

THE ANGLO-BOER WAR IN THE DESPATCHES OF RUSSIAN MILITARY ATTACHES

*Translator's Preface*¹

The "Despatches of a Russian Military Attaché² during the Anglo-Boer War are particularly important for three reasons:

- (a) As far as is known they have only been published once in the original (Russian) and have never previously been translated; therefore this is the first translation to appear in English.
- (b) They give a clear picture of the Russian attitude towards
 - (a) the English
 - (b) the Boers
 which may be of real value to any historian of the Boer War — particularly a South African one.
- (c) They shed a very interesting, correlating and to many readers a new light on the Anglo-Boer War, seen through Russian, officially "neutral" eyes, its progress and its repercussions in London.

I

The Finding of the Documents

With the encouragement and support of the University of South Africa and in particular, of Professor S. Pauw, the University's Principal, I undertook a tour of Europe and America to study modern methods of teaching Russian. During my travels I visited Washington D.C. in January, 1962 and there I met Dr. S. Yakobson who is in charge of the Slavic Section of the Library of Congress. I asked him if he knew of any documents giving information about the Russian attitude towards the Boers during the Anglo-Boer War. He told me of a publication he had seen, which had appeared in the Soviet "Krasnyi Arkhiv" (Red Archive) during the last War, which was for the first time printing documents, up to then kept secret in the Intelligence Dept. files (and later transferred to the Historical War Archives).

These were the despatches and letters of Russian Military Attaché's who wrote their observations and comments during the Anglo-Boer War.

I tried and failed to obtain "The Krasnyi Arkhiv" in the U.S.A. and finally succeeded in discovering a copy of it at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. The publication in question was too long for me to copy out by

1. Mrs. Williams-Foxcroft to whom South African historians stand indebted for this rare documentary collection, was born at Poltava in the Ukraine, scene of Peter the Great's decisive victory over the Swedes, 1709. As a child she had to flee from Russia after the Revolution and then lived in Bulgaria, France and England. The new Department of Russian of the University of South Africa is her present charge. (Ed.).
2. Although the Despatches are described in the text as those of "a Russian Military Attaché", there are in reality three authors: Col. Ermolov, who wrote most of the reports (17 letters and three telegrams) from London, Lt. Col. Miller who wrote three reports from Brussels and the Hague; Lt. Col. Maximov — the writer of the only letter from Pretoria.

hand and as I could neither borrow it from the library nor buy it, I had a microfilm made of it, which was sent here by air and I then translated it.

(As far as Dr. Yakobson, Professor Konovalov of Oxford and Professor Hill of Cambridge knew, it had never been previously translated from the Russian and received very little attention when it appeared in 1940 because the world was in the throes of a war which quite overshadowed the one which took place forty years previously.)

II

The Russian attitude to the English and to the Boers

(a) To understand the Russian attitude to the English during the Anglo-Boer War, one must know something about the events which preceded it and were responsible for it. To do that one must make a short digression into nineteenth century Anglo-Russian relations.

By the beginning of the 19th century it was becoming increasingly clear to English statesmen that Russia was not only a potential but an actual rival of England — and not in Europe only but in most of the English schemes in the East.

Therefore, whatever may have been the attitude of a few individual Englishmen the “official” English policy towards Russia from then on was epitomized in three words: “Keep her down”. This was applied firmly and consistently, either by openly engaging her in actual war and by forming alliances against Russia to keep up a “Cold War” and by means of that to keep her deprived of that liberty of action and the right of deciding the fate of other nations, which the political leaders of Britain appropriated for themselves.

Napoleon lost his Russian campaign. His triumph in Moscow was short-lived. This is not the place to argue whether he was defeated by Russian soldiers or by the Russian cold. Suffice it to say that he lost roughly nine-tenths of his army and most of his best troops in Russia. It was not long after that victorious Russian troops in their turn, entered the capital of France — Paris, with Alexander, who is known in Russian history as “Blessed”, at their head.

After Napoleon’s final defeat at Waterloo, England became very jealous of the increasingly important part which Russia was beginning to assume in European politics. So Alexander I, who had great faith in the Allies whom he considered as “Brothers in Christ” — generally encountered setbacks in 1815 at the Congress of Vienna — and returned home, disillusioned with Austria but chiefly with England — whose rulers praised him and his country and flattered him to his face and stabbed him in the back.

In 1853 Turkey declared war on Russia — in November of that year the Russian Black Sea Fleet destroyed the Turkish fleet at Sinope. Following this the British and French squadrons entered the Black Sea and war started between Russia and these West European powers. It lasted for three years. Soon after the fall of Sebastopol, whose resistance was one of the most heroic in any war, peace negotiations were opened. The Treaty of

Paris was concluded on terms not just unfavourable but highly offensive and humiliating to Russia. Among the other indignities England imposed on Russia, was to forbid her to keep a fleet in her own home waters — the Black Sea. This demand, to which Russia had to acquiesce, was a very hard blow to her national pride and was tremendously resented by every Russian.

The Russo-Turkish War 1877-78 was caused by Turkish oppression of the Slavs, which led Russia to intervene on their behalf. It was a hard and difficult war — especially as the reorganisation of the Russian army on the basis of universal military service was far from completed when it began. However, by February 1878, after the fall of Plevna and Shipka, victorious Russian troops neared Constantinople (the possession of which had been Russia's cherished dream since the fall of Byzantium). The success of the Russian armies led to the interference of Great Britain, who feared a threat to her possessions in the East. The English fleet entered the Sea of Marmora. On March the 3rd 1878 at the small village of San Stefano, near Constantinople, the preliminary negotiations for peace were signed. These were very favourable to the liberated Balkan States and to Russia. But the Treaty aroused the strong opposition of Great Britain. In the person of her Prime Minister, Disraeli, she threatened Russia with a new war. Wishing to avoid that Alexander II accepted the mediation of Bismarck and agreed to revise the conditions of the Treaty at a European Congress in Berlin. This turned out to be an utter diplomatic defeat for Russia. She lost the peace terms of the war she had just won with such effort and with so much loss of life . . .

Thus, from just these three examples, to mention but a few, it can be seen and understood why Russia felt so bitter towards England — “the Perfidious Albion” — whose foreign policy was at that time the very denial of all the principles believed in and upheld by the average Englishmen at home.

(b) It must therefore be admitted that a large part of the Russian official friendliness to the Boers was based not so much on love of them as on the hatred of “our common enemy” — the English — a large part — but by no means all.

Besides the shared hatred there was also real sympathy for the Boers — the innocent victims of English aggression whose only crime was the fact “that gold was discovered on their farms”. There was also a genuine admiration for their courage, in daring to make such a prolonged and brave stand against England — at that time still backed by the might of her Colonial Empire.

The Russians respected the Boers for their steadfastness and their success and swift military tactics, which baffled the English and made it impossible for them to pin the Boers down and to engage them in a major battle.

The Russians had just fought in defence of an oppressed minority in the Balkans. The thought of fighting side by side with the Boers appealed to several Russians, who joined the Boer ranks as volunteers. Other help was sent as well, in the form of money, clothes and food-supplies.

News of the Boer successes was front-page news in all the chief newspapers in Russia. Patriotic Boer songs were translated into Russian and sung by young and old alike — such as for instance “Transvaal, Transvaal, my Fatherland” — probably a free transcription of “Sarie Marais” or a Russian variation on a Boer theme which ended:

“Mother give me my gun and my drum,

I am going with the Boers to beat the English”.

A visit to the old Museum in Pretoria illustrates the Russian unofficial attitude better than any written descriptions. There is a great “Bratina” — brotherhood loving cup — with a parchment roll with thousands of signatures from well-wishers in all walks of life — a truly democratic document on which princes and paupers signed their names one next to the other — all joined together in one great feeling of sympathy for victims of an unjust aggression. There is a beautifully ornamented Bible, ikons and books of old songs, now yellowed with age. But as one gazes at these relics, one marvels that they should have been preserved with such gratitude and reverence. It is true that the Boers did not have many open friends at that time and therefore prized all the more any real proof of goodwill, which they received.

In every line of the despatches one sees that the sympathy of the authors is with the Boers. Whenever there is news of Boer victories they rejoice at it as if it were their own, but whenever the situation is reversed, then their first aim is “to unmask the false report”, for to them any success of the English is almost as painful as it is to the Boers themselves. Ermolov’s only regret is that the English defeats are not continual; he would welcome more than anything else a complete Boer victory in the War. Since this could be interpreted as being caused only by his hostility to England it is good to bring the reader’s attention to his concern for the Boer women and children, the hardships in the concentration camps and the plight of the Boer population in their own territory, occupied by the enemy. There we see the author’s indignation and grief for the victims without any ulterior motive and on grounds of human sympathy alone. He watches a gallant minority struggling for independence against overwhelming odds and would like to see the miracle of their overcoming these odds.

The Boer War

One of the most striking aspects of the despatches is the fact that they give almost simultaneous information from three distinct sources

- (1) English ones (London)
- (2) Continental ones (Brussels and the Hague)
- (3) Boer ones (Pretoria).

This greatly enriches their content both from the historical and the psychological point of view and gives them almost an independent and three-dimensional existence. The first despatch is dated August 15th 1899 (roughly on the eve of the declaration of the Anglo-Boer War), the last in

December 1901 (roughly on the eve of peace).

