

FRANCE AND THE BOER WAR

Jean-Guy Pelletier*

I: THE BEGINNING OF THE WAR TO THE DEATH OF VILLEBOIS-MAREUIL

The aim of this article is not a study of French opinion as regards the Boer War but rather to describe the events which accompanied it in France. Thus the various pro-Boer movements which were founded will be mentioned. It will be seen that one of their principal accomplishments was to recruit and send volunteers to South Africa. The most renowned of these volunteers was Colonel Villebois-Mareuil. It seems that he was not motivated by anglophobia but it may be said that that was the dominating sentiment among the participants at the different pro-Boer demonstrations. These demonstrations were fairly numerous particularly when Boer delegates visited France and when the Transvaal participated in the Exhibition of 1900. It is interesting, therefore, to study from two aspects the attitude of the French Government itself; the way it reacted to requests for mediation from the Boer authorities and the way it responded to the pressure of public opinion.

Pro-Boer agitation was not left unorganised in France. Different "comités" were formed for propaganda or charitable purposes. However, research concerning these organisations has proved disappointing. It is sometimes difficult to discover the precise date of their foundation and the nature of their activities. In general, there seems reason to suppose that their members were few and that as a result, the effectiveness of such "comités" was limited.

The first organisation founded was the *Comité d'action de la jeunesse française en*

*Dr J-G Pelletier received a Ph.D from the University of Paris — X (Nanterre) France in 1972 for a thesis on "French public opinion and the Boer War". He was born near Quebec City, Canada, in 1938 and is presently researcher at the National Assembly of Quebec.

The following abbreviations of sources have been used:

AAE	Archives des Affaires ÉTRANGÈRES, Paris (Foreign Affairs Archives)
AHA	Archives historiques de l'armée, Paris (Historical Archives of the Army)
AN	Archives nationale, Paris (National Archives)
BB	Archival group at the National Archives in Paris; BB18 is particularly important on Boer manifestations in France
JO	Journal official, Paris = Hansard
GB	Grande-Bretagne (Great Britain)
FO	Foreign Office, London
NS	Nouvelle série (dispatches from French consuls in Pretoria and Johannesburg)
OUP	OXFORD University Press
PO	Post Office Box
PP	Préfecture de Police (Archives), Paris
PRO	Public Record Office, London
TO	Transvaal, Orange Free State
Sé	sans éditeur (no publisher)
SD	sans date (no date of publication)
P.U.F.	Presses universitaires de France
T	TÔME (vol.)

faveur du Transvaal. The exact circumstances behind its foundation are not known but, at the beginning of 1900, it published a brochure explaining its aims. According to this brochure, it must have been founded not later than 31st October 1899, for it is mentioned therein that at that date, reports had appeared in the newspaper to announce the existence of the committee. The President of this *Comité* was a law-student, Maurice E Landry. Amongst its well-known members there were several nationalist deputies, for example: George Berry and Francois de Mahy and a senator, Louis Pauliat. The aims that the organisation intended to pursue were: first, to render assistance to the French in the Boer armies and, second, to facilitate the departure of volunteers. It will be seen further on, that this movement did succeed in sending a certain number of volunteers to South Africa. On the other hand, it would appear that its first aim remained something of a dead letter. The *Comité* was, however, successful in its propaganda. If its President is to be believed, in fifteen days he received applications from 400 would-be volunteers, amongst whom were several medical students, and in all he received a total of 4 000 such applications.¹ It also organised a few lectures: 15 and 23 January, 1900 in Paris and 20 January at Nancy. One such lecture, organised by George Berry, 10 March, 1900, led to the publication of a brochure.² After that date, the *Comité* became less active. As the result of a controversy started by a discontented volunteer (which will be dealt with later in connection with the situation of the volunteers), the action *Comité* transformed itself and became a "rapatriement" committee on 1 August, 1900. There is no further mention of this group. It is difficult to judge of its efficacy: volunteers went to South Africa, but they were not always sent by this particular *Comité*. Its premature end would seem to suggest that money had not flowed freely into its coffers.

Another movement worked in close co-operation with the above youth committee: le *Comité Française des Républiques Sud-Africaines*. The history of this organisation was very similar to that of the *Comité d'action*. However, the date of the foundation of the second, can be indicated with precision. It was founded on 31st October, 1899, at the Pompadour Theatre in Paris, in the course of a meeting presided over by a retired Lieutenant-Colonel, J L Monteil. The object of the meeting was "to study practical means to show French friendship for the Boers".³

The people present at the meeting approved of what Monteil said proposing "moral and material help by subscriptions for the South African Republics." The *Comité* fixed as its aims: the pacific solution of the conflict in South Africa by means of European arbitration and the organisation of a collection, via the Parisian and provincial newspapers, in support of the Boer cause. In addition to Colonel Monteil who was elected chairman, the participants at the meeting chose as honorary chairmen: Jules Lemaître, Francois Coppée, Henri Rochefort and Edouard Drumont, all well-known nationalists, and some other less well-known ones. Amongst its members, were Lucien Millevoeye, director of *La Patrie*, Madame Gyp and the notable Colonel Villebois-Mareuil, whose name appears for the first time in connection with the war in South Africa. On 14th November, the *Comité* announced through the newspapers that it had formed a sub-committee to organise charity

Landry (M.E.), *Comité d'action de la jeunesse française en faveur du Transvaal*, Paris, 1900, Paul Dupont, 24 pp, p. 6; *Le Matin*, 9 November 1899, p. 2 and *Le Petit Journal*, 10 November 1899, p. 2.

