operate a modern, developing city at this time.

Pietermaritzburg was a compact city, laid out in a classical rectangular street plan approximately 1 700 by 3 000 metres, with the government and business purposefully set at the centre. In 1914 the city was still suffering from the economic depression following the South African War and from the loss of status as a colonial capital following the Union of South Africa. Efforts to obtain financial compensation for that loss from the central government in Pretoria came to nought. The rateable value of the city fell by 45 percent between 1905 and 1914, and property rates were considered high compared to other South African cities. Only in 1913/1914 did the town council finally manage to budget a small credit balance, and it did so by ruthlessly cutting new public works. Efforts to attract industry failed, although the city's position as the emporium of the Natal interior assured a modest property sustaining various trades and professions, and the town council characteristically represented the commercial and professional elite.

The city was also considered an educational centre, with a university college and technical institute, numerous public and private schools, and a library, museum and art gallery. It has been suggested that the elite really did not want

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3. For the structure and functions of the Corporation see the Corporation of the City and Borough of Pietermaritzburg, *Corporation Year Book for the Year Ending July 31st, 1915* (P. Davis, Pietermaritzburg, 1915), and subsequent volumes for 1916–1919 (hereafter CYB with the year); and the section on Pietermaritzburg in *The Natal Directory 1915* (P. Davis, Pietermaritzburg, 1914), and subsequent volumes for 1915–1918 (hereafter ND). The terms borough, city, corporation, and town were used almost interchangeably, as the first title indicates.

4. CYB 1918, p 47.

industry in the city. People then, as now, thought of Pietermaritzburg as a pleasant, wholesome place to live.

One other thing should be borne in mind about Pietermaritzburg 100 years ago. It was also a compact society – or at least the European community, for which information is sufficient, was. Electricity was being used extensively and petrol-driven vehicles were more common, but they did not predominate yet. Communication depended largely on the printed and spoken word. Telegraph was for distance; telephones were still a novelty. Government and business offices in proximity relied on messengers. All major business in town was confined to six blocks within a ten-minute walk of the Town Hall. Indeed, one could walk across town in half an hour. There were fourteen newsagents downtown, and two major newspapers published editions twice a day (and occasionally “specials”, e.g. with fresh war news). People *read* news and passed it by word of mouth quickly. This meant that the highly conformist English-speaking community could be influenced and manipulated by the authorities relatively easily. Our sources portray an unbounded public enthusiasm for Britain’s war at the outbreak; but, as we shall see, they cannot do so for long.<sup>5</sup>

### Commitment

On Monday 27 July 1914 both Pietermaritzburg newspapers, the morning *Natal Witness* and the evening *Times of Natal*, headlined Austria-Hungary’s declaration of war on Serbia. Throughout the following week the newspapers carried war reports from capitals of Europe. On Monday 3 August headlines read: “Germany Draws the Sword. Declares War on Russia” (*Witness*) and “Germany and Austria versus Russian and France. Britain Vigilant” (*Times*).

The next day, Tuesday 4 August, both newspapers reported that an important statement from London was imminent. There was no longer any doubt what Britain would do. Germany was attacking France through Belgium, whose sovereignty Britain had guaranteed, and Britain demanded Germany halt its aggression.<sup>6</sup>

Britain’s ultimatum to Germany expired at midnight, and Britain – and the Empire – was at war with Germany. On Wednesday 5 August the news “spread like wildfire” through town, creating restless agitation, although, observed the *Times* correspondent, “everyone accepted the inevitable with the calm so characteristic of the average Britisher at a time of great national tension”.<sup>7</sup> The full speech of Sir Edward Grey, the foreign secretary, to parliament in London, justifying Britain’s entry into the war on the side of the Allies, was printed in full in newspapers on 6 August.

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5. This sketch of Pietermaritzburg, and more particularly its European community for which the source material is ample, on the eve of the war is admittedly impressionistic and therefore subject to criticism and correction. However, it is broadly based, on the reading of the *Corporation Year Books* and *Directories* (cited above) for the war years, and on samplings of the local press (cited below) for July/August 1914, May 1915, June/July 1916, and May and November 1918. There is some information of incidental interest to be found in J. Laband and R. Haswell (eds), *Pietermaritzburg 1838–1988: A New Portrait of an African City* (University of Natal Press and Shuter & Shooter, Pietermaritzburg, 1988), especially pp 90, 92, 144 and 238.

6. *Times of Natal*, 4 August 1914.

7. *Times of Natal*, 5 August 1914.

On the evening of Saturday 8 August there was a public gathering in the town gardens, in the centre of town, where the band of the Natal Carbineers played patriotic airs.<sup>8</sup> Four days later, on the 12th, there was a mass meeting in the town hall; there were patriotic speeches, and the following resolutions were adopted unanimously:

That this Mass Meeting of the Citizens of Pietermaritzburg offers its wholehearted support to, and co-operation with, the Motherland in her noble determination to fulfil her international obligations; to maintain the integrity of the British Empire and to safeguard the liberties of mankind against the wanton and unjustifiable aggression of Germany.

That this meeting pledges itself to assist in every possible way in any move that may be deemed necessary by the authorities for the safety and welfare of the Empire, and that His Worship be requested to ascertain from the Government in what form material aid can best be rendered by the City of Pietermaritzburg.<sup>9</sup>

Subsequently there was a large and enthusiastic meeting of women, which adopted unanimously the following resolution:

That this Public Meeting of women of Pietermaritzburg expresses its sympathy to the Motherland in the present International crisis and desires to offer assistance in the alleviation of suffering and distress and thereby in whatever form it may be most acceptable to the Authorities.<sup>10</sup>

The mayoress wired it to the prime minister to transmit to the queen; and also cabled the matron in chief at the War Office in London: "How can women of Pietermaritzburg help?"<sup>11</sup>

## Mobilisation

The imperial government asked the government of the Union of South Africa to assume the duty of protecting the coast and borders of the country against invasion or attacks by the enemy, thus relieving the imperial garrison of 6 000 of that duty. The Union government agreed to do so, and mobilised the Active Citizen Force for the purpose.<sup>12</sup> The South Staffordshire Regiment, which had garrisoned

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8. *Natal Witness*, 8 August 1914. *Times of Natal*, 8 and 10 August 1914. See also J.S. Bettie, "Natal and the Great War", in *A Century of Progress in Natal 1824–1924* (Natal Witness, Pietermaritzburg, 1924), p 102.
  9. CYB 1915, 23. See also D. Child, *Charles Smythe: Pioneer, Premier and Administrator of Natal* (Struik, Cape Town, 1973), p 226.
  10. KwaZulu-Natal Archives, Pietermaritzburg, Archives of the Corporation of Pietermaritzburg, 3/PMB: 3/1/93 ("Letter Book, 20 March, 1914 to 19 November 1914"), pp 66–12. All archival records cited in this paper are in the Pietermaritzburg repository and the archive 3/PMB, so these will not be cited hereafter. Letter Books are in record group 3/1 and hereafter will be cited by volume number only.
  11. 3/1/93, p 663.
  12. Union of South Africa, General Staff, Defence Headquarters, Pretoria, *The Union of South Africa and the Great War 1914–1918: Official History* (Government Printing and Stationery Office, 1924), p 211. This work will be cited hereafter simply as *Official History*. Union of South Africa, Union Office of Census and Statistics, *Official Year Book of the Union and of Basutoland, Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland, No. 5 – 1922. Containing statistics Mainly for the Period 1910–1922* (Government Printing and Stationery Office, Pretoria, 1923), p 392. Official Year Books will be cited hereafter as OYB followed by number and year, thus OYB 5/22. P. Scrivenor, "South Africa: Rebellion and Invasion", *History of the First World War*, 1, 13, p 351.