In the frame-work of these three years and four months we see picture after picture unrolling itself before us. We are given statistical facts i.e. about the numbers of troops involved, the costs of the War in terms of money and men. These figures are now a part of history. What makes the despatches so actual and alive is the representation of human emotions: hopes, fears, disappointments of the two opposing sides and of the spectators—the “officially neutral Russians”.

Reading the despatches one forgets that the Anglo-Boer War was fought some sixty years ago — that daily there are fewer of the surviving veterans who made that history.

The passage of time gives perspective, heals wounds, calms passions, but it also robs events of their intensity — of their “fever of life”. The despatches, written from day to day, in the heat of the moment, resurrect that life and plunge us into its very heart. Their authors speculate about a future known to us but undisclosed to them and we relive the past, captivated by its spell, temporarily forgetting everything that has happened since. It is as if we were standing right next to the balance on which the fates of England and the Boer Republics are being weighed. Will there be war? How long will it last? Who will win it? These are some of the questions that the writers of these despatches ask themselves and attempt to answer at the same time. Will it be England — according to Ermolov’s reports, already a giant with feet of clay, whose policy “is carrying the seeds of its own destruction within itself?” Reading his descriptions of the “frame of mind and the state of affairs in London” we realise with a shock how close to victory the “Indocile” Boers were in fact, who had no idea of the true position in England at the time.

Fighting England, they thought of all the might of the British Empire behind her, of Canada and Australia sending contingents and pouring in other aid. The Boers, fighting for the independence of their own soil, could not expect much help from anywhere and had to rely mostly on their own fighting qualities and their staunch hearts. But unfortunately for them they were not all of them of one mind. There were some weak ones and there were those, who for the sake of money or of peace had gone over to the other side — “the traitors” as Ermolov “the neutral observer” writing from the capital of the opposing side, calls them with obvious contempt. There is no shadow of doubt as to where his and the other correspondents’ sympathies lie.

At the beginning of the War when Fortune smiles on the Boers and there is a depression in London, Ermolov writes as if the Boer victories were Russian ones. He does occasionally show some humane feeling for the English too as when, speaking of the “terrible scenes which take place in the Hall of the War Office when casualty lists are posted there”. For the rest he follows the progress of the War as if the Boers were his own people and the English not just their enemy in the field but the enemy of the rest of the human race.

As the fortunes of war begin to change and start going badly for

the Boers Ermolov and the other Russian reporters hope with them, grieve with them and share their indignation at the English excesses. Wherever it is possible they do what they are accusing the English of doing, only the other way round. They give out the bad news for England "in generous doses and the good ones in dribs and drabs".

Realising that the prospects are becoming more and more gloomy for the Boers as the War progresses and that the struggle will end sooner or later in England's favour they try to console themselves with the thoughts: (1) that "whatever devastation and ruin the English leave the country in at the end of the War, the Boers will soon succeed in bringing it back to its former flourishing condition".

(2) that the English foreign policy of "national selfishness and greed will give way to a different policy, more lofty and sympathetic to the life of other nations . . . that other people will appear, more high-minded men . . . and that there will be a moral awakening in the political life of England, and that she will not always want "the lion's share for herself".

Whether written from London, Brussels or Pretoria, the despatches are framed in the same, rather heavy cumbersome language of the official documents of the time. The sentences are long and very involved. However, behind this often clumsy form dwells such a wealth of acute observations of general politics, national characteristics or of individual psychological detail, such sincere spontaneity and wholehearted enthusiasm for the Boer cause that, forgetting grammatical shortcomings, we can only be glad that these men lived to tell their tale, that we have the opportunity to read it and to thank them posthumously for sharing it with us.

E. Williams-Foxcroft.

Soviet Introduction to the Despatches (1940)

The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902 was one of the most important landmarks of the colonial policy of English Imperialism in the Southern portion of Africa during the last century.

Beginning with the eighties of the 19th century England undertook a series of attempts to gain possession of the small Boer Republics: the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. In 1880-1881 the first Anglo-Boer War took place in which a weak detachment of Boer militiamen defeated the British forces and thus gained the independence of the country.

Fifteen years later in 1896 the English government once more tried to subjugate the republics. As a provocative measure English Imperialism organised the Jameson Raid, which ended in defeat.

An expansion of English Imperialism in Southern Africa was motivated by several political, strategic and economic causes. Among the first persons interested in seizing power from the Boer republics were: together with Joseph Chamberlain and Cecil Rhodes, leading the list, the circles of gold mining companies and owners of diamond mines, all of them industrial and (chiefly mining) magnates. These circles hoped to gain a monopoly of all the natural wealth of the Transvaal and the Orange Republics by subjugating them in order to find profitable markets for their merchandise and finally

to make use of the newly acquired lands in order to build a railway line: Cape-Cairo.

From this strategic angle the conquest of the Boer Republics promised English Imperialism the strengthening of its possessions in Southern Africa. From the political angle the English government intended by a series of decisive victories to raise the shaken prestige of the British Empire.

On account of all these causes the ruling circles in England began a new war with the Boer Republics in 1899.

In spite of the overwhelming inequality of numbers the Boers put up a lengthy, and on several occasions, victorious resistance to the English forces.

During the first months of the War the Boers consistently defeated and routed almost all the English forces concentrated in Southern Africa. In the first ten battles the English forces lost 4,458 men, killed; whereas the Boer losses amounted to only 530 men. The Boer forces besieged the most important centres held by the enemy: Ladysmith, Mafeking and Kimberley. It was only at the price of a colossal effort, having moved almost all the available supplies of ammunition and men from the metropolis to South Africa that the English command finally succeeded in freeing the fortresses besieged by the Boers and achieved a change in their own favour in the theatre of war operations.

The war lasted three long years. In spite of the fact that the whole territory of the republics was occupied by English troops, Boer partisan detachments continued the unequal fight and inflicted several defeats on the English army.

Only in 1902 did the English Imperialists manage to finally break up the resistance of the Boers and to make their country into their own colony.

The documents published below are despatches and letters of the Russian military attaché in London: Colonel Ermolov and the Russian Military attaché in Brussels and the Hague, Lieutenant-Colonel Miller. They were addressed to the Chief of the Intelligence Committee of the General Staff, to the Generals Sologub and Tselebrowsky and comprise almost all the duration of the Anglo-Boer War (Aug. 15th 1899—Dec. 19th 1901). The value of these documents is particularly great because they come from neutral observers, well informed about the actual positions of the fighting sides, and on the whole give an objective evaluation of the events taking place at the time.

Ermolov, using his connections with the English High Command, gives in his dispatches the dark picture of the lack of preparedness and of the inadequate supplies of the armed forces of the British Empire in the Boer War. Although he had no reliable information from the theatre of war operations, Ermolov succeeds on several occasions, in unmasking the false English reports of victory and in showing the serious defeats which were inflicted upon the English in South Africa.

The Miller despatches (obtained from the valuable information offered by the Boer Mission at the Hague) show the true picture of the Boer positions, their state of mind and of their command.

Thus the despatches of both Ermolov and Miller organically supplement

each other and give a correct general picture of the progress of the Anglo-Boer War.

The documents published below have several stylistic idiosyncracies which we will not alter in any way. This applies in particular to the transcription of proper names and geographical denominations.

The documents are now preserved in the Central Historical War Archive .FV.U.A. D. No. 78124. D. No. 174-085-D. No. 78-708.*

M. Rabinovich and N. Shlapnikov.

I

From the reports of Colonel Ermolov the Military Attaché in London, to the Chief of the Intelligence Committee of the General Staff, Lieutenant-General Sologub.
15/3 of August 1899.¹

I report to your Excellency herewith, that on account of the strained relations with the Transvaal, England has decreed the following military measures:

(1) All transport ships owned by private companies and chartered by the Admiralty in case of war, have been notified to hold themselves in readiness.

(2) One battalion (the King's Liverpool Regiment) is transferred from the Cape Colony to Natal, another battalion (the Manchester Regiment) has received orders to proceed there from Gibraltar, but may reach Natal not earlier than the 20th of September. This gives the following concentration of English forces in Natal: 5 battalions, 2 cavalry regiments, 3 infantry regiments, 1 mountain battery, 3½ companies of sappers, military baggage and an ambulance transport detachment, 2½ infantry battalions are, for the time being, left in the Cape Colony, but the replacement for these battalions to be sent to Natal will be sent out immediately.

I am of the opinion that no one here — except Chamberlain wants a war, but nevertheless it may blaze out. I think that (if it does take place) it will be hard and prolonged. I also think that, if there is a war — the English will proceed with caution and deliberation (not like the Americans).² Australia and Canada have offered England their troops in case of war. The causes responsible for a possible war with the Transvaal are serious. For England it is a matter of keeping or losing South Africa.

8th November 1899/27th October 1899

Thirty-five battalions of militia and five sanitary companies have been called up. The losses, according to information received before the end of last week, are: In all killed, wounded and taken prisoner — 2,012 men.

For the last few days the position has been regarded as quite dangerous and the general state of mind here is far from a happy one. It is hoped that Sir George White will stave off his tactical encirclement until the arrival of re-inforcements. But his position is undoubtedly critical.

* Unless otherwise indicated, footnotes in the reports themselves derive from the Soviet editors (Ed.).