George Berry, *Français-Boërs, (Conférence de Monsieur Georges Berry, député de Paris, précédé d'une introduction de Monsieur de Mahy, député de la Réunion (10 mars 1900))*, Paris, Mercadier, 1900, 62 pp.

Le Petit Journal, 1st November 1899, p. 2.

bazaars in aid of wounded soldiers from Transvaal and Orange Free State. The latter decided to hold one of those representations soon in a Parisian theatre.⁴ This *Comité* would have disintegrated in turn, without trace, had not a controversy concerning it and the other pro-Boer organisation already discussed, broken out in the pages of *La Petite République*, during the summer of 1900. At this time, Colonel Monteil revealed to the public that his *Comité* had been dissolved towards the middle of July but that it had sent 625 francs to aid the French prisoners-of-war on the Island of St Helena. That proved to be the swansong of this pro-Boer organisation.⁵

In June 1900, the *Comité pour l'Indépendance des Boers*, was founded. Its president was the senator of the Cher region, Louis Pauliat and it included besides, several other senators and deputies. The appearance of this *Comité* was ridiculed by the Editor of the *Siècle*, Yves Guyot, who called its members "les boërophiles retardataires" (the proboer late-comers)⁶. They wanted, however, to avoid the mistakes of the movements which had preceded it. There was no longer any question of sending volunteers since the war seemed already lost. The *Comité* decided instead to concentrate on propaganda. In that sphere it appears to have been effective. Numerous publications have been found which were diffused under its auspices and were addressed to the Protestants and to the public in general, like Emily Hobhouse's Report and the Report on the War by General de la Rey, or, again, little collections of poems.⁷ This *Comité* also arranged shows; on Christmas day 1901, it held a *matinée* show with other pro-Boer organisations, at the Théâtre de la Gaité. The highlight of the occasion was a lecture by the Boer officer, Sandberg. The public was also able to hear Mounet-Sully recite verse and Edmond Rostand present a piece of appropriate prose: *La Ballade de Noël*.⁸

President Kruger's visit to France, however, gave the *Comité* its greatest opportunity. The visit thrust it into the limelight and while it lasted, the *Comité* gave an impression of power and efficiency. It could claim to have control of the Paris Municipal Council and following the proposal of E Caron, one of the vice-Presidents of this pro-Boer committee and also head of the Budget Committee of the Municipal Council, the Council agreed to receive Kruger officially at the Town Hall. Furthermore, the *Comité* which had raised funds to present a sword to General Cronjé, had the sword given to Kruger by Henri Rochefort. At the same time, Parisians were able to see posters on the walls of their city which urged them to welcome the President. This *Comité* was also one of the groups present at the Gare de Lyon (one of Paris' stations) when the Boer leader arrived.

Was this organisation, though, really as powerful as it then appeared? Contrary to its predecessors, it made concerted efforts to recruit members and apparently addressed membership forms to all the primary school teachers in France.⁹ It developed in the provinces, for it claimed to have local branches at Marseilles, Nantes, Pont-Saint-Esprit, and

4. *Le Petit Journal*, 14 November 1899, p. 2.

5. *La Petite République*, 9 August 1900, p. 1.

6. *Le Siècle*, 24 June 1900, p. 1.

7. C Spoelstra, *Les Boërs sont-ils ennemis de la Mission?* Paris, 1901; E Hobhouse, *La guerre dans l'Afrique du Sud* (Camps de reconcentration. Rapport d'une visite de Miss Hobhouse dans les camps de l'Orange et du Cap), Paris, s.d., Mauchaussat, 95 pp.; De la Rey, *Rapports officiels* (O. du Général J H de la Rey et du Général J C Smuts, et d'autres documents concernant la guerre dans l'Afrique du Sud, récemment parvenus aux représentants Boërs en Europe), Paris, s.d., comité pour l'Indépendance des Boërs, 27 pp. and Anonymous, "Aux martyrs du Transvaal", *Poésies*, Niort, 1902, T Mercier, 11 pp.

8. *Le Siècle*, 6 November 1900, p. 1.

9. *Le Siècle*, 6 August 1900, p. 1.