Fort Napier, at the upper end of town, was withdrawn for service overseas. On 12 August its drums sounded retreat outside the town hall for the last time.<sup>13</sup>

In Natal the Active Citizen Force consisted of former colonial units which had been carried over into Union service.<sup>14</sup> Pietermaritzburg was the headquarters of Military District No. 4, including all of the Natal Province except the Durban and Inanda magisterial divisions which constituted District No. 5.<sup>15</sup>

The 1st Mounted Rifles (the 1st Wing of the Natal Carbineers) was mobilised at regimental headquarters in Pietermaritzburg on 8 August. They encamped at the top of Alexandra Park (where there is now a sports stadium), and received equipment and training. The city laid on water in pipes to the camp free of charge. The men were also allowed free use of the town baths (except on Monday and Friday, which were ladies' days); and the mayor asked the commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel William Tanner, to let as many as could be spared attend a Saturday football match in the lower part of the park, since the gate would be in support of the Mayor's War Relief Fund. It was rumoured that the Carbineers would be sent to German South West Africa. On the night of Saturday 5 September, the regiment left by train, no destination given.<sup>16</sup>

The imperial government had also suggested that the Union government take German South West Africa, which was justified as a defensive measure. The first troops sailed on the night of 14 September, and in due course others, including the 1st Mounted Rifles, moved to the border.<sup>17</sup>

In the flurry of mobilisation, Active Citizen Force units were recruited to strength, but many more men wanted to join up than existing units could accommodate. Thus was organised a special service unit, the Natal Light Horse, which absorbed the remainder. Volunteers began arriving in Pietermaritzburg before the authorities started enrolment on 1 September. They were a mixed lot, and a number were without means, which aroused some concern among townspeople. Their camp was on the polo ground, a flat area near the railway yards. Clothing, equipment and arms were issued from old Natal Militia stores, and horses were purchased locally. The town council discussed whether to make a grant of money or to buy horses for the regiment. A proposal to give 100 guineas was lost, but a fund was set up to receive public contributions.<sup>18</sup>

When the regiment was presented with its colours on 18 September, the mayor, Percy Taylor, said that since Natalians had provided so many of the horses

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13. Bettle, "Natal and the Great War", p 102 and p 51.

14. See ND 1913, pp 166–169; and 1915, pp 1609–1611.

15. ND 1915, pp 1609–1610; and 1916, pp 1583–158. Also OYB 1/17, p 339.

16. G.T. Hurst (compiler), *Short History of the Volunteer Regiments of Natal and East Griqualand. Past and Present* (Knox, Durban, 1945), p 27. F.N. Broome, *Not the Whole Truth* (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1962), pp 68–69. A.F. Hattersley, *Carbineer: The History of the Royal Natal Carbineers* (Gale & Polen, Aldershot, 1950), pp 51–52. Child, *Smythe*, pp 226–227. 1/1/9 ("Town Council Minutes 1911–1921", p 343. See also 3/1/93, pp 685 and 723; 7/11/8 ("Minute Book.Finance etc Committee. 19 March 1914 to 25 September 1915"), p 52. Hereafter books are cited by number (without dates).

17. J. Meintjes, *General Louis Botha: A Biography* (Cassell, London, 1973), pp 221–225. Scrivenor, "South Africa", p 351.

18. Hurst, *Short History*, pp 142–143; 7/11/18, p 52; 7/10/16, 29 September and 6 October 1914; 7/12/7 ("Minute Book.Sub-Committees. 3" [1914–1916], p 68. Hereafter books are cited by number (without dates).

it was appropriate that the regiment should receive its equipment and colours in the provincial capital.

Shortly afterward the regiment entrained for the Northern Cape. The Inspector of Nuisances reported that the regiment had left the polo ground in such a condition that he advised it not be used again as a camping ground.<sup>19</sup>

On the evening of 23 September a public meeting – the largest ever held in Pietermaritzburg according to the mayor – expressed, unanimously and enthusiastically, its “highest appreciation” of the prime minister’s ‘heroic action ... in the present crisis’.<sup>20</sup> The *Witness* roundly condemned the Nationalist opposition, the more so when dissident Afrikaner factions in the Orange Free State and the Transvaal rebelled in October.<sup>21</sup> On 17 October Prime Minister Botha appealed for 300 Natal men to augment his Transvaal commando to 3 000. The 2nd Squadron of the 3rd Mounted Rifles and the Durban Light Infantry were mobilised and sent to the Free State.<sup>22</sup> On Trafalgar Day (21 October) there was a religious service and patriotic address in the town hall. Another large meeting in the hall, chaired by G. F. Macfarlane, founded a Maritzburg Defence Association, and the *Witness* declared that the rebellion made it imperative that every able-bodied man be ready for any eventuality.<sup>23</sup>

The administrator of Natal, Charles Smythe, remarked on 28 October that requests for weapons were coming in from all quarters. He considered forming a Town Guard of civil servants, but there were only 100 carbines available.<sup>24</sup> On 29 October the town clerk asked the staff officer of the Military District for the loan of twenty-four rifles and ammunition for use by the borough police. The Borough Engineer wanted police to be stationed near the Waterworks and to patrol the catchment area during the crisis. He was instructed to confer with the chief constable on 3 November, and presumably Defence lent the rifles, for the arrangements were made.<sup>25</sup> The remainder of the 3rd Mounted Rifles (Umvoti Mounted Rifles) were mobilised on 27 October and proceeded on 28 October to Pietermaritzburg, where they were equipped at the Drill Hall. The Ministry of Defence wired the commanding officer on 30 October: “Natal at present not menaced. ... You will be advised of any changes in position of Rebels and Loyal commandos ... which may affect Natal.” The Mounted Rifles left Pietermaritzburg for duty upcountry during the next few days.<sup>26</sup> Botha announced that the rebellion had been crushed on 10 December.<sup>27</sup>

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19. CYB 1915, pp 24–26; Hurst, *Short History*, p 143; 7/10/16, 29 September and 6 October 1914.
  20. A.J. van Wyk, “Politiekwoelinge in Natal 1910–1915” (PhD thesis, University of the Orange Free State, 1977), pp 268–269. See also 3/1/93, pp 786, 792, 801.
  21. Van Wyk, “Politiekwoelinge”, pp 269–271. The *Witness* pursued a vindictive line against the rebels, and printed and abetted an article by John Maydon, a former colonial minister and an extreme patriot, savaging the National Party opposition in parliament as secret traitors. See Van Wyk, “Politiekwoelinge”, p 285; and 3/1/93, p 813.
  22. A. J. Du Plessis, *The Umvoti Mounted Rifles 1864–1975* [the regiment, Greytown] 1975), pp 112–116. M. Coghlan, *Toujours Pret. The Umvoti Mounted Rifles ... 1864–2004* (Umvoti Mounted Rifles Comrades Association, Durban, 2012), pp 155–158.
  23. Van Wyk, “Politiekwoelinge”, p 270.
  24. Child, *Smythe*, pp 229–230.
  25. 3/1/93, p 429; 7/10/16, 13 August and 3 November 1914; 7/11/18, p 78; 4/2/21 (“Minute Register 1914”) pp 903 and 916. Hereafter books are cited by numbers (without dates).
  26. Coghlan, *Toujours Pret*, p 156.
  27. Van Wyk, “Politiekwoelinge”, p 285.

The right wing of the 2nd Battalion of the Durban Light Infantry, under Major W.P.M. Henderson, was also ordered to Pietermaritzburg on 6 November, but for the purpose of guarding Germans being interned at Fort Napier.<sup>28</sup> The town council found their presence reassuring and offered civic hospitality. The battalion remained until 23 January 1915, when the Defence Force opened another camp in Alexandra Park for the receiving, drilling and equipping of recruits.<sup>29</sup>

On 4 December the Durban *Natal Mercury* reckoned that almost 6 000 Natal men were in military service, almost a third of men available.<sup>30</sup> Altogether, Military District No. 4 provided about 1 674 officers and men (District No. 5 provided 1 238) for the Active Citizen Force during the first year of the war.<sup>31</sup>

### Relief and comforts

The national government assumed responsibility for the raising, training and employment of military forces, but local government had an important role in the war effort. The voluntary support of the citizenry was essential in sustaining morale. The energies of men and women who could not fight were channelled into providing aid and comforts for the troops and looking after the welfare of their dependents. The corporation and burgesses of Pietermaritzburg set an example in their contributions of time, money and work.