1. Chronology: *Old and New Styles*

A point, which may need explaining to the Western reader is the giving of double dates at the head of each despatch. Russia remained true to the Julian style, the so-called "Old Russian Style" until 1923 when she adopted with slight modifications the Gregorian "New Style" accepted in the rest of Europe. The difference was twelve days during the 19th and 13 days during the 20th Century. Colonel Ermolov gets mixed up at the beginning of the year 1900, allowing only 12 days difference but by the end of February he masters the extra day (which must have been hard to him to remember as he was at the time living in London and not in Russia (Translator).

2. Ermolov is alluding to the Spanish-American War of 1898, during which he was the Russian Military Attaché with the American Expeditionary Forces in Cuba.

There is considerable discontent here at the Intelligence Department because it did not make a correct estimate of the strength and the means at the disposal of the enemy who has turned out to be more numerous, better equipped and supplied with artillery, than was supposed. Even the Prince of Wales has admitted that "the Boers have turned out to be far superior in power and numbers than we had supposed".

It is doubtful if the forces which have already been sent out will prove to be sufficient. Rumour has it that it will be necessary to send another one or maybe two divisions of the Second Army Corps. From the political angle there is a widespread fear of possible complications in Europe.

The Channel Squadron has gone to Gibraltar in order to keep the Mediterranean under observation. A special "Flying Squadron" has been formed at Portland under the command of Captain Roe, which is composed of the four cruisers: St. George, (second ship's name obscure, Ed.), Minerva and Juno. This squadron is now coaling at Portland and awaits orders for an unknown destination. It is very probable that it will be ordered to proceed to South African waters.

22/10 November 1899

Yesterday I went to Sandhurst to see a friend of mine, General Markham, who is the head of the Royal Military College. He told me, among other things, that the War Office does not publish all the news received from Africa, from Buller. I deduced from that that the state of affairs there is far less favourable, or to be more precise is far more unfavourable to the English than one gathers from the Press.

First of all, Ladysmith is going through great hardships as no heavy artillery battery guns had been sent to the theatre of war at the beginning. Because of this, orders have been given that besides the 5th Infantry Division a battery train must be mobilised and also sent to the front. An interesting fact: first of all is that the army has immediately become aware of the dire need of heavy artillery in the field. Secondly, the War Office has, a few days ago sent out orders that certain reinforcements should be sent to Africa from India — which ones and how many of them still remains unknown. The Boers have not attacked Ladysmith yet. They are short of bayonets. The following was a fair comment in one of the newspapers: "The Boers have acted well up to now but not yet decisively well".

There are thirteen hundred and thirty-eight English people now imprisoned in Pretoria. Among them about forty officers. This is a bad blow to English prestige.

One hears complaints about the Army supplies of tinned meat. The reason for this is that the English bought a great supply of these tins not only in England and Australia, but in America too. Now it turns out that their friends — the Americans — had sold them quantities of tins, which had been left in the hands of private dealers after the Cuban expedition. The English received this merchandise (very familiar to me) without due inspection. (These tins were nicknamed "tinned dead mules" in Cuba). The English were now obliged to throw huge shipment of these tins, which had been put on board together with the armed forces, into the sea. It was also discovered that some of the transport ships had been loaded with rotten hay.

There are complaints about the Admiralty, because the fastest ocean-going ships such as the Umbria, the Lucania etc. of the Liverpool and other shipping lines have not been chartered at all. In fact, of the 150 transport ships carrying the army and its heavy supplies to Cape Town, almost all of them are slow-moving — taking three weeks and more to reach their destination. The fast boats can do the same journey in fourteen days. This is a very important factor, because, although the Boers did their best to put off the beginning of the war and of attacking—the English procrastinated even more, which has led to the result that the initiative of the enemy, who has attacked everywhere, (in the East into Natal, in the South into the Cape, in the West to Kimberley and

Mafeking, in the North into Tuli) has forced the English to disposition Buller's corps in quite a different manner to the way that had been planned here.

As far as one can observe, there is displeasure here among servicemen at this state of affairs and the fact that Buller's corps has been divided into the West Group — Lord Methuen (based at De Aar) — object to relieve Kimberley, the Middle Group General Gatacre, (based on East London) — objective Aliwal North and Bloemfontein and the East Group (Clery based at Durban) — objective release of Ladysmith.

The task which had been set to the whole corps now falls on the division of Gatacre. It is obvious that reinforcements are needed (Fifth Division reinforcement from India). There is a great deal of concern here apart from that on account of the Cape Dutch. There is a growing discontent among them with England which, if it continues, may become far more acute than the press would care to admit. This discontent worries the English considerably.

Besides that there is growing unrest among the natives of the Basuto and Zulu tribes and even in Rhodesia there are disturbances against the whites. All this is very dangerous for the English.

28/16th November 1899

At the present moment, already in Africa or on the way there (without counting the Fifth Infantry Division and the Battery Train the dispatch of the Division was only just begun and the Battery Train is not ready). Fifty-two battalions, thirty-nine squadrons, eight companies of mounted infantry, twenty-four on foot, four batteries on horse, two mountain batteries, six engineering companies and different reserves to help when help is needed, the entire so-called Buller Corps has been filled up with reservists, and the whole army now numbers 78,000 men and 180 guns.

However, in actual fact, one must and can only take the Combat Force into account. The infantry, about a thousand men per battalion, 52,000 mounted infantry, only 1,200 cavalry out of thirty-nine squadrons, 6,300, that is to say 59,000 and 500 artillerymen in all with 180 guns. This is not so very many if one takes into consideration that the Afrikaners³ are hostile to the English and that the Boers are mobile and unsurpassed in swift raids.

As to the numbers of the Boers the information concerning them was inadequate and inexact at the English General Staff Headquarters. As I have already reported to your Excellency they were assessed at 40,000, or at a maximum 45,000 men. But now it turns out that in both the Republics there are up to 93,000 men capable of carrying arms (this I was told by an English general) and that now the Boers have no fewer than 50,000 in the field. Thus on one side there are 59,000 with 180 guns and on the other 50,000 with a number of guns unknown here in London.

At any rate it seems that the Boer artillery is of a heavier calibre than the English one and is superior to it in long range and quick firing. The Boers have siege and the quick-firing guns and the English have the 10 and 12 pounders, slow-firing and loaded with shrapnel only. Only now are three field batteries on the way with 5-inch field howitzers.

Thus the superiority (in the sense of the artillery effects) rests with the Boers — this has forced the English to take out and put to use their guns from the men-of-war (the "Powerful" and the "Terrible") in Ladysmith and also to bring in battery trains.

The Boers have no bayonets. They are all of them mounted and excellent shots but, not being in possession of cold steel, they are not capable of receiving and withstanding bayonet or sword charges. The Boers are mounted infantrymen without bayonets — their tactics are: swift and light manoeuvring, steady and well-aimed

3. Apparently a reference to the Afrikaners of the Cape Colony (Ed.).

gunfire from artificially erected covers and protected natural positions (which abound in the hilly countryside of the theatre of war), damaging communication actions and withdrawals before the charge of English bayonets. When forced into such attacks they get on their horses and ride away. This tactical move puts the English at great disadvantage as they can neither catch up, cut off, nor defeat the Boers. The English cavalry in the field is not numerous — there are about 6,300 men against the entire mobile army of the Boers. Besides that the English cavalry is clumsy and not capable of swift motion.

As for the infantry — it can shoot at the Boers but cannot engage them i.e. defeat them, or at any rate without the greatest difficulty. All these tactical unorthodoxies of the enemy place the English in an awkward and disadvantageous tactical position.

There are no victories; being unwilling to sacrifice their men, out of their number appears that the Boers surround them and take them prisoners. Thus the tactical position such are their tactics. It was exactly the same thing at Santiago. The Spanish retreated, not because they were defeated, but because their tactics were such. The Americans deceived themselves in thinking that they were victorious. These considerations are confirmed by the relatively small losses of the Boers and the relatively heavy English ones (up to now 290 men killed, 1,100 wounded and 1,438 prisoners of war). It appears that the Boers surround them and take them prisoners. Thus the tactical position of the English is quite a difficult one. Nevertheless I personally think that both Kimberley and Ladysmith will hold out until relief. These towns are hanging on a thread, in the same way as Mafeking, and still I think that they will hold out. I do not anticipate any catastrophes on a bigger scale and the besieged towns will probably be saved — but will that settle the fate of the war?

The Boer Army has as yet hardly been affected by any losses so that they can defend their territory step by step; retreating, enticing the enemy, choosing favourable positions as centres of defence and gradually disrupting English communications. I am inclined to surmise that the war will last a long time and will be bloody and very hard for the English.

And what if the English have to face a big catastrophe? What if their army melts away or is demoralised by the losses which are inflicted upon it at each encounter? After all there have been no major battles yet — only skirmishes and in each one of them the English lose several officers and from 100 to 200 men in the lower ranks. The English losses have a very depressing effect here. Daily, towards evening, in the hall of the War Office where lists of those wounded and killed are posted, crowds of people assemble there and often tragic scenes take place.

And what if the English meet with a serious set-back? There are only 28 battalions left here (with the departure of the 5th Infantry Division). If the 6th Division leaves for the front also, there will only be about 20 left, out of which about seven are needed for Ireland i.e. thirteen regular battalions — that is the whole of their reserve. And if they suffer a serious defeat (if that is possible) what then? . . .