Montpellier. How many members did it in fact have? In July 1900, it boasted of having 25 000. According to a pro-Boer daily newspaper, *L'Est Républicain*, the movement was supposed to have had 60 000 members, of whom, 125 were MPs, 4 000 municipal councillors and 1 500 teachers. By 10 November of the same year, it was supposed to have acquired 294 438 members.¹⁰ Guyot cast doubt on this figure. According to him, the number was simply that of the visitors to the Boer stand at the Paris Universal Exhibition. Indeed, he claimed that at the Transvaal stand, children of ten years old could be seen signing their names next to those of Jules Lemaitre and Francois Coppée.¹¹ On 29th November, 1900, in an address to Kruger, one of the Vice-Presidents of this *Comité*, Kranz, spoke of 300 000 members.¹² This figure was clearly an exaggeration, but that did not prevent the *Comité*, in March 1901, from taking the initiative in an appeal "to unify the world proboer associations."¹³

Indeed, this project took form with the formation of a *Union Fédérative Internationale pour l'indépendance des Boërs*, which grouped together the associations of Germany, Austria, Hungary, Belgium, Spain, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Russia, Switzerland and the United States of America.¹⁴ The aim of the Central Committee, formed in the course of a meeting in Paris between 8 and 12 March, 1901, was to employ all legal means to enforce the policy adopted by the Hague Conference. Several commissions were created, one of which included among its members an ex-journalist at *Le Temps*, Edgar Roëls,¹⁵ and was given the task of protesting against violations of the Hague Treaty concerning respect for private property and civilians. The general aims of the Union were:

- 1) to make every effort to end "that War imposed on the Boers against all rights" and carried on in a "manière barbare", to aid the Boers to obtain the arbitration that they had "never ceased to ask" and to regain their complete independence;
- 2) to procure material help for the victims of the War. The league would strive, until the end of the War, for recognition of those limits on conduct that the right to go to war imposed nonetheless on civilised peoples; and it would remind neutral states, if necessary, that it was their common duty to stop all deliveries of arms and ammunition — in short, of any sort of war contraband.¹⁶

After this noble declaration, the Union completely faded out of existence. But according to the newspapers, in May, 1901, a *Comité de Défense des Boers* was formed in turn. It included several nationalist stars of the defunct movements: Henri Rochefort was its president. In the communiqué issued upon its foundation, the new group announced that meetings would be organised throughout France and that a big meeting would soon be held at the Salle Wagram in Paris.¹⁷ It is not known, however, whether the meeting ever took

10. *L'Est Républicain*, 20 July 1900, p. 1 and *Le Petit Journal*, 13 November 1900, p. 1.

11. *Le Siècle*, 14 November 1900, p. 3.

12. *Le Temps*, 29 November 1900, p. 1.

13. *La Paix par le Droit*, April, 1901, p. 165.

14. Kröll, Ulrich, *Die internationale Buren-Agitation 1899—1902*, Verlag Regensberg Münster, 1973, 500 pp.

15. Edgar Roëls received subsidies from a representative of the Transvaal in Europe, Dr Leyds distributed this money among the French newspapers.

16. P Deschamps, *La Reine Wilhelmine*, (Reception à la Haye du Président Kruger), Paris, 1901, Lemerre, 366 pp., p. 224.

17. *Le Petit Journal*, 11 May, 1901, p. 1.

place, for this *Comité* appears to have given no further sign of its existence after the above announcement.

In March 1902, there appeared yet another movement which proved just as ephemeral as its predecessors: La Ligue Pro-Boër. It was presided over by Lucien Pemjean and its directors were literary figures known in pro-Boer circles. It was under the best of signs that this new league was born and it had the patronage of important personalities. But the circumstances surrounding its creation are somewhat confused as the *Ligue* seems to have emanated from a pro-Boer organ of propaganda called, *Le Cri du Transvaal* which was succeeded by *l'Ami des Boërs*. Both publications were financed by the representative of the O F S at The Hague, Dr H P N Müller. In April, 1902, *l'Ami des Boërs* announced that it was to form a joint stock company with a capital of 25 000 francs. During the few months of its existence, the *Ligue* proved quite active. It put on a play in Paris and at Neuvy-sur-Loire. The author of the play, Edmond Duesberg, advised the members of the audience not to buy South African shares "stained by Boer blood (...) Hit England at the Heart, that is to say at the purse (financially)."¹⁸ The *Ligue* also encouraged the dissemination and the signing of a brochure urging consumers not to buy British goods. Furthermore, it backed a certain number of candidates in the legislative elections of 1902. These two campaigns had scant success, the more so as the War was drawing to an end. The *Ligue* was the last big pro-Boer organisation to be formed in France.