On Monday 10 August 1914 the town council made an appeal to citizens to subscribe funds for the relief of the wounded and dependents of the deceased as a result of the war. The council donated 100 guineas, the mayor and deputy mayor ten guineas each, and in two days over £1 000 was subscribed. This was the basis of the Mayor's War Relief Fund, which was established in the course of the week. The list of subscribers was sent to others who had not (yet) subscribed as an encouragement to do so, and it became the accepted practice to have the names of contributors to war funds published in the local newspapers. By 15 August over £2 000 had been subscribed.<sup>32</sup>

The Mayor's War Relief Fund had two branches. One, the Prince of Wales Fund, was for the relief of sufferers at "home" (as Britain was often called), and another £1 000 was cabled home early in September. The other branch, which proved the more popular, was for the relief of distress in South Africa. A Consultative Committee and an Investigative Committee had oversight of the Fund. On 24 September the former fixed the rate of payment at £3 per annum per woman and £1 per child under twelve years, plus £4 for rental of a house. (If the recipient received another allowance, then that amount would be deducted from the grant.) The payment would be in cash, unless the Investigative Committee determined otherwise.<sup>33</sup>

A short-lived component of the Mayor's War Relief Fund was the Imperial Mealie Fund, which called on farmers for a contribution in kind. The general

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28. 3/1/94, p 159.

29. A.C. Martin, *The Durban Light Infantry*, 2 vols (The Regiment, Durban, 1969), vol. 1, p 193. Coghlan, *Toujours Pret*, p 150. Du Plessis, *Umvoti Mounted Rifles*, p 117.

30. OYB 1/18, p 373.

31. OYB 2/18, p 374.

32. CYB 1915, p 22; 3/1/93, pp 616, 624, 625, 649; 4/2/21, pp 467, 276. *Times of Natal*, 10 August 1914.

33. 3/1/93, pp 722, 742, 820; and 94, p 634.

manager of the railways ordered that railage be free of charge to Pietermaritzburg, where the mealies were carted to the corporation stores, and the storekeeper issued certificates for them, also indicating to which branch of the main fund they were to be credited. The mealies would be sold at current market rates and the money banked accordingly. (There seems to have been an impression among some of the contributors that bags of mealies would actually be shipped to England.) Bags of mealies were received at the corporation stores and sent to the market until the end of October. (No final tally of the number has been found.)<sup>34</sup>

The Mayor's War Relief Fund was not the only war fund. A women's meeting was held and established the Maritzburg Women's War Relief Fund. The organisers arranged for a street sale of flowers on 29 August and concerts in the town hall on 30 August and 5 September. The town hall subcommittee allowed them use the hall free of charge.<sup>35</sup>

The *Natal Witness* launched a Shilling-per-week Fund for the provision of tobacco and other small needs of the troops. In eight weeks it supplied 39 000 cigarettes, 12 000 cheroots, 250 cigars, 410 pipes, 152 tins and 2 658 pouches of tobacco, and 4 896 boxes of matches, as well as 60 razors, some other small items, and periodicals. In December it called for a thousand contributions for Christmas, and in a week received an amount in excess of that.<sup>36</sup>

A little later, funds were opened for Belgian War Relief, for Belgian Children, and for War Refugees in France.<sup>37</sup>

The Mayor's War Relief Fund anticipated the establishment of the Governor-General's Fund, whose object was "to relieve any distress caused to persons who have or are called out, or who volunteer, in the service of His Majesty during the present War, or to their dependents resident in the Union." The Central Committee straightaway sought to absorb about 120 local funds already established nationwide.<sup>38</sup>

The mayor accepted membership of the Central Committee of the Governor-General's Fund, and at the end of September the Mayor's War Relief Fund Consultative Committee agreed to affiliate with the Governor-General's Fund Natal Section, on condition that the money was used for dependents of men on active service. The Mayor's Fund then merged with the Governor-General's Fund. Robert Dunlop became the secretary of the Natal branch, and a local committee was appointed on 28 January 1915. Donations were received in the name of the Mayor's Fund until 22 January, when the mayor forwarded a cheque for £2 654.18s.7d to Dunlop. Altogether the Mayor's War Relief Fund had collected £4 834, of which £1 623 was remitted to the Prince of Wales Fund.<sup>39</sup>

The South African Red Cross Society also assumed a wartime responsibility. On 21 August it appealed through the press for assistance in

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34. 3/1/93, pp 676, 682, 694, 722, 751, 751, 754, 818, 827, 870, 874, 922, 923, 940, 941; and 94, p 125.

35. See 3/1/93, pp 692, 693; 4/2/21, pp 704, 708; 7/12/7, p 63.

36. Van Wyk, "Politiekewoelinge", pp 259 and 269.

37. 3/1/93, pp 915, and 3/1/94, p 931; 7/12/8, p 21. See also CYB 1915, p 27.

38. OYB 1/17, pp 340-341.

39. CYB 1915, p 22; 3/1/93, pp 688, 730, 747, 837, 846, 868; and 3/1/94, pp 165, 176, 278.



carrying out "works of relief for the sick and wounded in war".<sup>40</sup> On or before 24 August the mayoress received a circular on forwarding comforts for troops and hospitals, presumably in collaboration with the Red Cross.<sup>41</sup>

The provision of aid and comforts for the troops was done by the South African Gift and Comforts Organisation Committee, appointed by the prime minister and based in Cape Town,

to co-ordinate, assist, and direct all public efforts in South Africa which are not covered by the work performed by the Governor-General's Fund and the Red Cross Society [namely]:  
(1) for the supplying of gifts and comforts for the use of the South African forces, whether in Europe or in Africa;  
(2) for the rendering of such similar assistance as may possible to His Majesty's Government for the forces of the Empire.

Branches of the organisation were established in the provinces. In Natal the Maritzburg Women's Patriotic League, with headquarters in Pietermaritzburg, agreed to act as the provincial branch.<sup>42</sup>

Early in September the Maritzburg Women's War Relief Fund Committee apparently underwent a transformation to become the Maritzburg Women's Patriotic League. The subscription lists of the fund were given to the Patriotic League on 21 September, and the fund ceased to operate by late November. The Patriotic League was raising funds by early March 1915. In his report for the corporate year (ending 31 July 1915) the mayor acknowledged the 'indefatigable' efforts of the Patriotic League for the provision of comforts to the troops at the front. In November the league took in hand the provision of Christmas cheer for Natal troops, and held a Christmas ball in the town hall on 17 and 18 December, which raised £3 000. The league's committee also organised public concerts and street collections, and made up the groups of women which, at all hours of day and night, dispensed refreshments at the railway station to troops on trains to and from the front.<sup>43</sup> In four years it handled £15 357 for aid and comforts.<sup>44</sup>

In the first two years of the war corporation facilities were used repeatedly by organisations raising raise funds for war relief. The town hall's main hall, which had a large floor space and an organ, plus a balcony, was the most popular venue. The Town Hall Subcommittee granted use of the town hall for functions related to war relief at cost of lighting (15s) and caretaker's fee (5s). The ordinary charge for hire of the main hall was £9.7s.9d, but the corporation refunded £7.9s.9d as a contribution.<sup>45</sup>

There were at least twenty bookings of the main hall for war-related performances between October 1914 and June 1916. Five persons gave concerts (one of them twice), including two organ recitals. The Patriotic League, Maritzburg District Railway War Relief Fund, *Natal Witness'* Shilling Fund, and the Red Cross

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40. *Official History*, p 222.

41. 3/1/93, p 682.

42. *Official History*, p 223.

43. CYB 1915, pp 22–23; 3/1/93, pp 692, 693, 845, 966, 996; 3/1/94, pp 22, 328, 414, 440, 441; and 3/1/95, p 107; 7/12/7, p 186. See also Bettie, "Natal and the Great War", p 106. The local branch of the Victoria League appears to have been absorbed into the Patriotic League. See ND 1915, p 825 for mention of the Victoria League.

44. Bettie, "Natal and the Great War", p 106.

45. 3/1/94, pp 2, 568; 3/1/94, p 154.