It is said that conditions at Ladysmith are very bad; there is suffocating stench, illness, horse-sickness, and a lack of ammunition. It is said also that things are pretty bad at Mafeking as well. A telegram from Pretoria, i.e. from Boer sources, announced on Sunday that the Boer generals are counting on the fall of Ladysmith by the end of this week.

14/2 December 1899

Lord Salisbury has told the French Ambassador that he thinks that the war will drag on and will cost a great deal. He said this, apparently not without a shade of malice towards Chamberlain. In military circles here there is a growing discontent at Lord Lansdowne and Lord Wellesley for their many mistakes; they are accused of

having sent the cavalry and artillery ahead of everyone else and that the sorely-needed mortar batteries were only sent out last (65th was sent on November 12th and 61st on November 16th, 37th on the 17th of November).

They are accused of not having made sufficient use of the horses available in the Cape Colony (Colesberg) and Natal, for the English cavalry which is slow to mobilise and to move. English horses, after arriving in South Africa, stood for two weeks with swollen legs, after the crossing (Australian horses, which arrived with the Australian contingent at the theatre of war, did not suffer at all from the crossing and could be saddled and ridden immediately. This is explained here by the fact that the Australian horses are always in the open in droves, and are fed on green fodder, whereas the English horses are kept in stables).

The War Office is also accused of not having made sufficient use of local militiamen in order to form mobile units and also of making hardly any use of the offers of Australia and Canada to send bigger contingents. Lastly and most important of all is the accusation that the armed forces are mobilised and sent off according to the same system of dribs and drabs; division after division and not in a large mass. The unsuccessful battles of the generals, Gatacre at Stormberg and Methuen at Garsfontein have created a very bad impression over here, especially the position of Gatacre's detachment. This was moved at 9 p.m. and led through the night into an absolutely unknown territory and after a whole night's march landed right in the middle of the Boer trenches (the confusion was so great that the English began to shoot at each other and lost 675 men as prisoners of war). General Gatacre (extremely unpopular with the army) is blamed entirely for this senseless act and it is said that he should be recalled and replaced by Lord Kitchener.

I was also told that Buller is greatly displeased with General Gatacre and also does not approve of the usage of armoured trains. Lord Methuen has lost (out of a total of 8,000) 832 men (15 officers killed, 47 wounded and many prisoners of war) that is to say about 10%. Gatacre has lost 25 killed, 16 wounded, 607 prisoners of war out of 2,000 men. At Stormberg there were only 800 Boers and they lost 5 killed, 13 wounded. Gatacre, it seems judging from the last despatch, has now moved to Cyfergat and Bosmanshoek. One can gauge the extent of the nervous strain from the people here by the quantities of rumours which spring no one knows where from and circulate in public places. Thus, not long ago, it was said that Methuen has been killed (this news even reached the Stock Exchange). Yesterday evening while reading at the Club, I heard one member of the Club tell another one that Ladysmith had been freed and that 10,000 Boers had been taken prisoner. There is nothing of the kind in the War Office despatches as yet and they are the only reliable source here.

On the 4/16 of December Buller's attack at the crossing near Colenso, ended in a defeat for the English. They lost 11 guns and all the horses belonging to the 14th and the 66th Batteries.

17/5th December 1899

It is difficult to imagine the impression produced here by the unexpected news of Buller's unsuccessful attempt of a crossing at Colenso on Friday the 14th. He attacked the Boers with three brigades, the 2nd, the 5th and the 6th. His attack was repulsed and, according to today's despatches he lost 1,097 men, including 300 prisoners of war. As I have telegraphed two batteries galloped right to the shores of the Tugela River where the enemy's skirmishers were concealed (on the South bank). The position had not been previously reconnoitred and the fact of them being there was quite unknown to the head of the English detachment. The Boers shot all the artillery horses and 11 guns were lost by the English as well as five artillery officers who were taken prisoner.

I hear many comments about this in the United Services Club. Many people

come to have lunch here direct from the War Office. My acquaintances have informed me that General Buller had acted upon orders received — to attack the Boers at Colenso immediately and at any cost.

On Wednesday already I was told that Buller would attack on Friday; the newspapers were not notified of this. It appears that Buller was against a hasty attack, wishing to await the arrival of other reinforcements, in particular of the artillery. But it is obvious that in the War Office and even in the Cabinet there was an over-riding desire for a victory, which would wipe out the effect of Gatacre's defeat at Stormberg and the unsuccessful attempt of Lord Methuen at Magersfontein. For this reason a telegram was sent to Buller to attack at once, without any further delay. There is a great depression here among the Generals at the United Services Club as a result of all this.

It is thought that Mafeking will be relieved by Plumer's detachment but that Kimberley and probably Ladysmith will be lost. It is known that Cecil Rhodes is in Kimberley now. The Boers are saying that if they catch him, they will put him in a cage and will parade him round the Transvaal towns. Today, General Beresford said to me: "Alas, it seems that Cecil Rhodes will not escape a cage" — this gives an idea of the general state of mind.

Concerning White's garrison at Ladysmith, it is assumed that he might try to break through in a south-westerly direction — the only possible route for him as it is in the open and the Boers will not come out into the open veld. Perhaps protected by the cover of night, White's cavalry will break through? But how about the infantry and the artillery? And the wounded? The bombardment is not too bad but it seems that the garrison is already on half rations and there are many sick people in the town . . .

One cannot deny the fact that the English have really bragged and have, like the Americans, landed themselves into such a strategic position, that they themselves tell me: "We are in a terrible strategical mess". Symons, White, Gatacre and Methuen and finally Buller have all suffered defeats and have all been smashed against the steadfast positions of the Boers. Buller has 19,000 men in Natal. Methuen 8,500. Why is it that neither of these generals makes an attempt at an encircling movement? The tactical methods of the Boers deserve the admiration which they are gaining here. As for me, so far away, as far as I can form any sort of opinion from fragmentary despatches, I am struck, not so much by the strategical skill of the Boers, as by their clever well-planned and harmonious action on the battle-field.

English officers who have been to Africa tell me that the Boers usually give their orders along the line — for instance, to retreat for a time to such and such place — behind a certain mountain — such a command is passed verbally from one man to the other without any orderlies in-between — or "shoot", cease fire"; all this is passed verbally from man to man.

Buller has about 23,000 men in Natal and 9,000 in Ladysmith. These troops would be quite useless there after the relief of Ladysmith. They would have to be moved to Port Elizabeth before being able to undertake any active operations. However, for the moment there are no transport ships of any kind in Durban. Even in case of success, i.e. after the relief of Ladysmith, the return of these troops to the main operational line will occupy much time. This means that 32,000 men, even in favourable circumstances, will find themselves in a useless strategic position. Political considerations are responsible for this — it was the desire to protect Natal. They should have, as they see it now here, from the very beginning only held the defence line of the Tugela River.

18/6 December 1899

At Colenso Buller's detachment has lost 1,097 men; 82 killed, 667 wounded, 348 taken prisoner. Of this number 66 killed, 254 wounded and 96 prisoners were officers,

in all 416. Buller's detachment consisted of the following units: 3 brigades — the 2nd (Hildyard), 4th (Lee Hilton), 5th (Hart), apart from the 6th brigade (Barton) therefore 14 or 15 battalions; a naval brigade with 6 naval 12-pound quick-firing guns and 2.47 quick-firing guns, 5 batteries of artillery on foot, 2 cavalry regiments, commands of pontoon and sapper engineers, and in all, in Natal 19½ B.A.T. 2 cavalry regiments, 7 artillery batteries, a naval brigade, 8 naval guns up to 4,000 mounted infantry and local Colonial units — in all up to 23,000 men and besides that the 9,000 men cut off at Ladysmith. On the left flank Lord Methuen has moved back after his unsuccessful attack at Magersfontein, across the Modder and has dug himself in. In the centre, General Gatacre is stationed at Cyfergat and Bosmanshoek. The revolt in this part of the country (the Northern region of the Cape Colony) is spreading. The Blacks no longer believe in the might of the English. The position in which the English are finding themselves is a very hard one, chiefly because they have scattered their troops, having concentrated such a large proportion of them in Natal, (where these troops are forced into inactivity except at Ladysmith.) They would find it a very long drawn-out process to move them back to Port Elizabeth because they have not even got any transport ships available. The strategic position appears to me almost hopeless, unless there is a complete reshuffle of troops — and all this abnormality of the strategic situation has arisen because of the initial political intention to protect the whole of Natal.

Jan. 2nd 1900/Dec. 21st 1899

The news that General Buller will attack again on Friday or Saturday of this week appears very odd in view of the fact that the new Commander-in-Chief has not yet arrived at the theatre of war. The general, who informed me of this on Sunday, added that "the War Office hopes that the second attack on Colenso positions will be successful". He said that Buller, having received five battalions, three batteries on foot, five divisions and also six-inch howitzers of the battery train arriving shortly in Durban intends to bombard Boer positions from protected emplacements, and at the same time his mobile column will attempt to encircle them from the West. The latest news from the front mentions that the Boers are holding strong positions at Springfield on the South side of the Upper Tugela, where they are protected from the front by the river-bed of the Little Tugela. Besides that, they are occupying positions on the right flank of Buller, the height of . . . (impossible to read as written in the text).⁴

All this goes to prove that the Boers are probably already informed about Buller's intentions and the prevailing state of mind here (in as far as it was re-echoed here in last night's Press) is a very anxious one.