Other movements were created in response to particular aims. The best known amongst them was the *Sou des Boërs* formed by a group consisting of the wives of intellectuals and well-known men. In April 1900, these women adopted the following manifesto:

We are not, of set purpose, enemies of the British nation. But we are with our whole heart and spirit with the Boers. We admire them because they are unfortunate; We love them because they are generous and just, quiet and simple, because they represent in our eyes the sound dignity of the just and the love of their country."¹⁹

Guyot wrote ironically about this text declaring that "the brave and the just are two distinct things".²⁰ The movement published several books of poetry which bore the words "vendu au profit de l'oeuvre Le Sou des Boërs" (sold for the benefit of "Le Sou des Boers"). Another predominantly feminine organisation, was *La Vie aux Enfants Boërs*, whose president was a Madame Maurice Fauqueux. This association, like others of which only the name is known, was only mentioned in the newspapers.

Even after the War, in 1905, a *Comité Franco-sud-africain* was founded, whose president, it would seem, was Senator Pauliat. It included among its members, Dr W J Leyds, the brother of Colonel Villebois-Mareuil and the Colonel's daughter. It proposed to bring young Boers to France and to promote the use of French in South Africa, via the *Alliance Française*.

From the study of these pro-Boer movements, certain conclusions may be drawn. Firstly, they tended to be of short duration, the public seemed to have been in favour of the Boers, but not inclined to adhere strongly to these organisations. Secondly, these movements all appear to have lacked money even while they received funds from the

18. Duesbert (E.), *aux héroïques Boers, la Justicière*, play in one act, Paris, 1899, Barbre 41 pp.; 2nd édition, 1900, 41 pp. Another collection from the same author: *La guerre sud-africaine*, Paris, 1902, 16 pp.

19. *Le Siècle*, 2 April 1900, p. 1.

20. *Ibid.*

representative of the South African Republic or the Orange Free State or raised money by public collections through the medium of the newspapers. Thirdly, the Left is strangely absent from these committees. The presiding members were conservatives, hostile to the government. This situation naturally affected adversely the recruitment of volunteers for the South African Republic.

The participation of the French in this War took diverse forms. Thus France, like several other big powers, sent two military attachés to South Africa to observe the fighting from both sides to gain information in this way.²¹ There were also workmen and engineers who went to teach the Boers how to handle the arms delivered to them by Creusot, the French armaments manufacturer.

However, projects of a more fantastic nature were envisaged. It can be learned from some curious texts that some individuals proposed "a naval war against England by means of professional leagues ... financed by subscriptions to buy and equip warships".²² An appeal addressed to shipowners and seamen was also launched in which it was declared that there were "Good opportunities for profit. The intended expedition is perfectly legal, write to A B C *Cri du Transvaal*".²³ Nothing seems to have come of this advertisement and likewise as regards this telegram sent from Bordeaux to a post office box address in Paris: "Received a proposal by consul Transvaal to go to Cape Good Hope to command a Boer privateer to sink British liners, full of soldiers. 5,000 Francs a month. Will you allow me to go?"

The telegram thus intercepted was probably the work of a practical joker, but it could have had the aim of compromising the official representative of the Boer Republics in France.²⁴ In Paris there was in fact, a consul representing the South African Republic, Mr Johan Pierson and, at Brussels an itinerant Ambassador, Dr W J Leyds, not to mention Dr Hendrik Müller, for the O F S, at The Hague. Prospective candidates went to see these representatives. On every occasion the diplomats replied that they could not deal with them for it would lead to diplomatic difficulties with the countries to which they were accredited.

The recruitment of volunteers was, therefore, handled by national committees: in France this was principally the *Comité d'Action de la Jeunesse Française en faveur du Transvaal*, the work of which has already been partly discussed above. According to this Comité's President, Landry, the movement enjoyed remarkable success. He claimed that "on the very first day, more than fifty volunteers enlisted; after fifteen days, more than 400 names were registered". Landry claimed furthermore, that by January 1900, the Comité had received more than 4 000 requests to engage. He admitted, nevertheless, that only half of these volunteers were ready to leave.²⁵

This Comité d'Action had access to the use of several newspapers which gave vast publicity to the recruitment campaign. The newspaper called *La Patrie* (right-wing) gave

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21. The French government sent the Major (Commandant) D'Amade (1856—1941) to the English side. At first no one was sent to the Boer side. Then the Consul of France in Pretoria observed that the Boers risked being wounded by this situation (AAE, TO, NS 28, p. 139). Prince Henri of Orléans also requested that France send an attaché to the Boers: *Le Gaulois*, 26 December, 1899, p. 2; so the government sent Captain Demange (1860—1941). Both men kept diaries. Demange's diary is remarkable.
 22. Pemjean, (Lucien), *L'Ami des Boërs*, November 1901, p. 3.
 23. *Le Cri du Transvaal*, 18 August 1901, p. 3.
 24. AAE, TO, NS 28, p. 120, Bordeaux, 11 November 1899, to Adèle Rebatet, P.O. 96, Paris.
 25. Landry, *op. cit.*, p. 6 and *le Petit Journal*, 17 February, 1900, p. 2.

figures in the form of a sort of victory bulletin. The following are some examples for the month of December, 1899:

"On the 15th of December, enlistment of 95 at Limoges;
at Romilly, 6 volunteers left.
On the 23rd of December, a reserve lieutenant from Brest
will rejoin Villebois-Mareuil.
On the 25th of December, at Brest, 4 reserve lieutenants".²⁶

Landry told a reporter of the *Figaro* that he wanted to send an entire company, equipped and armed, on a ship provided by some shipowner. He also revealed that he had written to the Minister of War, Gallifet, to ask if he would consent to give leave, for several months, to officers and non-commissioned officers to enable them to command the company in question. In addition, he declared that he was going to invite two famous French historians, Ernest Lavisse and Alfred Rambaud to preside over the committee. The reporter commented sceptically in his newspaper in the following terms: "The British navy may disembark easily at Durban if it were opposed only by Colonel Monteil's subscriptions and captain Landry's company." The journalist also recounted having seen, at the café Procope a student responsible for recruitment. On a list of 250 names, there figured not only French names but Belgian, Greek, Luxemburg and Danish names as well. "Not one German yet. An Italian was not accepted".²⁷ In mid-January 1900, the *Comité* admitted that it had only sent fifty Frenchmen to the Transvaal and that only twenty-five others would soon be following.²⁸ It may thus be seen that the fanciful projects imagined by certain journalists, were far from being realised. Henri Rochefort, for one, had proposed an international lottery in order to equip and send an army of 25 000 men.²⁹

How many volunteers were there altogether? Diverse figures have been given: an historian inquired in the course of a congress of learned societies: "How many people know that more than 100 Frenchmen enlisted?"³⁰ On the other hand, in the preface of one of Kipling's works, it may be read that 400 Frenchmen went to fight in South Africa.³¹ By comparing the information from the different sources, about 240 names can be found. The efforts of the committees appear, therefore, to have produced little in the way of practical results and not least, because the volunteers who went were not all motivated by heroism and proved of scant service to the South African Republic.

Of course, one cannot rely solely on the descriptions of the volunteers given by enemies of the nationalists, to whom the volunteers were ex-sailors, soldiers about to re-enlist, in fact "all those rejected by their own class who were left by society to suffocate and die, all adventure seekers, battle lovers who think of humanity only in terms of strangling". Reporting this opinion in his paper, *Le Siècle*, Guyot agreed with it declaring that "Ceux qui s'enrôlent pour le Transvaal sont, en général, des déclassés, des aigris, des malades, des aventuriers" (Those who enlist for Transvaal are, in general, rejected and irritated people, or sick or adventure seekers).³² This point of view was shared by some volunteers who returned from the South African Republic: a certain E C Roëland and a

26. *La Patrie*, 15, 23 and 25 December, 1899, p. 2.

27. *Le Figaro*, 9 November 1899, p. 4.

28. *Le Petit Journal*, 14 February 1900, p. 2.

29. According to Guyot (Y.), *Le Siècle*, 17 and 18 March 1901, p. 3.

30. Martel, (André), *la guerre du Transvaal vue par les compagnons de Villebois-Mareuil*, in *Actes du 78ième congrès national des Sociétés savantes*, Toulouse, 1953, P.U.F., 1954, p. 415.

31. Kipling (R.), *Carnet de guerre*, Bizerte, Henri Borjane, 1939, p. 19.

32. *Le Siècle*, 10 November 1899, p. 2.

certain P Thierry confirmed that there had been several scoundrels amongst their comrades.³³ Captain M G Demange, the French Military Attaché accredited to the Boer Army, was very severe in his judgment of these volunteers: many of them, he said, "do not possess the sense of discipline and sacrifice which they should have". He considered also that many unworthy foreigners had come to the Boers only in order to profit from the mess and the disorder which exist in the country.³⁴

Were these contemporary criticisms as regards the volunteers, valid? An attempt was made to discover the social origin and the reason for the departure of the different volunteers. It was found that men of every condition were among them: clerks, workers, blacksmiths, sailors, a doctor, a veterinary surgeon, a station master, but above all military men of every rank. At first, it seemed as though it would be easy to trace the previous records of this last category. Being ex-soldiers, their service records would normally be preserved in the Historical Archives of the Army in France. However, this proved true only in the case of officers. Certain individual cases are of interest, while not permitting conclusions to be drawn. Thus a Lieutenant E Gallopaud, forced to leave the French Army on account of debts, enlisted for the Transvaal. Another, having legally separated from his wife in 1898, became available in 1899 through the loss of his post, and also enlisted. Yet again, H M A Lecoy de la Manche, having been suspended from his functions in 1898 as a disciplinary measure, for failing to declare his new address, left for the Transvaal in 1900.³⁵ There was also the case of Villebois-Mareuil, of whom more will be recounted later. These few examples are somewhat puzzling, considering the romantic way in which Martel spoke of them, declaring that such volunteers leave, resigning their officer's rank in the French Army to fight as privates.³⁶ Indeed, at times, the opposite occurred: an officer of a minor rank in France pretended to be of a much higher rank in South Africa.