Society also sponsored concerts. There were two dances, in support of the Governor-General's Fund and the Masonic War Relief Fund. A few smaller functions were held in what was called the Supper Room. The Horticultural Society used both spaces for its Spring Show in 1914, at which the Patriotic League provided refreshments. Six schools used the hall for entertainments, but Maritzburg College offered a sports and athletics display in Alexandra Park. The Maritzburg Rugby Union, Football Association, Cricket Union, and Brooklyn Hockey Club also held fixtures in the park. Various other organisations and individuals made donations to the mayor's and governor-general's funds. There was even a collection of £5.6s.7d from the Children of "Old King Cole's Corner", a weekly feature of the *Natal Witness*.<sup>46</sup>

The corporation's contributions to relief and comforts had to be paid for, of course, and on 5 November 1914 the Finance and General Purposes Committee (which hereafter will be referred to as the FGPC) established a War Contingency Fund.<sup>47</sup> On 17 December it instructed the town clerk to debit to it the costs of the services rendered to the Defence Force and contributions to the various war relief funds originating from remittances of charges for use of the town hall.<sup>48</sup>

Another means of raising war relief funds was street collections. These were customarily held on Saturdays. By 1916 there were so many street collections for patriotic funds that the mayor found it impossible to name them in this annual report.<sup>49</sup> There were also house-to-house collections, which collected "handsome" amounts.<sup>50</sup>

The mayor became chairman of the local committees supporting the Governor-General's Fund, and they carried on the "war work" in the city. The mayoress was in charge of street collections. The Patriotic League provided for refreshments (fruit, cigarettes, etc.) for the troops on the passing trains.<sup>51</sup>

## Expeditionary forces

Early in July 1915 there was much talk about sending a South African contingent to Europe.<sup>52</sup> Immediately the campaign in South West ended the Union government undertook to organise armed forces for service overseas. The imperial government accepted its offer. But in terms of the constitution South African Defence Force units could only be used for defence, and therefore Active Citizen Force units could not be sent. Thus special service units of volunteers would have to be formed for the expeditionary force. A director of War Recruiting was appointed, and a vigorous recruiting campaign was launched throughout the Union. Soon an infantry brigade, a heavy artillery brigade, a signals unit and medical units were raised, trained, and despatched.<sup>53</sup>

The existing local Recruiting Committee offered its assistance, and the

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46. 3/1/93, pp 753, 796, 823, 826, 836, 933, 951–952, 955; 3/1/94, pp 31–32, 60, 203, 414, 751; and 3/1/95, pp 104, 128, 154, 182. See also 7/12/7, pp 78, 79, 95, 128, 137, 151, 171, 177, 179, 182; and 8/12/7, p 14.

47. 7/11/18, p 78.

48. 7/11/18, p 89.

49. CYB 1916, p 32.

50. CYB 1917, p 19.

51. CYB 1917, pp 21–22; 1918, pp 18–19; 1919, pp 26–27.

52. Child, *Smythe*, p 235.

53. *Official History*, p 211; OYB 5/22, p 398.

mayor urged the minister of Defence on 22 July to make Pietermaritzburg a major recruiting centre, because there was strong local feeling that as provincial capital, the city should supply one of the infantry regiments for overseas. The director of War Recruiting fell in with the proposal.<sup>54</sup> The local recruiting drive was launched at a public meeting on 12 August.<sup>55</sup> On 31 August Colonel Tanner and officers of the 2nd Battalion of the 1st South African Infantry Brigade were entertained to dinner in the Supper Room before leaving for training in the Transvaal.<sup>56</sup>

The mayor warned the director that there was a strong feeling against paying men defending the Empire overseas less than those defending the Union in Africa.<sup>57</sup> He inquired of the director if the Governor-General's Fund would supplement military pay and allowances. The mayor had learnt that a compensatory fund had been set up in Cape Town,<sup>58</sup> and a similar Mayor's Overseas Contingent Fund was opened in the city on 16 August. Prominent citizens led the way with handsome contributions, all duly acknowledged and reported in the press.<sup>59</sup> In due course the Mayor's Overseas Contingent Fund was amalgamated with the Overseas Contingent Section of the Governor-General's Fund, and on 5 October a cheque for £2 823.7s.7d was handed over to the fund's local secretary, J. Bird.<sup>60</sup> Those who served in the East African expeditionary force (see below) were paid more than those in the overseas expeditionary force, and a deputation of mayors from all over the Union interviewed the minister of Defence, J.C. Smuts, to ask for equal pay.<sup>61</sup>

The organisation of the expeditionary force had other ramifications. At the beginning of August a fund was launched to supply machine guns for the overseas contingent. Local response was good, but the fund was curtailed because the War Office did not approve of it, and the monies were transferred (with contributors' consent) to the Mayor's Overseas Contingent Fund. The total amount was £674.3s.<sup>62</sup>

At the request of General Botha the mayor also agreed to become an *ex officio* member of the committee for comforts for the South African Expeditionary Force.<sup>63</sup> The South African Gifts and Comforts Organisation Committee launched a fund to provide sheepskin coats for the troops, and Pietermaritzburg was asked to supply 500. The mayor opened the fund, but, like the earlier mealie fund, working with farmers proved complicated, and the bundles went off in half a dozen

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54. 3/1/94, pp 759, 790.

55. 3/1/94, p 833.

56. CYB 1916, p 30.

57. 3/1/94, p 790.

58. 3/1/94, p 827.

59. 3/1/94, pp 843, 858, 886, 888, 890, 910, 971.

60. 3/1/95, pp 32, 53, 97.

61. 1/1/9, p 478; 7/11/19, p 44. Unionists and Labourites both demanded the full South African rate of 3s per day instead of the British rate of 1s for service in Europe. The government agreed for service in East Africa, but National party supporters and many SAP members opposed it for Europe, and Botha sided with them. However, the government made a general war contribution of £1m to the British government, which agreed to pay the South Africans serving in Europe 3s. On this see Krüger, *The Making of a Nation: A History of the Union of South Africa, 1910–1961* (Macmillan, London, 1969), pp 104–105.

62. CYB 1916, p 30; 3/1/94, pp 792, 796, 806, 814, 850, 859.

63. 3/1/94, p 919.

shipments. The War Office in due course announced that it had enough coats and requested that no more be sent.<sup>64</sup>

In October 1915 the imperial authorities asked the Union government to organise a large force to augment the imperial forces operating against German East Africa. The proposition was more attractive when General Smuts was appointed to command the expeditionary force. Two mounted brigades and two mounted regiments, two infantry brigades and two rifle regiments, field artillery and departmental units were raised, trained and despatched within five months. A base was established in Durban from which the expeditionary force departed; and all the trains from the camps inland passed through Pietermaritzburg.<sup>65</sup>

Natal men made up the majority of the 6th Infantry and 4th Mounted Regiments, both raised in November; also of the 10th and 11th Infantry raised in November and December.<sup>66</sup> All the special service units were trained in the Transvaal and then went to Durban for embarkation, beginning in January. On 27 January the FGPC voted £20 for refreshments at the station for about 700 men of the Mounted Brigade, the majority of whom were Natal men. On 2 February council authorised £45 for refreshments for more troops; on the 10th £25 for the 10th Regiment; and on the 17th £35 for others to come. On 6 April it voted £25 and on 26 May £100. By mid-February the last of the expeditionary force had sailed from Durban.<sup>67</sup>

The Overseas expeditionary force departed from Cape Town and therefore did not pass through Pietermaritzburg; however, when it left camp in the Transvaal the mayor sent a telegram to Colonel Tanner: "Maritzburg wishes you and your regiment Godspeed." Colonel Tanner replied: "All ranks send greeting and thanks for kind thoughts. Tell fellow men their assistance required to back us up."<sup>68</sup>

The town council agreed to top up the pay of the corporation's European permanent employees with dependents who served overseas (but only half pay to those without dependents), less the amounts of their military pay and allowances. (In August 1917 the FGPC gave single men the same allowance as married men.)<sup>69</sup> Payment would be made paid monthly to their dependents, as was done by the Governor-General's Fund. Positions were guaranteed for when they returned.<sup>70</sup> In November these conditions were extended to those who would serve in East Africa.<sup>71</sup>

Very soon the corporation began to feel the pinch in manpower. In twelve months of war every member of the borough engineer's clerical staff, except the chief clerk, left on active service and had to be replaced,<sup>72</sup> and turnover

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64. CYB 1916, p 30; 3/1/95, pp 249, 272, 274, 281, 288, 303, 309, 315, 320, 322, 323, 353, 364, 429, 456.