I questioned my acquaintance the general: "But does the position at Ladysmith not require an immediate attack?" General Gordon replied: "The position is not in immediate danger but the garrison must be relieved as soon as possible". What appears so strange and incomprehensible to me is the fact that the 5th Division has also been sent to Natal and it is simply quite impossible to understand this strategic order.

11 Jan. 1900/13th Dec. 1899

Lord Methuen will soon either be recalled or displaced; it is said that his state of health has been irreparably damaged and that he is showing signs of a nervous breakdown. In general I must repeat, that judging from what is published here, from private letters of officers and men to their relations and from what I am told by the fathers whose sons took part in battles — it shows such a loss of spirit, lack of discipline and lack of faith in commanding officers that it is quite simply hard to credit and I do not want to take all these allegations too seriously.

4. Note by Soviet editor.

Telegram: 22nd/10th January, 1900

Great anxiety everywhere. People realise that Buller's position is dangerous. He took the three forward ridges on Saturday. Losses 300 men. Major positions still ahead. The river crossings behind poor.

Telegram: 26th/14th January 1900

Buller's telegram "Troops retreated from the Spionkop heights" created a very painful impression. The 4th Cavalry brigade received orders to leave at the beginning of February and now twelve batteries are being sent out as well. Departure of the 8th Division has not been decided upon yet although it is being mobilised.

Telegram: 2nd Feb./21st Jan. 1900

Two Sudanese battalions have mutinied at Omdurman. A battalion from Egypt is being added to the eighth division. The canal is clear. Yeomenry are now being loaded on the trains. Buller attacking once more.

Letter of the same date

Now I would like to report to your Excellency what is said and thought here about news received from the front.

First of all it would seem that there are enough troops at the front; the sending of further reserves only complicates the administrative organisation of the campaign. I would not like to substantiate what I am about to write, for one can only know really being on the spot, but among us military attachés here there is a growing doubt as to the fighting qualities of the English troops. From careful perusal of descriptions, rumours, and letters from the front, there emerge many details, which reflect badly on the troops' behaviour at the front. It seems that they go into battle quite willingly, but soon after lose their formation, scatter and are unable to stand the strain. After the taking of Spionkop (on the night of the 23rd to the 24th) Buller telegraphed "The men are splendid" but he is forced to conduct his operations with the human material which he has at hand and during the night of the 24th to the 25th Colonel Thorneycroft who took the place of the wounded Brigadier-General Woodgate, ordered a retreat and at about 8 p.m. on Saturday morning all the Warren troops were once more on the South bank and this, notwithstanding the order issued by Buller shortly before starting — "that there will be no retreat".

The American regular army troops were also in a very insecure tactical position on the San Juan heights on the 1st, 2nd and 3rd of July at Santiago, having lost more men than the English now at Spionkop. However, the Americans held the positions. All this episode of the clearing of Spionkop is still very obscure. It is only known that the English have lost 1,048 men (of whom 215 were taken prisoner). It is reported here that Lord Roberts is making haste to concentrate his troops on the central line, i.e. in order to advance into the Orange Free State Republic, that is to say to return to the initial plan of attack. But what astounds me most of all is the fact that people here are becoming resigned to the possibility of the fall of Ladysmith. It would have seemed that the first and most important aim in view should be to save that garrison and its regimental colours from disgrace. It is still very problematic whether an advance on the central line will free White in time or not.

The episode of the mutiny of the two Sudanese battalions at Omdurman, concerning which I wired your Excellency, was as follows: After the English defeat in South Africa much unrest appeared among the native officers of the Egyptian army of the Sudan. Their attitude became clearly hostile towards the English, so the order was sent out to take cartridges away from the troops at Omdurman. Two Sudanese battalions refused to carry out this order and the Sirdar left Cairo in a hurry for the Sudan. It had been the intention to take one battalion and to transfer it from Egypt to South Africa (the European battalion of the Royal West Kents) for the 8th Division. But the

question now arises as to whether or not that will be possible under the newly arisen circumstances.

Feb. 4th/Jan. 23rd 1900

For the moment there is no news from the war front. While the campaign drags on with so many mistakes and lack of understanding on the part of the military (in America lack of administrative, in England lack of strategical and tactical understanding) and England is being drained of her trained defenders, there was an official opening of Parliament on Tuesday, January the 30th. One cannot conceive a more trivial and more pitiful spectacle than the first days of activity of this session at a moment of national danger and crisis. The spectacle, if one thinks deeply about it, is so interesting and instructive, that, on account of its close link with the military problems of the moment I should like to devote a few reflections and this report to it.

It is quite clear that all these men — these Balfours and Chamberlains — are unable to raise the level of the Cabinet's activity at a moment of national crisis to the height of self-denying national service detached from any "party spirit" or any other ultimately private considerations, plans, interests or objectives. All these petty and feeble debates, at a time of anxiety, all these reciprocal reproaches and attacks of the opposition on the government and of the government on the opposition, set aside and obscure all those important questions concerning the saving of the army and of its honour, which are now agitating, disturbing and troubling the nation.

In my opinion — it is not only the personalities who are at the head of the realm who are now giving a proof of their failure at their task; it is in my belief the collapse of that basically selfish and greedy policy, which England has always followed up to now and which has brought her almost to the brink of military defeat at the present moment. The policy of national selfishness which pursues only practical and materialistic considerations of the moment, of immediate material gains — a policy of political opportunism, which is incapable of embodying the higher aspirations of humanity, of magnanimity, of respect for other people's feelings, desires, customs and needs — such a policy carries within itself the seeds of its own destruction. This is clearly seen in England at the present time. This policy seeking self-aggrandisement by means of aggression has brought her almost to the edge of military annihilation — and she is only alive still thanks to the generosity of others.

In his very weak speech of January 30th, Lord Salisbury expressed himself thus: "The British constitution is quite adequate for the time of peace but it is too weak for the time of national military crisis". Such was the statement of the English Prime Minister himself. Was it not the same thing in America during the war too?

However, England cannot alter her form of government; she has and she will keep her Parliament. Nevertheless one would have thought that the present war would have taught England some political lessons. Her present-day rulers, who have shown themselves so incapable of protecting their fatherland from the plight she is now in, will gradually leave the stage. Perhaps this war (especially if the English lose it) will cause a moral awakening in England and one can foresee then that the policy of national selfishness and greed will give way to a different policy, more lofty and more sympathetic to the life of other nations. Other people will appear on the stage — representatives of a different new order, no longer the likes of Chamberlain, but more high-minded men and such a moral awakening in the political life of England will help, if it takes place, in the realisation of world-peace — at any rate in Europe. England's greed — what is described here as "practical politics" that is to say "everything at once and the lion's share for oneself". This element might disappear by then, in its intense form at any rate. Seen from this point of view one cannot help wishing (apart from any other sympathies and considerations) as many successes as possible to the Boers and

that is why the whole world from the greatest man to the smallest wishes them victory.

(1) The statesmen now at the head of the State are either too old (Salisbury) or are not capable of grappling with the present crisis.

(2) England's external policy of selfishness, self-assertion and aggression has led her so far that she does not know what to do next. The harder the lessons of the hot war are for England—the better for everyone else. The administrative machine of State will not change in England, but the people will probably change and their politics may change as well. Indubitably it is desirable to foresee all the possible changees, which may take place after the war (which would have been responsible for them). Such changes may impose a duty on both sides.

(1) It is possible that England will take certain steps in the direction of moral political awakening after the war.

(2) She may become even more powerful from the angle of military might. What then from such a general deduction, should be the political programme of Europe towards England, not only now but in the future as well? It seems, speaking in general terms as follows:

(1) To leave the outwardly political — so to speak moral education of England in this hot war to those calamities and humiliations which England is deservedly undergoing; the more of them, the more acute they are—the better for the future and the better for the conception of world peace. It would seem best of all to leave the turn of events in this war to its own natural tempo, neither slowing it down nor hastening its course, i.e. not interfering in any way—as long as everything is going well for the Boers.

(2) With all available means at hand, without actually entering into war with England, and pursuing one's own political aims, as if nothing was the matter, also maybe by means of political or military-political demonstrations in accordance with our own aims — to prevent the strengthening of England now and in the future in the theatre of war operations as well as in the European theatre.

Any, even the most insignificant demonstration in Asia Minor (about which people here have the haziest notion) creates a most powerful impression here. Up to the present time the English have removed four battalions, four cavalry regiments, three infantry ones, two mounted batteries and a small contingent of officers of the voluntary and regular (mounted) infantry from India.

At the moment there is a great unwillingness in London to move out any more troops from India, but who knows if the war is prolonged and assumes an even more unfavourable turn, it may become necessary to take more troops from there. A question has already been asked in Parliament as follows: "On account of the acute crisis and of the fact that the Gurkhas and the Sikhs get so well used to the South African climate — would the Cabinet not alter its decision — not to send native (Indian) troops to Africa."

The Cabinet in the person of Balfour replies: "The Cabinet will not change its decision for reasons understood by Parliament".

As long as all goes well for the Boers the best seems not to interfere in any way, not to stop the war and not to wish for anyone to negotiate peace terms. Only in the case of a change of the fortunes of war in England's favour, then perhaps by means of some European coalition to interfere and thus to prevent England from strengthening her position either in the theatre of war or in any other theatre.