Why then did these men go? Was it on account of anglophobia? One prospective volunteer confessed to hating Britain, calling that country "L'ennemi à perpétuité du Français" (the perpetual enemy of the French).³⁷ The French Consul in Lisbon, informed Delcassé that when they had stopped there en route to South Africa, certain young volunteers had demonstrated their anti-English feelings in front of the British Embassy.³⁸ Given the young age of most of these men (the youngest was said to be only seventeen years old), which averaged 25, it can be supposed that it was a desire for adventure or less avowable reasons, that attracted them. This did not, however, exclude the existence of real heroism and pure motives in some of them.

Whatever the reasons for their departure, it must be conceded that the volunteers showed merit in persevering in their decision. The trip to Southern Africa with false names and professions to avoid the possibility of being stopped by the French or Portuguese authorities, was not exactly restful. At Lourenco Marques, the French Consul obliged them to pay 8 francs to legalise their passports³⁹ and imposed the swearing of an oath denying that they wanted to place themselves in the service of a foreign army. Without this oath they would have lost their French nationality. Several of them never reached Pre-

33. *La Petite République*, 29 August 1900, p. 2.

34. Report of Captain Demange, AAE, TO, NS 15, May 1900, p. 173 and TO, NS 16, May 1900, p. 262.

35. His file kept at the AHA, mentions with discretion a trip on the East coast of Africa in 1900.

36. Martel, *op. cit.*, p. 416.

37. Guyot (Evariste), *Boërs et Denaisiens*, Condé, 1901, F. Descamps, 56 pp.

38. AAE, TO, NS 29, 18 March 1900, p. 66.

39. *Le Cri du Transvaal*, 23 August 1901, letter of Raimbault

toria. To avoid British hostility the Portuguese authorities did not always accord the necessary authorisation to leave the port. The Consul, therefore, had to arrange to send these men, without any means, back to France.⁴⁰

What did those who succeeded in reaching the Transvaal find? This is what the French Consul in Pretoria, who was pro-Boer reported: "Boers do not know what to do with those foreigners ... Those volunteers are derelict, without orders, without support, and even despised by the Boers. They try to dissuade those Frenchmen who are sent to Transvaal by unconscious comités from enlisting and try to convince them, especially those who possess a trade, to work in the mines or the factories in Johannesburg".⁴¹

On their return, some volunteers complained of a lack of organisation in the South African Republic. E C Roëland, a veterinary surgeon, started a public controversy in *La Petite République* concerning the committees of Landry and Monteil, which he accused of having used the money collected for the Boers for the election campaigns in France: the real purpose was political: to enhance the French nationalist movement by stressing its dedication to another people's interest. In his view, the committees in question had sent volunteers without any money and with no concern for their welfare. The author requested the committees to use their funds to repatriate volunteers without means and wanted to know, besides, what had become of the money that had been collected.⁴² Colonel Monteil denied these accusations and declared that he was ready to associate himself with any move to facilitate the repatriation of volunteers. Louis Guillou, the secretary of Landry's *Comité*, counter-attacked by accusing Roëland of having gone to the Transvaal to practise his profession of veterinary surgeon to make money for himself and to have used the aid from the *Comité* to obtain a reduction on the price of the voyage. Furthermore, he claimed that the volunteers had enough money as they had each received an adequate amount before leaving France. In his reply to this, Roëland mentioned penniless volunteers and said that instead of giving them a gun and ammunition, it would have been more useful for them to have continued to exercise their professions.⁴³

Who was right as regards this controversy? Lucien Millevoye, a nationalist MP and an eminent pro-Boer, expressed ideas similar to those of Roëland. He noted that many volunteers had been ready to leave but had failed to do so for lack of money. He did not understand why the South African Republics' representatives in Europe had not wanted to provide the committees with the money needed. "Large amounts of money were sent to Europe to obtain direct help from France. In whose hands did that money land up? Our question should not be left without an answer". But Millevoye did not pursue this issue, even though Yves Guyot urged him to raise the matter with President Kruger.⁴⁴

It would seem that the Frenchmen who went to the Transvaal were not very useful there: they participated in few battles and their losses were minimal.

Nevertheless the British captured a number of them, and sent these prisoners to St Hélène or Ceylon. In the spring of 1900, the committees ceased to send volunteers. The problem of their repatriation proved difficult. The French Government was obliged to

40. AAE, TO, NS 29 the French Consul at Lourenco Marques to Delcassé, 24 January 1900, p. 23: he wanted to send back 27 Frenchmen who had not obtained the authorisation to disembark.

41. AAE, TO, NS 29, pp. 99 and 100, The French Consul at Pretoria to Delcassé: The consul declared that he had found work for about 50 Frenchmen.

42. Roëland, *La Petite République*, 31 July and 7 August 1900.

43. *La Petite République*, 9, 12 and 13 August 1900. The controversy continued 18, 24 and 28 August 1900.