65. *Official History*, p 213. OYB 5/22, p 398.

66. Hurst, *Short History*, pp 145, 148, 151–152, 155–156.

67. CYB 1916, p 30; 1/1/9, pp 434, 478; 7/11/19, pp 44, 54, 74, 96. Child, *Smythe*, p 241. The 8th South African Horse was organised between April and June 1916; two of its three squadrons were raised in Natal. They left Durban at the end of July. See Hurst, *Short History*, p 161.

68. CYB 1916, p 31.

69. 7/11/20, pp 91–92.

70. 1/1/9, pp 432–3; 3/1/94, pp 568, 823; 7/12/7, p 169.

71. CYB 1916, p 8; 7/11/19, p 25.

72. CYB 1915, p 67.

continued.<sup>73</sup> Early in 1916 the town clerk reported that he had to replace staff on active service with two unmarried ladies as typists and a youth as messenger.<sup>74</sup> By the end of July 1916, as many as 43 corporation employees were on active service,<sup>75</sup> and an accountant in the Treasurer's department, Captain W.H.F. Harte, had died, leaving a widow.<sup>76</sup> On 2 December 1915, the FGPC resolved that heads of department should only hire men unfit for military service as temporary replacements for those on active service.<sup>77</sup>

### Morale 1916–1918

In mid-1916 the glory of war lost its sheen. The promising expeditions to France and East Africa did not meet with success. Casualties were terrible, and there was no end in sight. The home front resolve was tested in these circumstances. Recruitment was organised thoroughly; there was very little that was voluntary about it. Patriotic charity was methodical and relentless, and it was harder to give when living costs rose. The jingoes were muted; more often leaders at public meetings were ministers, and patriotism assumed a distinctly religious aspect.

There was good news early in June. The Royal Navy had defeated the German High Seas Fleet in action off Jutland (31 May/1 June). A public meeting on 15 June passed resolutions expressing citizens' "unbounded appreciation of the splendid victory" and the "debt of gratitude" which South Africa owed to the Navy. A "Lightning Fund" was opened to collect money for the relief of the dependents of those who had lost their lives in the battle. Contributions flowed in from the city and country districts. The mayor cabled the sum of £2 881.9s.9d home.<sup>78</sup>

Then came bad news: Lord Kitchener's death. He had drowned when the cruiser on which he had been travelling to Russia sank after hitting a mine on 5 June. A memorial service in the Town Hall on the 7 June drew more than 2 000 persons.<sup>79</sup>

Then worse news: the battle of the Somme, in which the 1st South African Infantry Brigade lost three-quarters of its fighting strength at Delville Wood (15–20 July). On 19 July the first casualty reports appeared in the local newspapers, followed by more bits and pieces on 25, 27 and 28 July – and then a comprehensive statement of casualties on 31 July.<sup>80</sup> The mayor sent a cable to General Lukin, commanding the expeditionary force in France: "Citizens of Pietermaritzburg proud of achievement of South Africans in recent operations and while offering warmest congratulations on their success would express sympathy for losses and the hope for speedy recovery of wounded."<sup>81</sup> There was no reply. Casualties in the 2nd (Natal and Free State) Battalion were 482 including all of the officers.<sup>82</sup>

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73. CYB 1916, p 9.

74. 7/11/19, p 48.

75. CYB 1916, p 27.

76. CYB 1916, p 27.

77. 7/11/9, p 26.

78. CYB 1916, pp 31–32.

79. CYB 1916, pp 27, 32.

80. See *Natal Witness* and *Times of Natal* for the dates given.

81. CYB 1916, p 31; *Times of Natal*, 19 July 1916.

82. *Official History*, p 111.

Administrator Smythe wrote on 31 August 1916: "The casualties have been appalling. I think almost every one I know personally in the South African Brigade has been killed or wounded. I think every Government office in this building has had one of two men killed."<sup>83</sup>

On 4 August the second anniversary of the declaration of war was commemorated in a "very impressive" service in the town hall. The mayor's chaplain conducted it, assisted by representatives of other churches. That evening there was a public meeting, which passed resolutions reaffirming civic determination to carry on to a successful end.<sup>84</sup> Contrary to official expectations it was sparsely attended.<sup>85</sup>

The South African brigade in France was rebuilt with new drafts, several times after further battles.<sup>86</sup> In March 1917 Smythe wrote: "Frightful casualty lists are coming in from the South African Contingent in Flanders. Jim Ross has lost two out of three sons killed. Jim Maclean, who lives beyond Souter, has lost both of his. It is all too sickening."<sup>87</sup>

The mayor referred to losses in his annual report at the end of July 1917:

The City has sent many of its sons to the front, and in proportion to those available the number of those who have gone is a cause for gratification. Many of them have laid down their lives, leaving homes filled with sorrow.<sup>88</sup>

And again the following year:

As a result of the heavy fighting in France, in which the South African Brigade bore a glorious part in Gauche Wood, and later at Messines Ridge, the casualty lists [have been long] and many homes have been plunged into mourning. Our sympathy goes out to all the bereaved and those whose boys are wounded. During the year many "Springboks" have returned home invalided, having "done their bit" in the great struggle, and have been welcomed by all.<sup>89</sup>

In addition to the losses in the forces, in the latter part of 1918 there was shock when news was received that the member of parliament for Pietermaritzburg South, Dr Buntine and his older daughter had died when the *Galway Castle* had been torpedoed. He was returning with his two daughters from England, where they had completed their education.<sup>90</sup>

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83. *Official History*, p 243.

84. CYB 1917, p 20.

85. *Times of Natal*, 5 August 1916.

86. The 1st South African Brigade had 121 officers and 3 032 men on 14 July 1916 and 143 officers and men on 20 July. The brigade was rebuilt with new drafts, but lost about 1 159 at Butte de Warlencourt in October. It was rebuilt again, but lost 1 258 at Ypres in September 1917, and was practically destroyed at Gauche Wood in March 1918. The brigade retained its name, but was really a consolidated, composite formation until new drafts in August 1918 enabled its reorganisation. See *Official History*, pp 95–168. It has been estimated that 16 000 men served, out of a male European population of 60 000 in Natal. Between 1 500 and 2 000 lost their lives, and many more were wounded and disabled. See Bettle, "Natal and the Great War", p 105.

87. Child, *Smythe*, p 249.

88. CYB 1917, p 18.

89. CYB 1918, p 26.

90. CYB 1919, pp 27–28.

The third anniversary of the declaration of war was commemorated, at the prime minister's suggestion, as a Memorial Day. On Monday 4 August 1917, there was a public meeting in the town hall, at which the customary reaffirmation of loyalty and determination was made, followed by a service conducted by the mayor's chaplain.<sup>91</sup>

In January 1918 the Pietermaritzburg Church Council requested the town council's support for a combined service of thanksgiving and intercession, and in April it proposed intercessory services on a regular basis. The town council agreed, and a "Citizens' Fellowship Service", in fellowship with those at the front, was introduced on 13 May, but there was only "a moderate gathering" in the town hall, perhaps because it was held at 8 o'clock at night. At the ministers' behest the mayor convened a special meeting, and a new committee organised the event on a regular basis, evidently commencing on Sunday 16 June 1918.<sup>92</sup> Thereafter services were held on the second Monday of every month.<sup>93</sup>

In May 1918 the public observance of a moment of silence for the fallen, which had been introduced elsewhere in the Union, was introduced in Pietermaritzburg. A minute before noon one of the bells on the town hall was rung until noon to draw public attention, and at noon there was a minute's pause, in remembrance of those at the front. This was done every day.<sup>94</sup> A "Citizens Meeting and Service of Remembrance, Prayer and Thanksgiving" was held on Sunday 4 August, the fourth anniversary of the declaration of war.<sup>95</sup>

More exclusive was the entertainment at Christmastime of the children of men at the front. On Boxing Day 1916 they were entertained at the town hall, and the *Witness* raised £75 to cover expenses.<sup>96</sup> In 1917 the children – about 350 of them – assembled at the Natal Creamery hotel on Longmarket Street for a Christmas treat, then were "marshalled" and led across the street to the Rinko for a "suitable" programme.<sup>97</sup>

The celebration of Empire Day continued to be primarily for children. The FGPC voted £100 for the entertainment in 1917.<sup>98</sup> It voted the same amount in 1918, but then increased it to £150 (and added £50 for the entertainment of coloured children). The children were shown films in the town hall, then addressed by Frederic Tatham and the bishop of Pretoria, and finally moved to Alexandra Park for a sports programme. The mayor reported that the children entered fully into the spirit of the celebration.<sup>99</sup>

### Recruitment 1916–18

In January 1916 the director of war recruiting was appointed to take command of all the staffs and depots assembling recruits and to take charge of elementary training. He was to control all troops engaged in Union-Imperial contingents and to

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91. CYB 1918, p 27; 7/11/20, pp 71, 73.