Distrust of France forces England to call up her militia and to envisage the mobilisation of her naval reserves. This last measure is very difficult and costly for England because it interferes with the daily routine of a valuable section of her population. England is loath to do this especially as such a move has no direct connection with the Boer War, *If things look up for England, could France not force*

her to mobilise her naval reserves?

I personally am of the opinion that the most cautious and the most fertile political programme for Europe (or for any new European coalition against England) would be the one, which — not so much for the present as for the future foreseeing the evolution of world-thought, would be capable of preventing any successes for England at the front or anywhere else.

Consequently the worse England's fortunes of war are the less reason for Europe to interfere or to attempt to end the war by means of negotiations. On the other hand, should England's war fortunes improve, then there would be more reasons for such termination and negotiations — but not the other way round, although the opposite line of thought might appear to be of profit to France at any rate, immediate gains which might tempt France might be, so it seems to us, from the angle of my report, more compromising than assuring the future.

18/6th Feb. 1900

Lord Rosebery made the first strong speech of the Session in the House of Lords last Thursday. This was before the arrival of the news of the liberation of Kimberley and Lord Rosebery heatedly and eloquently pointed out to the Cabinet that the latter does not in the least realise the importance of the moment or the danger with which England is faced. "I followed the development of events in Europe and Asia with even greater anxiety than I do what is happening in South Africa. It is as if the Cabinet was unaware of that which is known to every man in the street — that at the present moment it is a matter of life and death for England and for the British Empire. For if you lose the war in South Africa then the Sepoys in India and the Emir of Afghanistan will deduce that Great Britain has lost her power and her might and that it is no longer worthwhile linking their fate with hers. European nations view us with a hostile eye. Russia is wisely following and shaping her policy in Asia and in Persia. As for England she is remaining a mere spectator of this policy, of the latest developments in Persia, which are leading to a great strengthening of Russian influence there, and she does not undertake any moves to prevent it or to compensate herself for this. She does not do anything maybe simply because she is not in the position to do anything else; for where are our armies? where is our fleet? Our armies are in South Africa and it is useless to deceive ourselves and others with paper figures of the miscellaneous collection of those 110,000 regular troops, who are, we are told in actual existence — within the confines of the United Kingdom. These are after all non-efficient, non-combatants and one cannot rely on them — the militia and the volunteers? They are numerous but firstly they are of little importance from the action aspect, are also not organised and not yet provided with either supplies or ammunition. They may well be good potential material for the army — but they are not an army, and it is feeble consolation to await the day when this disorganised mass, will according to the Cabinet's programme be called up under tent for the monthly camp muster. — As for the fleet? But, my Lords, as you well know, the Mediterranean squadron is engaged in the Mediterranean, that the Channel Squadron is tied up as combat reserve for the Mediterranean Squadron and the place for the Channel Squadron is — Gibraltar — Who then is protecting our shores? Are you going to mobilise the reserve squadron? Where are the active, naval and land forces? What are you thinking about? If tomorrow you have to endure defeats in South Africa you will be left with nothing but your fleet in the middle of Europe which already has several scores to settle with us and who has a better grasp of the present-day situation than we have ourselves — better even than our own government, and which will probably not stop to think before settling some of these scores with us. If this is not a moment of life or death I would not know in what other way to describe it".

This speech made a very powerful impression (in spite of what has been said to the contrary in the Cabinet). One must know and keep in mind the fact that in England the Cabinet is always somewhat behind public opinion in the matter of foresight, vigour, decisiveness, all of which found expression in the strong speech quoted above.

Now on Friday the Admiralty issued an order for the mobilisation of a portion of the reserve squadron. It seems to me personally that two reasons are responsible for this move. First, Rosebery's speech — for, although the Cabinet reacted to it by an attack on the opposition with sarcastic remarks (Balfour's reply to Rosebery) nevertheless on the quiet it has submitted to its advice and instructions.

Secondly, although it is said here that the partial mobilisation of the reserve squadron is nothing but a preparation of the navy for the 1st March manoeuvres, and that it will be disbanded again on the 1st of April — nonetheless this order has been interpreted as a military move — in view of the alarming position on the political horizon — besides that it is essential to keep in mind that the freeing of Kimberley and successes of Roberts, are hastening the end of the war. England is afraid that Europe's interference might prevent her from reaping the harvest and concluding a peace of the kind she is wishing for. It seems to me that the mobilisation of the reserve squadron is a precautionary measure — to prevent Europe from forcing England into some kind of Berlin Treaty later on. And so the Cabinet, under the influence of Rosebery's speech, ordered the following measures:

(a) *On Land* — an extremely weak military programme of the Cabinet (I will report on that more fully below).

(b) *At Sea* — The mobilisation of a portion of the reserve squadron. I believe that includes the ships at Portsmouth and Devonport but I cannot confirm it yet, Ironclads such as Rodney, Howe, Collingwood, Sans Pareil, Trafalgar, Alexandra, Benbow and several other cruisers which are part of the reserve squadron, and whose duty it is to patrol the home waters.

The other cause which has led to the mobilisation of the reserve squadron may have been the news that we are massing troops on the Afghan border and are intending to take Herat. This report (from the *Times*) made a strong impression here and, as I have already stated above, no one knows exactly what it means — and if it is true — what exactly is the truth? I consider that this "vagueness" is very favourable to us. There is nothing more frightening than the news of a vague, unknown danger. Rumours about this danger make far more impression than its exact valuation and therefore occasion greater apprehension. These rumours are more profitable to us than exact information. The cheerful mood brought about by Roberts's successes, the hope of an early conclusion of war, the fear of European interference and of the concentration of our troops at Kuksha, Rosebery's ardent speech, the order of February 16th concerning the mobilisation of the reserve squadron — such are the news of the present situation and of the general frame of mind here. It is essential to remember that in England public opinion in Clubs and in the Press always affects its attitude and to a certain extent guides the Cabinet in its decisions.

18th/5th December 1900

Having returned to England from Russia, (on November 21st Russian style) I found the general frame of mind concerning the position in South Africa rather troubled and depressed. This mood has been increased by the unfavourable (to the English) events of the last few days. Everyone is extremely weary of the war, and there is great concern in military circles as they do not see an end in view of that phase of partisan warfare into which the war has now entered. Lord Roberts is expected here on January the 2nd but although a triumphal meeting is being prepared for him everyone realises that the

celebrations about to take place are badly timed, as not only is there no probability of the return of troops but Lord Kitchener is demanding further reinforcements — firstly as marching units to fill in gaps, secondly as newly-formed units of mounted infantry so badly needed now at the front. A few days ago orders were issued at Aldershot to send out another 1,000 men of the mounted infantry. It is said that it will be necessary to send out up to another 4,000 of them.

25th/12 January 1901

The position is serious in the rear of the front in the military-organisation sense.

Summing up there seem to be two trends of thought or two schools concerning the whole situation prevalent here. According to one of them — that is the school of Chamberlain, Sir Alfred Milner and others, the war cannot last longer than another three months. The Boers are weary, they have little ammunition left, their appearance in the confines of the Cape Colony has not led to any political or military results — on the contrary — having moved into a region where they can get provisions easily and certain comforts of living — they have become soft and do not wish to return to the rigorous campaigns and will therefore end all resistance soon. Such is the opinion of the first school.

The other school of thought holds the very opposite opinion, and I must report that, however odd it may seem, among the representatives of this second school of thought are . . . Lord Roberts himself and the military party — optimism in political party circles, pessimism in military circles — such is the impression which one gets here at the present moment. According to the second school of thought the Boers are not in the least weary; on the contrary they thrive on the conditions of camp-life. They keep their hold over the war regions richest in grain and in fodder. They have plenty of horses and ammunition; the war-weary ones are not the Boers but the English.

The English army is weary because it has lost hope of any large-scale military engagements. The number of sick people is constantly on the increase; there is demoralisation. It has been said even that bubonic plague has broken out among the English troops. Kitchener has forbidden all private correspondence to the troops and the censorship is becoming more and more strict.

Undoubtedly it is very difficult to say which side gives the more truthful evaluation of the situation. As for myself I have not yet met any serviceman here who does not have a very gloomy outlook on present events. When questioned about his opinion concerning the war, Sir Charles Dilke replied that, judging from information given out to the public by the War Office, one can deduce with equal likelihood that the war will either end tomorrow or go on forever.

6th Feb./Jan. 24 1901

I enclose figures published by the War Office up to February 1st 1901 concerning the losses since the beginning of the War. These losses are as follows:

Losses up to Feb. 1901	Officers	Lower Ranks	Total
Killed up to 1st Feb. 1901	334	3,346	3,680
Died of wounds	103	1,081	1,184
Died in imprisonment	4	92	96
Died of sickness	188	7,605	7,793
Died of accidental causes	6	230	236
Remained in imprisonment	15	922	937
Invalids sent home	1,708	39,095	40,798
Total	2,358	52,371	54,724
In all died in South Africa	335	12,354	12,989
Remained in imprisonment	15	922	937

Sick men who died in England	4	265	269
Sick and wounded men who had to be withdrawn and were invalided out of the service		1,734	1,734
Total	654	15,275	15,929

At the present time people are talking about a new plan of action which has apparently been thought out by Lord Kitchener. This plan boils down to destroying the means of waging warfare by moving numerous columns in different directions, and having laid waste the country to turn it into a desert and thus to force the Boers together on one of the war fronts. To wage war against the means of waging war so to speak — this plan is treated with scepticism here.