44. *La Patrie*, 29 July 1900, p. 2 and *Le Siècle*, 27 November 1900, p. 3.

intervene. As far as the prisoners went, the task was complicated by the fact that legally they had lost their nationality. This fact did not, however, prevent the French Consul from visiting a wounded French volunteer in hospital at the Cape of Good Hope.⁴⁵ To enable the repatriation of the volunteers, France sent a warship to Delagoa Bay,⁴⁶ which after all was not used. The Consul at Lourenco Marques, who expected the return of about a hundred Frenchmen from the Transvaal in June 1900, asked Delcassé what he should do with them.⁴⁷ Apparently the French Government paid for their return passages.

In conclusion it must be said that the participation of the French volunteers ended in failure. Perhaps it would have been different if Colonel Villebois-Mareuil had not died so early. In view of his previous career in the French Army and his personality, this volunteer acquired fame such as no other did.

Georges de Villebois-Mareuil was born at Nantes in 1847, into a family of the old nobility.⁴⁸ He received a good education and carried his studies as far as the equivalent of a Bachelor of Arts degree. Having been through Military and officers' school (St. Cyr), he began a military career as lieutenant in the Imperial Army in 1868. He fought in the various campaigns in which France engaged during the period including the Franco-Prussian War, in the course of which he was wounded. He was promoted to the rank of Colonel in 1892 and was placed at the head of the *Ier Regiment Etranger*. In 1892, Villebois-Mareuil married but having given him one daughter, his wife died in 1893. He was connected to the family of the playwright Edmond Rostand, who wrote *Cyrano de Bergerac*.

Following the death of his wife, the Comte de Villebois-Mareuil seems to have been seized with a desire for adventure. He had hoped to accompany his regiment to Madagascar when it was sent there; instead he was retained in France by his superiors. In disgust, and seeing no hope of acquiring the rank of general in the near future, he left the army in 1895. It has been suggested that political reasons were also responsible for his decision. The agitation over the Dreyfus Affair had turned him against military life in France, if not against the army itself.

The Comite did not remain inactive, however. He devoted himself to literature. He had already published a novel under a pseudonym in 1890 and since 1885, had had published several articles on world strategy. After leaving the army, he continued to contribute articles and wrote for publications with a nationalistic flavour. He also concerned himself with movements of similar tendencies, for example, *Action Francaise*.⁴⁹ During this time, he wrote two further novels. Meanwhile, he lived in a luxurious apartment in Paris. It was suggested that he intended to go into politics and hoped to be elected a deputy.⁵⁰ Villebois-Mareuil could, thus, have continued to enjoy an active and pleasant retirement. However, in the autumn of 1899 the newspapers announced that he had gone to the Transvaal. What were the reasons for his departure?

45. AAE, TO, NS 29, pp. 11—112, account of the conversation with the volunteer Feissal given by the consul at the Cape.

46. At Delcassé's request, the navy sent a cruiser, *le Nielly*. It arrived 30 November 1899 and remained until 28 September 1900 (AAE, TO, NS 28 and 29).

AAE, TO, NS 29, p. 124, Consul of France to Lourenco Marques, to Delcassé, 4 June 1900 and AAE, TO, NS 29, 10 April 1900, p. 81, Consul of France to Capetown asked Delcassé what he should do.

48. Macnab, Roy, *The French colonel Villebois-Mareuil and the Boers, 1899—1900*. (London, OUP, 1976), 270 pp.

49. Hue (Gustave), *Le colonel de Villebois-Mareuil*, Paris 1912, Bloud, pp. 63—64 and Patté (Paul), *Les Sociétés Régimentaires d'anciens militaires*, Paris, 1899, Berger Levraut.

50. PP, B $\frac{A}{1295}$ and PP, E $\frac{A}{58-7}$

Opinions differ on this question. He himself suggested in a letter that it was quite simply anglophobia: "Il s'agit tout simplement d'arracher tout le sud-Afrique aux Anglais: c'est la cognée dans le grand chêne" (Felling the great oak would be simply a case of removing all of South Africa from the English).⁵¹ Others suggest that it was the result of an unhappy love affair.⁵² The *Figaro* declared that it was simply from a spirit of adventure that he had gone to Africa.⁵³ This last appears to have been the principal reason, though the others cannot be excluded. Given their different political leanings, each newspaper announced the news of his departure in their own particular manner. Villebois-Mareuil seems to have had the idea of going to South Africa himself, even though *The Times* published an anonymous letter in which it was claimed that Dr Leyds had asked him to go.⁵⁴

The Colonel was apparently disappointed on arriving in South Africa. He felt that from the Boers' point of view it was a hopeless war. The French Military Attaché, Captain Demange, noted that as far as Villebois-Mareuil was concerned "he does not have and never had a definite and stable position in the Boer Army". According to a Belgian nurse there, he was despondent about the tactics and inefficiency of the Boers. This did not, however, prevent him from showing a capacity for stoicism, integrity and remarkable self-abnegation⁵⁵ and he attempted to rally round him all the foreigners in order to form a homogeneous unit capable of being used effectively against the British. He succeeded in grouping together about fifty of these volunteers. As a first mission, he decided to blow up the Kimberley railway line but his little group met some 1 000 English soldiers near the village of Boshoff on the 5th of April 1900. The Colonel fought desperately. Instead of surrendering, he gave the order to fight until there was no ammunition left. He was wounded twice and died on the battlefield.⁵⁶ His death was a blow to the Boers; they no longer knew what to do with their foreign volunteers.