92. *Times of Natal*, 11 and 14 May 1918; and 1/1/9, p 709.

93. CYB 1918, p 25.

94. CYB 1918, pp 25, 28; *Times of Natal*, 14 and 15 May 1918; 1/1/9, p 695; 7/11/21, pp 28, 38.

95. CYB 1919, p 27.

96. CYB 1917, p 21.

97. CYB 1918, p 29.

98. 1/1/9, p 608; 7/11/20, p 50.

99. CYB 1918, p 29; 7/11/21, pp 28, 51.

despatch reinforcements when they were called for. Recruiting continued to be on a strictly voluntary basis, but every town was now to have its War Recruiting Committee, consisting of the mayor, councillors and leading citizens. Recruiting conferences were to be held at intervals to review the situation and to discuss best methods, and special campaigns were conducted constantly under the direction of carefully selected officers.<sup>100</sup> Ultimately, 30 719 South Africans served in the overseas expeditionary force and 47 321 in the East African one.<sup>101</sup>

Mayor Taylor was chairman of the local War Recruiting Committee, and the town council was involved in recruiting directly and indirectly, not least in encouraging corporation employees to volunteer for service. In February 1917 the FGPC instructed heads of departments to report which members of their staffs were eligible for service and then to inform them of the facilities the corporation offered to encourage their enlistment. In March it resolved that all unmarried men of military age be requested to offer themselves for service or to present army medical certificates or discharge certificates to justify their not doing so. The Electric Department was the exception, and two men in it who wanted to volunteer were refused permission to do so. Only three men came forward from the Town Clerk's, Tramway and Police departments. Sixteen men lodged medical certificates signed by Medical Corps doctors. One unfit man had tried to enlist four times and been refused. Seven men lodged discharge certificates; one had served in France, the rest in East Africa, three of whom suffered from malaria.<sup>102</sup> At the end of the corporate year, 31 July, 32 municipal employees were on active service.<sup>103</sup>

The mayor attended a recruitment conference in Cape Town, which recommended that each of the large towns hold a Win-the-War Recruitment Rally on 17 July. The FGPC voted £75 for the local rally. There were 50 men of the imperial forces, who had seen service in Europe and were in Durban at the time, who were brought up at the city's expense to participate. They were met at the railway station and became part of the procession, which included Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, school children, representatives of patriotic and friendly societies, and some Pietermaritzburg soldiers who had returned (some of them had been wounded at Delville Wood). Led by the band of the Natal Carbineers, they marched from the station to the park, where there was programme of sports. The crowd there was estimated to be at least 3 000.<sup>104</sup>

In 1917 two new committees were formed in connexion with recruiting. The mayor chaired both.<sup>105</sup> The Returned Soldiers Committee looked after the interests of veterans, and co-operated with the local branch of the newly formed national League of Returned Soldiers and Sailors.<sup>106</sup> The Privacy Committee helped men who wanted to enlist but who could not afford to do so, by giving them money for clothes and other items they needed. It was a small committee which met weekly

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100. *Official History*, p 212.

101. OYB 5/22, p 389.

102. 7/11/20, pp 4, 6, 12, 16, 23, 26, 71, 91. Two men in the Market Department, who had served in East Africa, refused to enlist again unless there was conscription.

103. CYB 1917, p 20.

104. CYB 1917, p 21; 7/11/20, p 77.

105. CYB 1917, p 21.

106. *Official History*, p 221. See CYB 1917, p 21; 7/10/17, p 161; 7/11/21, pp 13, 125; 7/12/18, pp 34, 215, 216.



and dealt with cases personally and confidentially. Sometimes its good offices were abused, but this was rare.<sup>107</sup> By 1918 it was raising funds of its own.<sup>108</sup>

By this time the official casualty lists were making it obvious that service at the front was as likely to be fatal as not – all the more reason to carry on. There was a recruiting meeting in the town hall on 4 April. Major Miller, DSO, of the Royal Air Force, was expected with the first aeroplane ever to land in Pietermaritzburg. His long awaited arrival took place on 23 April. Thousands of people were on hand when his plane landed. He was entertained to a luncheon in the Supper Room and gave a lecture illustrated by lantern views at the Rinko. Not surprisingly his recruitment effort particularly interested men in the RAF.<sup>109</sup> The League of Returned Soldiers joined in the recruitment drive, and a large number of new men were sent off for training on 18 May.<sup>110</sup>

The FGPC made another canvass of corporation employees for service in France, since South African units had been withdrawn from East Africa. Councillor Laffan moved that all men of military age produce medical certificates, but the mayor amended it to apply only to unmarried men.<sup>111</sup> It was becoming clear that recruiters were scraping the barrel – on 13 May just seven volunteers were examined and four of them were rejected as medically unfit.<sup>112</sup> The Recruiting Committee began issuing exemption badges to men who wanted to serve but were unfit to do so, and made it clear in the press these men were not shirkers.<sup>113</sup>

The corporation had had 27 employees on active service during the South West Africa Campaign. It had 34 on active service in German East Africa and Nyasaland, and 46 in Europe. Of these 12 lost their lives (three in Africa and 7 in Europe) and 14 were wounded (2 in East Africa and 12 in Europe).<sup>114</sup>

### Convalescent camp

In addition to returned soldiers, during the spring of 1917, the city received a large number of convalescent soldiers from hospitals elsewhere in the Union. These were casualties of the campaign in German East Africa. The expeditionary force suffered many fewer killed and wounded than the one in France. Instead the campaign had been destroyed by disease.<sup>115</sup>

Very many returnees were invalids; their health had been broken by tropical diseases, especially malaria, and malnutrition and exhaustion. The Defence Force had raised a medical force of about 5 000 to man the hospitals which it set up for

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107. CYB 1917, p 21; Bettle, "Natal and the Great War", p 106. See 9/4–13, the Minute Books of Special Recruiting Fund Privacy Committee. These were kept by members of the committee and the records of the weekly meetings are rather fragmentary and sometimes cryptic, but probably provide the greatest insight into the problems of working-class volunteers that can be found.

108. 7/11/21, p 83.

109. CYB 1918, p 28; 7/12/8, p 209.

110. *Natal Witness*, 17 May 1918 and 18 May 1918.

111. 7/11/21, p 41.

112. *Natal Witness*, 15 May 1918.

113. *Natal Witness*, 11 May 1918.