A few days ago I met two officers who have just returned from the front. Like the majority of servicemen, they have a very pessimistic attitude on the general situation. They think that there are at least 24,000 Boers in the field.

Mar. 8/Feb. 23 1901

Costs of the War in South Africa

A few days ago the new War Budget appeared (for the period 1901-1902) calculated for 450,000 men, 25,402 horses and totalling £87,915,000. The Budget was debated in Parliament today. I cannot send your Excellency detailed information about this debate in under a week from now, but I would like to inform you in this report about the exact cost of the South African War to England. This expenditure is now being accounted for by different writers, newspaper articles etc. in various and incorrect ways. For that reason it is indispensable to clarify the position and to find out definite and exact figures based upon official calculations. For this one must add together all the sums of money which have been voted by Parliament for the army during the last three financial years i.e. 1899-1900, 1900-1901, 1901-1902 — consequently all the army credits from April 1st 1899 until March 31st 1902. Let us examine these credits year by year.

A. 1899—1900

	£ Sterling
The Initial War Budget was	20,617,200
Additional credit Oct. 17th 1899	10,000,000
Additional credit Feb. 8th 1900	13,000,000
Total 1899-1900	£43,617,200

Out of this sum only additional (extraordinary) credits were used for war expenses i.e.

in all 23,000,000

B. 1900—1901

The Initial War Budget was	61,499,400
Additional credit June 20th 1900	11,500,000
Additional credit Dec. 6th 1900	16,000,000
Additional credit Feb. 26th 1901	3,000,000
Total 1900-1901	£91,999,400

Out of this sum the following was spent:

(a) War in South Africa	64,286,700
(b) War in China	3,450,000
(c) Usual military expenses	24,262,700
Total 1900-1901	£91,999,400

C. 1901—1902

Now being asked for 1901-1902	87,915,000
To be allotted as follows:	
(a) War in South Africa	56,070,000

(b) War in China	2,160,000
(c) Usual expenses	29,685,000
	In all 1901-1902 £87,915,000
Making a total year by year	
<i>War in South Africa</i>	
in 1899-1900	23,000,000
in 1900-1901	64,286,700
in 1901-1902	56,070,000
	Total £143,356,700
<i>on China</i>	
in 1900-1901	3,450,000
in 1902	2,160,000
	Total £5,610,000

Thus the extraordinary war expenses in South Africa amount up to March 31st 1902 £143,356,700. But if one excludes expenditure which has not been started on yet from April 1901 i.e. taking into consideration only actual war expenses up to March 31st 1901, then taking off £56,070,000 we have the following war expenditure:

	143,356,700
—	56,070,000
	<u>£87,286,700</u>

6th Dec. 1901

In this despatch I would like to give your Excellency a general report about the situation as a whole, which I found in England upon my return from Russia.

It is rather difficult to gauge the real state of affairs among the maze of various rumours, newspaper comments, public opinion in general and that of the few people whom I have already managed to see. However, the information, impressions and deductions given below are not far from the truth.

First of all I must inform you about the rather strange, joyful and optimistic attitude of people in London now concerning the progress of the war. The same persons who were pessimistic during the first phases of the War and who viewed with a critical eye not only orders issuing from the War Office but also the army activity in South Africa — these have now changed their tune, and not without a certain malice assure one that the war is proceeding well, that all the rumours about Kitchener's illness and tiredness (and also about his return) are unfounded, that the reports about the troops being war-weary are false, that Kitchener is stronger than ever and that the Government is full of zeal and is determined to carry on with this business to the very end — that is to say to the complete surrender or annihilation of all the Boers, and that generally speaking, the victorious end is not far off. It is also said among much else, that the successful termination of the war will see a homeward-bound return of a much improved army, that the war has moulded many energetic and experienced field-generals and that all in all — instead of weakening the military might and prestige of England the war will have strengthened and raised her — whatever may be said to the contrary in Europe.

This optimistic mood has lately spread to the local newspapers as well and even Lord Lansdowne has stated "that lately things have been going much better".

But the crux of the matter is in the fact that one cannot trust the current of optimism; it is superficial, official, issuing from the Government which needs to spread it more than ever before for several reasons: (1) First of all in order to calm and reassure public opinion which is utterly sick of the war. (2) Secondly, for the Stock Exchange — to raise the value of South African shares. (3) Thirdly in order to have something to show to Parliament, whose Session must shortly be opened. (4) Fourthly,

in order to obtain new credits — supposedly for a concentrated effort for a swift and victorious culmination of the war. (5) Fifthly for party reasons — in order to silence the Liberal Party.

There are many proofs for such a deduction, first of all the news from the front is carefully sifted out by the Cabinet. The bad news is dealt out a drop at a time — the good news in generous doses. Secondly, reports from Pretoria are not at all in line with the cheerful mood displayed in London. Thirdly, the actual state of affairs at the front, does not warrant optimism. Fourthly, it had been decided to send out more reinforcements: this last order was announced yesterday.

Reinforcements

The number of troops in the theatre of war has hardly changed since the first of November (Old Style) except for the detachments of the Yeomenry and Mounted Infantry sent out at the beginning of the year. For the rest only two cavalry regiments have been sent from England during the Autumn. The reinforcement of the army with new, fresh contingents has gone on uninterruptedly, about 4,000 men per month. The number of militiamen at the front has remained unchanged — 30 battalions but certain battalions have been brought back to England and others had been sent out in their stead. Apart from that, before November 1st it had been decided to exchange four battalions and two cavalry regiments sent to South Africa from India at the beginning of the War, for the same number of contingents from India (this exchange is taking place now) but in such a manner that the actual number of troops stationed in India should not be reduced. It has also been decided to return to India a part of the field artillery found useless in the present theatre of operations.

Thus the refurbishing of the army has gone on throughout the year without a stop. The English War Office is obviously doing all that is possible for its troops and is generously and without interruption supplying them with all necessities. Therefore one must not attach too much importance or faith to the rumours that the English fighting troops are now weary, disorganised and demoralised by the tedious, drawn-out fight. Nevertheless it is also evident that these troops, now as before, are not showing any great zeal in attacking and are being stationed along railway lines and blockhouses and are still insufficiently mobile and lacking in aggressiveness and in capacity for swift pursuit, which is so indispensable to defeat and to break the Boers.

But, apart from all this and among the signs that contradict this optimism in London are the latest orders about the dispatch of new reinforcements. To be exact, it has been decided to send down another 12,000 men.

1. 2 Battalions of Line Infantry
2. 1,200 of the Guards
3. 2 Cavalry regiments
4. 2,000 Yeomanry
5. 6 Militia Battalions
6. A contingent from Canada (the third).
7. A contingent from Australia.

The regular infantry is already being embarked but there will be more trouble again with the Yeomenry as they will have to be collected and trained first. It will not be possible to send these battalions before February and then only 500 men at a time.

The Position at the Theatre of War

The positions of General Louis Botha stationed near Lake Chrissie north-east of Ermelo can hardly be described as really weak. These positions are held on a high plateau, hard to reach with rivers flowing down from it in different directions. The latest fairly successful operations of the English mobile columns at Ermelo (which caused such rejoicing here for they were thought to be the fore-runners of an early peace)

represent only different manoeuvres or movements of the English in front of and around the actual position, which the English do not dare to attack. Now they are building a railroad in the direction of Carolina and it seems also a line of blockhouses to the east of the Lake Chrissie position, but this requires much time and besides that Botha has at his disposal his last redoubt — the fertile and well-provisioned region to the north of the line Pretoria-Delagoa. According to Broderick's official announcements (November) the lines of blockhouses have now cleared 14,700 square miles in the Transvaal and 17,000 square miles in the Orange Free State, i.e. about 1/5th of the territory of both the Republics. In the Transvaal the blockhouse lines stretch from Zeerust to Middelburg (northern front) from Middelburg to Standerton (Eastern front) from Standerton to Klerksdorp (southern front of the Transvaal) and from Klerksdorp to Zeerust (western front). Broderick states that there are no parties of Boers inside these lines but that is not true; the Boers continue to penetrate the lines. In the Orange Republic the line of blockhouses stretches from Kimberley through Winburg to Bloemfontein and Ladybrand. According to Broderick the territory of the Orange Free State Republic south of this line has been cleared of Boers, but that is not correct. Nor has the Cape Colony been cleared of the Boers either. Broderick calculates that at the present time there are about 10,000 Boers in scattered groups beyond these lines. There is no reason whatsoever for these 10,000 men to put an end to their resistance struggle. The above picture of the situation cannot be described as brilliant for the English in the sense of an early ending of the war. On the contrary, and it is evidently realised even by the Cabinet, the war will assume a more and more chronic character. This is without making any prognosis as to what might happen when the Boers, who are imprisoned now, are liberated. Some people here consider it to be a point in England's favour that many of the Burghers have lately supposedly gone over to the English side, working for them as guides, scouts, etc. and that they are apparently beginning to exercise an influence on the other Boers to stop the fight. It is true that there are rumours about such a fact. But the explanation of this is simply that these men are traitors whom the English bribe by paying them enormous sums of money.

Correspondence received from Pretoria does not give ground to this superficial optimism which is held by the Government here. There are warnings coming from there that one must not count on a quick ending of the war, that the clearing of territory by the system of blockhouses is a very slow procedure — not always a reliable one and one that requires a very large number of men, so that there is forever need of further reinforcements in the theatre of war.