Villebois-Mareuil's death aroused diverse sentiments in France. Each political grouping reacted to the event and interpreted it in the light of its opinions and it was the principal subject of the news devoted to the South African War during the month of April 1900. At first his family desired to repatriate his body but on opening his will, his brother discovered that he wished to be buried wherever he should die and wanted no ceremony in his honour. His body was therefore not brought home to France. Nevertheless, on 18 April 1900, the nationalists organised a solemn service in his honour at Notre-Dame de Paris. Gallifet, the Minister of War, who had paid homage to the Colonel in the House of Deputies a few days before, gave permission for Army officers to assist at the service, provided they did not themselves participate in any demonstrations against the French Republic.

51. *Action Française*, 1 January, 1900, p. 93, letter from Villebois-Mareuil of 23 November, 1899.

52. Tharaud, Jérôme and Jean, *Dingley, l'illustre écrivain*, Paris, 1923, p. 90 and Macnab, *op. cit.*

53. *Le Figaro*, 12 April 1900, p. 1.

54. Article in *The Time*, reproduced in *Le Siècle*, 8 December, 1900, p. 1. Denied by Delcassé, AAE, TO, NS 26, p. 133.

55. AAE, TO, NS 15, May 1900, Rapport Demange, p. 137 and NS 16, p. 102. Also Bron (Alice) *Aux ambulances boërs*, published in *Le Siècle* of 8 February to 11 March, 1901 and *Retour de l'Afrique Australe* of 30 November and of 1 December 1901.

56. Details furnished by de Feissal, a French volunteer, who had not been killed in the battle, to the Consul of France at the Cape, AAE, TO, NS 29, pp. 11–112. The same de Feissal was interviewed in 1953 by Martel, *op. cit.*, p. 421. On the other hand Deschamps, P. *Gloire aux Vaincus!* (Historique du Transvaal et de l'Etat libre d'Orange la guerre anglo-transvaalienne: 1899–1901); Montluçon, s.d., Grande imprimerie du Centre, p. 27, claimed that Villebois-Mareuil "blessé, fut achevé d'un coup de revolver par un soldat anglais". This was part of the anti-English debate and no witness put forward such an accusation.

The principal nationalist figures were present. Although there was one rowdy incident outside the Cathedral after the service (which was interpreted by the different newspapers each according to its political line), by and large the occasion passed off calmly.

For some time Villebois-Mareuil's actions and death continued to be a source of political wrangling in France as both the Left and the Right sought to use the Colonel to their own advantage by interpreting his views and actions as it suited them. Demonstrations in honour of the Colonel were so numerous that Paul Cambon, the French Ambassador in London, found them excessive.⁵⁷ Throughout France, countless streets and movements were inaugurated in the fallen Colonel's honour. Millevoye compared him to Bayard, Rochambeau and Lafayette.⁵⁸ Even poets were inspired by his heroism. The Colonel's daughter passed on her father's cross of the *Légion d'honneur* to Lieutenant-Colonel J P Marchand, the hero of Fachoda in 1898. Thus Fachoda and Boshoff were united by a bond other than just poetic.⁵⁹

Even today, the Colonel is remembered in France and South Africa. In 1952, a French General declared that the Colonel's name was connected for him with his earliest memories: "As a young boy, I was filled with admiration and enthusiasm for Villebois-Mareuil who died so gallantly".⁶⁰ In South Africa, in 1971, a special ceremony was organised on the occasion of the transfer of Villebois-Mareuil's remains to a new site at Magersfontein. Recently a South African novelist praised him in these dithyrambic terms: "This great soldier, this gentleman, this adventurer, this wandering knight out of the Middle Ages, on horseback, facing the enemy to defend liberty".⁶¹

(To be continued)

57. Paul Cambon to his brother Jules, *Correspondence, 1870—1924*, t. 2, Paris 1940, Grasset, 8 April 1900.

58. *La Patrie*, 8 April 1900, p. 1.

59. Lostanges-Bédouer (Robert de), *Revue des Questions Héraldiques*, 25 May 1900 and 25 June 1900, p. 725.

60. Martel, *op. cit.*, p. 423, confidences of General Nugues, October 1952.

61. Cloete, Stuart, *Les haillons de la gloire*, Paris, 1966 Flammarion, p. 470.