114. CYB 1919, p 26.

115. *Official History*, pp 212, 217; Hurst, *Short History*, pp 147, 150, 155, 158, 159, 162. Martin, *Durban Light Infantry*, 1, p 309. In the European expedition 3 884 were killed and died of wounds and 10 325 were wounded; in the African expedition the respective numbers were 502 and 1151. See OYB 5/22, p 399.

them; two large ones at Roberts Heights and Cape Town, each with about 1 500 beds, and smaller ones with 400 to 600 beds at Durban, Kimberley and Potchefstroom. Seven auxiliary hospitals were maintained, mainly for convalescents, and convalescent camps were established at Roberts Heights, Kimberley, Durban and Pietermaritzburg.<sup>116</sup>

In the winter the town council offered the use of the town hall to the military for hospital purposes. A board of enquiry visited the city, and Dr Buntine, who was a member of this board, pressed the city's claims. The town hall was considered unsuitable, but the Natal University College council offered its building and grounds, and its offer was accepted.<sup>117</sup> The mayor and Councillor O'Brien made arrangements with the imperial authorities for the supply of electricity and water in September 1917.<sup>118</sup> Huts were built in record time.<sup>119</sup> The borough engineer was instructed to take steps to destroy mosquito breeding places so that malaria would not be spread from infected men to nearby residents.<sup>120</sup>

On 25 October a delegation comprising three clergymen, twelve ladies and four men, led by the Reverend A.J. Clarke, waited upon the FPGC. They represented the Ministers Association and Maritzburg Church Council, Christian Personal Service League, Women's Christian Temperance Union, and various women's church and other concerned associations. They requested the restriction of the sale of intoxicating liquors to soldiers and an earlier closing hour for bars. The committee informed the delegation that the chief magistrate had written to the committee with a proposal to prohibit the supply of intoxicating liquors to soldiers in uniform except under permit, and the committee concurred with his proposal. The delegation did too.<sup>121</sup>

The camp operated for seven months (closing at the end of May 1918), during which time nearly 3 000 men passed through it. The staff consisted of seven officers and 45 men.<sup>122</sup> The convalescents arrived in batches, and were welcomed by members of the Patriotic League and the Red Cross Society.<sup>123</sup> The first 150 patients arrived on 2 December. They were met by a large crowd at the station and refreshments were served. Then a number of city motorists drove them to the camp.<sup>124</sup>

An organising secretary, Mr E.V. Marsh, oversaw the local input to the operation. Refreshments at below cost were provided from funds raised by the Citizens Committee and dispensed by a Refreshment Committee. Ladies of the Patriotic League took turns serving a buffet twice a week, and for those men who could go into town the Young Men's Christian Association opened its daily buffet free of charge.

The University main hall was the social centre of the camp, with recreational materials, including two billiard tables (one provided by the Patriotic

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116. *Official History*, p 217.

117. CYB1918, p 27.

118. 7/11/20, pp 110–111.

119. CYB 1918, p 28.

120. 7/10/17, p 68.

121. 7/11/20, pp 125, 126.

122. *Natal Witness*, 15 May 1918.

123. *Natal Witness*, 15 May 1918.

124. CYB 1918, p 28.

League) and a bagatelle table. A Sports Committee supplied equipment for cricket, rugby and tennis – and boxing! Sport was a major activity in the camp.

A committee was formed to provide for the entertainment of the convalescents; there were even subcommittees to deal with different kinds of entertainment. Ladies of the Patriotic League took turns organising appropriate concerts and other entertainments, and also there were occasional afternoon concerts at Grey's Hospital. Early in December the FGPC granted £100 towards the construction of a recreation hut on the grounds of Grey's Hospital by the Convalescent Entertainment Committee, which cost £410–£420, and to which the Grey's trustees contributed £160 and the Patriotic League £100.<sup>125</sup> Men were also granted special admission to vaudeville and bioscope matinees in town. Various organisations provided outings, and city motorists occasionally took men for drives in the country, and the corporation lent the municipal char-a-banc for rides in town.<sup>126</sup>

It is no wonder then, that the *Natal Witness* called the convalescent camp in Scottsville the best in South Africa.

### Aid and comforts

The governor-general visited the city in August 1916 and appealed for contributions to raise the fund to £1 million, the amount estimated needed for it to carry out its objectives. The mayor then appealed through the press for £5 000 by Christmas, and there was an immediate and generous response.<sup>127</sup> Another appeal in 1917 for a “£10 000 effort” collected £11 000 in the city and country districts.<sup>128</sup>

Durban staged what it called a “War Market” and raised £10 000 for the Governor-General's Fund in August 1916. The ladies of the Patriotic League and several other local persons in Pietermaritzburg took up the idea in September, and the project was expanded to a two-day function in the market hall on 22–23 November. General and Mrs Botha came to open the market, which was successful and raised £24 066.9s.8d.<sup>129</sup> The prime minister and his wife stayed at the Victoria Club, and the town council provided a luncheon which was held in the provincial council chamber.<sup>130</sup> In response to the toast the general delivered a speech on the war situation, which, Smythe wrote, greatly offended the jingoes because it was in Dutch.<sup>131</sup>

Street collections remained an important source of funds, and the patriotic ladies collected with wonted zeal in all weather. The town council recognised that benevolent societies and orphanages, whose funds suffered in competition with war funds, also needed street collections to partially recoup their losses.<sup>132</sup> On 31 June 1917 the FGPC resolved that that all applications for street collections must

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125. 7/11/20, p 149.

126. *Natal Witness*, 15 May 1918.

127. CYB 1917, p 19.

128. CYB 1918, p 26; 7/11/20, p 147.

129. CYB 1917, pp 19–20; Bettie, “Natal and the Great War”, p 106; Child, *Smythe*, pp 243–244. See also 7/11/20, p 2; and 7/12/8, p 36.

130. CYB 1917, p 20.

131. Child, *Smythe*, p 246.

132. CYB 1918, p 28.

be submitted through the town clerk to the council, which would consider each one on its merits. The council decided that the Governor-General's Fund was the most important fund and therefore allocated to it the first Saturday of every month.<sup>133</sup> It soon proved impossible to limit street collections to two a month, and during the first six months of 1918 there were collections on all but three Saturdays.<sup>134</sup> In 1918 the Patriotic League and the Red Cross each booked one Saturday every quarter. The League of Returned Soldiers booked three Saturdays.<sup>135</sup>

The town hall continued to be booked heavily for war fund-raising. Between September 1916 and October 1918 there were 35 such bookings, most of them for the main hall. These functions included four "entertainments", three lectures, two film shows, one gymnastic display, three "sales", fourteen concerts (two of them "sacred"), and eight dances. Eight functions were for the benefit of the Governor-General's Fund and six were for unspecified "war funds". Three were for the Red Cross. Three were for the benefit of disabled soldiers and sailors, and one for the prisoners of war. Three in 1917 were for Christmas items for men at the front.<sup>136</sup>

But charity had limits. Mayor Taylor admitted that by the end people were growing "weary even of doing good". In asking the FGPC for the grant for the convalescents' recreation hut the mayor explained that he did so because it was "undesirable" to make another appeal to the public for funds after the many recent calls made upon them.<sup>137</sup>

A more sensitive issue was the use of town hall facilities. By February 1918 the town clerk was charging an "option fee" of £2.20s for evening bookings, and the Town Hall Subcommittee approved.<sup>138</sup> In May the FGPC refused the loan of 100 town hall chairs for tea rooms at the Royal Show for the benefit of the Governor-General's Fund, Red Cross and Patriotic League, because they would be needed for a performance in the hall the same evening. The mayor intervened and insisted on the importance of raising funds. The committee agreed to the loan of the chairs, but insisted that they all be returned and put in place in the hall by 6 p.m.<sup>139</sup>

Also in May 1918 the Town Hall Subcommittee asked for a moratorium on dances in the main hall until the end of the war, although present bookings could stand. There was a sharp disagreement in FGPC between Councillor O'Brien, who supported the subcommittee, and the mayor, who insisted that dances wholly in support of war funds should be allowed. The committee voted 7-5 in support of the mayor. O'Brien threatened to take the matter to the whole council, but apparently did not.<sup>140</sup>

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133. 7/11/20, p 69.

134. CYB 1918, pp 26, 28.

135. On the Patriotic League see 7/11/21, pp 16, 24, 96; 7/12/8, p 216; Red Cross 7/11/20, pp 109, 110 and 7/11/21, pp 9, 83; 7/12/8, p 193. See also League of Returned Soldiers 7/11/20, p 159; 7/11/21, p 83; and 7/12/8, pp 215, 216.

136. 7/12/8, pp 36, 53, 72, 76, 91, 102, 103, 112, 133, 135, 145, 160, 184, 193, 199, 209, 214, 215, 216; 7/12/9, pp 11, 32, 34, 39, 51, 56.

137. 7/11/20, p 149.

138. 7/12/8, p 199.

139. 7/11/21, pp 76, 78.

140. 7/11/19, p 56; 7/11/21, p 51. It seems strange that no mention of this was made in the press.

In the last year of the war there seems to have been a shift to holding more functions out of doors. In April the Patriotic League applied to use the market gardens on three occasions later in the year, and Mrs Brownlee asked to use them for a bazaar two days in August; and the Britannia Knitting Class booked them for a sale in October. In October the Privacy Committee applied to use the gardens for a series of concerts.<sup>141</sup>

## Peace

In the spring of 1918 victory was at last in sight, as Allied offensives brought about the collapse and surrender of Germany's allies and then revolution in Germany itself. The new German government sought peace. On 7 November the FGPC discussed steps to be taken when news of the cessation of hostilities was received, and asked Mayor Harwin to frame a suitable resolution. Restrictions on public gatherings owing to the Spanish Influenza epidemic precluded a meeting in the town hall, but the resolution would be proposed from atop the portico in front. It was decided that the town hall bells would ring as a signal for all businesses to close, and there would be a public holiday. The press was informed accordingly.<sup>142</sup> Meanwhile flags and bunting were put at the ready. Rumours of peace abounded daily, and the tension resembled that which had prevailed on the eve of war.<sup>143</sup>

On Monday 11 November the town hall bells pealed news of the armistice, and a great crowd gathered at the intersection of Church Street and Commercial Road. A procession of railwaymen arrived from the railway workshops, led by the band of the Carbineers.<sup>144</sup> The mayor made a short speech<sup>145</sup> and then proposed the resolution, which was conveyed to His Majesty thus:

Citizens of Pietermaritzburg at this supreme moment under deep sense of thankfulness to Almighty God, rejoice profoundly at cessation of hostilities with Germany, and welcome with pride and exultation the prospect of triumphant and lasting peace. Desire express unbounded admiration for bravery and heroism of forces of Your Majesty and Allies sea, land and air, intense pride in their achievement, and reverence for their noble sacrifice. Assure Your Majesty the undying loyalty and devotion and full faith in glorious future of beloved Empire.<sup>146</sup>

The resolution was carried by acclamation. Three cheers were given for His Majesty, three cheers more for the chief war leaders. The crowd lingered a while and then dispersed.<sup>147</sup>

Tuesday was declared a public holiday. The mayor consulted the Chamber of Commerce, and businesses were asked to close at 1 p.m. for the rest of the week. The governor-general invited the nation to participate simultaneously in joint thanksgiving services on Friday, and the mayor informed the FGPC that a public thanksgiving service should be held in Alexandra Park on Friday afternoon. A deputation of the Returned Soldiers League, railwaymen and several citizens

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141. 7/11/21, pp 41, 78, 113, 124.

142. CYB 1919, p 23; 1/1/9, p 748; 7/11/21, p 132. *Times of Natal*, 7 November 1918.

143. *Times of Natal*, 8 November 1908.

144. 1/1/9, p 748.

145. *Times of Natal*, 11 November 1918.

146. CYB 1919, p 24; and 1/1/9, p 748.

147. 1/1/9, p 748. See also *Times of Natal*, 11, 12, 13 November 1918.

informed the mayor that children's sports had been arranged in the park for Saturday, and a procession and fireworks display for that evening.<sup>148</sup>

On Tuesday evening the Railway Rifles band led a ragtag procession down Church Street to the Market Square, where an enormous bonfire made a grand blaze.<sup>149</sup>

As it turned out inclement weather led to the postponement of the thanksgiving service from Friday to Sunday at 4 p.m., but the children's sports and fireworks were held as scheduled on Saturday, and "almost the whole city" turned out for them.

On Sunday afternoon, under a lowering sky, the mayor led a formal procession from downtown to the park, where a crowd of some 3 000 to 4 000 people congregated. The service started at four o'clock. The National Anthem was sung, followed by several hymns and a reading. The mayor's chaplain then gave an address, a homily on past sacrifices, present victory, and future peace. At five the proceedings ended with another hymn, then the "Hallelujah Chorus" (by an ad-hoc choir), a benediction, and the singing (again) of the national anthem.<sup>150</sup>

The mayor told a special meeting of the council on 26 November that (he thought) the predominant feeling in the community was one of profound thankfulness to God, for what everyone realised was the close of the fighting between armies (the terms of the armistice practically precluded a resumption of it) and that righteousness had prevailed after the fiercest struggle in history.<sup>151</sup>

## Conclusion

This article has presented a vignette of a South African city at war from 1914 to 1918. Perhaps the city of Pietermaritzburg was not typical of South Africa, but it was typical of Natal. The majority of its citizens were British in sentiment, and naturally they supported Britain in the conflict.

The article describes this British patriotism as it applied to the war effort. Since it is based largely on corporation records, it reflects the perspective of the town council and public servants. The article focuses on the public expression of patriotism and the management of public morale, the recruitment of fighting men and the provision for their comfort and welfare. There is an aura of dedication and sacrifice about this effort, which while genuine (at least for the European English-speaking population), became increasingly mechanical and wearisome by the third year of the war. The spirit which animated citizens at the beginning of the war prevailed at the end of it, but the optimistic expectation of 1914 changed to a dogged determination to see it through in 1916, and the community was plainly showing the strain by 1918.

## Abstract

The city of Pietermaritzburg was the capital of the South African province of Natal. The white polity was predominantly English in background and sentiment, and its

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148. 1/1/9, p 748; 7/11/21, pp 135, 137.

149. *Times of Natal*, 13 November 1918.

150. 1/1/9, p 748; *Natal Witness* and *Times of Natal*, 18 November 1918.

151. CYB 1919, p 24; 1/1/9, p 748.

response to the declaration of war was enthusiastically pro-British. This article is an account of the corporation's war effort and the civic sacrifices it entailed. The town council consistently supported the imperial cause, and the corporation encouraged staff to volunteer for military service, making generous allowances for them and their families. Patriotic organisations were established to promote volunteering, to raise funds for war relief, and to provide aid and comforts to the troops. Local women played an important role in fundraising and aid and comforts. By the end of the first year of the war, these activities were regularised and patriotic observances were ritualised. Patriotism did not falter, but by 1916 morale was strained by mounting casualties at the front and shortages and inflation at home. By 1918 war weariness could not be concealed and local authorities were searching for new ways to sustain popular morale. The response to the announcement of the armistice was enthusiastically British, but tinged with profound relief and gratitude.

**Key words:** Great War; First World War; home front; Pietermaritzburg; British imperial patriotism; dominion patriotism; war relief; Governor General's Fund.

### Opsomming

Die stad Pietermaritzburg was die hoofstad van die Suid-Afrikaanse provinsie van Natal. Die wit politieke bestel was agtergrond- en sentimentgewys oorheersend Engels, en die reaksie daarvan op die oorlogsverklaring was geesdriftig pro-Brits. Hierdie artikel rekenskap van die korporasie se oorlogspoging en die burgerlike opofferings wat dit ingehou. Die Stadsraad het konsekwent die imperiale beweegrede ondersteun, en die korporasie het die personeel aangemoedig om vrywillig vir militêre diens aan te meld, terwyl dit milde toelae aan hulle en hul families voorsien het. Patriotiese organisasies is tot stand gebring om vrywillige diens te bevorder, om fondse vir noodleniging in te samel en hulpmiddele en geriewe aan die troepe te voorsien. Plaaslike vroue het 'n belangrike rol met betrekking tot fondsinsameling en hulpmiddele en geriewe vervul. Teen die einde van die eerste oorlogsjaar is hierdie aktiwiteite gereguleer en patriotiese handhawing verweselik. Patriotisme het nie gewankel nie, maar teen 1916 was die moreel getap weens toenemende ongevalle op die front en tekorte en inflasie tuis. Teen 1918 kon oorloguitputting nie langer verberg word nie en plaaslike owerhede het begin soek na nuwe maniere om volksmoreel te handhaaf. Die reaksie op die aankondiging van die wapenstilstand was geesdriftig Brits, maar met diepe verligting en dankbaarheid.

**Sleutelwoorde:** "Great War"; Eerste Wêreldoorlog; tuisfront; Pietermaritzburg; Britse imperiale patriotisme; grondgebied-patriotisme; oorlogsnoodleniging; Goewerneur-Generaalsfonds.