In spite of that optimism which the English are now trying to disseminate throughout the world, there is good reason to suppose that England still fears this war and is afraid of the political and military complications involved in it and of that almost hopeless, chronic state of affairs into which it plunges the country.

The proof of this apprehension can be seen even in such a problem as the well-known one of the concentration camps. It is obvious that the concentration camps were not created on humanitarian grounds but for quite different considerations — in order to protect and screen-off the railway lines which the English are so afraid of losing.

Furthermore, it would seem that the English are quite mistakenly hoping that the news about the resolution, optimism, etc. of the English government is beginning to reach the Boers (as for instance through those traitors whom the English bribe to become their "scouts") and who will soon persuade the rest of the hopelessness of the struggle. Such hopes are apparent here even in conversations.

But, as a matter of fact, the news about what happens or what is said in London, neither has nor could have any meaning or influence upon the Boers. The position of

England is still a very difficult one as regards the state of South African affairs.

If your Excellency will allow me to make a personal prognosis as a conclusion — I am of the opinion that in spite of the optimism prevailing here, that should the English have to undergo another grave set-back and should some nation, for instance, the United States, cautiously and tactfully offer to negotiate terms of peace on their behalf — England would not be averse to listening to such proposals.

II

Letter of the Military Attaché in Brussels and the Hague, Miller to the Chief of the Intelligence Committee and Tselebrowsky.

21/8th Feb. 1901

After a long interval of silence on the part of the Transvaal mission, information has been received once more concerning the position at the front; this has been given to me quite confidentially.

At the beginning of January different commandos numbered about 15,000 armed Boers, out of these about 9,000 from the Transvaal and about 6,000 from the Orange Republic. The number of fighters for national independence dropped after the taking of Pretoria in June and July to only a few thousand. However, gradually it increased again, partly under the influence of and thanks to the example of the most energetic leadership of Botha and de Wet, but chiefly on account of the scorched earth policy, which the English adopted against the Boers.

Prepared to resign themselves to the sad necessity of submitting to English rule, only in order to be able to return to their peace-time occupations after ten months of a heavy campaign, these so-called "peaceful or neutral Boers" gradually realised that the English were powerless to overcome the remaining detachments of de Wet, de la Rey and of several others and thus to ensure them a peaceful existence on their farms. The panic caused by the bloodless occupation of Pretoria gradually died down and the numerous exploits of individual commandos over the numerically stronger English detachments — exploits deliberately magnified, contributed to a change of attitude. Very soon a feeling of doubt took the place of that of the hopelessness of the whole struggle and of belief in the invincibility of the huge English army. At this point only caution retained the majority of the neutral Boers on their farms. But when they were chased out of their farms upon orders received from General Roberts, and taken prisoner on exactly the same footing as the fighting Boers with no difference whatsoever being made between the innocent and the guilty, when the English began to burn and to destroy their farms and all their possessions, for the preservation of which they had laid down their arms, especially when these measures began to be enforced not only in individual cases but in whole regions — then there remained but one way left open to them — as they had nothing to lose any more and the feeling of hatred and vengeance grew — it was to join the ranks of the fighters.

The South African Ambassador, Dr. Leyds told me that all the news which he had received from the Transvaal confirmed the above opinion. After the fall of Pretoria and the departure of President Kruger (for a while, June to October 1900) the Boers lost their spirit and the English held all the trump cards in their hands — to put an immediate end to the war. The news about severe measures and destruction of private property were received with something of a relief as they promised a more energetic renewal of the fight. The most treasured possession of a Boer is his farm — his own land where he is in complete mastery. He prizes his national independence only in so far as it upholds his patriarchal rights. Naturally this utilitarian outlook is only held by the masses; the history of the present war gives us many shining examples to the contrary. Basing his view on information received recently from de Wet, the beginning

of January of our old style, Dr. Leyds considers that one can have confidence in the future progress of the struggle. The spirit of the men, who have gathered under the leadership of de Wet, is excellent. The object of his operations is to prolong the fight for another year at least. To achieve this large encounters must be avoided; wherever the enemy is in the stronger position, always retreat, even in scattered formation. The prestige of de Wet's name and of the cause is so great that single men and whole detachments will be drawn once more to join his ranks. He does not have to fear deserters. His aim is to achieve small but decisive victories by attacking the enemy unawares.

The idea of invading the Cape Colony belongs to Hertzog, who was given the task of realising it. Hertzog and Kritzinger are under de Wet who is Commander-in-Chief of all the Orange Free State forces. They had about 3,500 men for their invasion of the Cape Colony. De Wet having only about 2,000 men under his direct command agreed to move into the Cape Colony too, in order to cause a diversion. He hopes to oblige the English to divide their forces, to tire them out with arduous marches during the rainy season and to undermine them both morally and materially by a fruitless pursuit of himself and thus perforce to increase further the casualties of the English from sickness that are already heavy.

He did not believe in the news of the insurrection of the Afrikaners and events proved him to be right. There was undoubtedly a certain feeling of sympathy which he utilised in order to extend military operations to a new territory as yet almost completely unscathed by the horrors of war and in order too to give a breathing spell to his fatherland. At the same time he intends to continue the very successful forays against the lines of English communications.

In order to establish communications between the various detachments which operate quite independently, a special volunteer body of scouts has been formed. One of these succeeded in reaching President Kruger and in giving to him despatches from de Wet. As has already been stated above, the only way open to him lay through Cape Town and England by English steamship. He is returning in the same way one of these days. On his departure, he received a document from de Wet in order to prove his identity to President Kruger. As for his instructions he had to learn them all by heart and carried no papers with him. President Kruger was not in direct communication with General Botha. It is only known that Botha has sent three messengers to him and it appears that all of them have paid with their lives.

Meanwhile the English have formed a special watch of "Kaffir guards" about 300 men strong in order to catch and capture all messengers who might be making their way from the Transvaal to the Eastern ports of Africa. This watch is under the command of a German renegade from the Transvaal — one named Steinacker — and his guards are even called "Steinackers Light Horse". The region of activity of this watch is the Eastern boundary line of the Transvaal which adjoins the Portuguese possessions. These men are given permission to shoot anyone who tries to cross the border without legitimate cause. They are given the belongings of the deceased. For Boers whom they kill and who might have been messengers carrying despatches or instructions, they are given a special reward. Besides that, these 300 kaffirs receive a set salary at the rate of 5/- per day per man.

Quite apart from this mere robber-band, the English use armed kaffirs as well in the North in the skirmishes at Lydenburg and in the West around Taungs. The correspondent of the English newspaper *Daily Telegraph* also mentions some detachment composed

of natives and bearing the name of "Kaffrarian Rifles"⁶ alluding to the battle between De Wet and General Knox at the end of January near Senekal. But the Transvaal mission has not received any confirmation of this revolting news as yet.

The forecasts of the allied Commanders-in-Chief can be summed up in a plan of withdrawal (in May and June at the coming of winter) into the Northern Transvaal, where the English have not penetrated yet, as they have nothing with which to feed their horses in the land which has been devastated and where there is no longer any fodder left. Dr. Leyds has in his possession proofs that immediately after the Jameson Raid, the English government began to prepare for war, and not only with the Transvaal with which it had misunderstandings and accounts to settle, but primarily with the Orange Free State Republic. The plan to get hold of the territory and the rich gold deposits of both the Republics by means of an invasion of the Orange Free State Republic from the South is confirmed by the research of the Intelligence Division Bureau for the year 1897 — as follows:

- (1) By a map, scale 1/250,000 with detailed representation of all farms, the names of their owners, the degree of their reliability, their nationality, etc.
- (2) A map, scale 1/126,000 of all the ways of communication leading from the Cape Colony to Bloemfontein parallel to the railway. Information is given also as to the condition and quality of the roads, bridges, wells, etc. but fate did not will it that the English should make use of and profit by these painstakingly conscientious compilations.

From letters of the Military Attaché in Brussels and the Hague, Miller to the Chief of the Intelligence Committee

30/17 March 1901

The privations of the Boer women and children in the hands of the English

A few weeks ago two letters of English doctors were published in the West European Press. These doctors were given the task of acquainting themselves with the true position of women and children imprisoned by the English in camps especially put up for them in the vicinity of large towns i.e. Johannesburg, Bloemfontein, etc. It turns out that the conditions of life of hundreds of women, many of them with children all huddled together in compressed quarters, are extremely bad. Food was often given in insufficient quantity and of a wretched, quite uneatable quality. The English Command tried, in as far as was possible, to satisfy legitimate complaints about the bad food of the prisoners, but was not always successful. For instance a dairy farm had been put to use to get milk for young children near the Johannesburg camp. One of the most inhuman and cruel measures enforced against the families (wives and children) of those Boers who continued to fight the English, was to give them still smaller rations, already very limited in amount, than those distributed to other prisoners whose husbands had sworn to remain neutral.

In order to improve the position of the victims a circle was formed in Holland under the chairmanship of Mrs. Vashkevich in order to collect money and to help these wives and children in captivity with money, clothing, shoes, tinned food, etc.

Now Mrs. Vashkevich has just published the following letter concerning the activity of the circle headed by her.

"Everyone has read the official English documents concerning the quality of the food given to the Boer women and children in English camps, especially in Johannesburg. I am being informed at the present moment that the dairy farm, mentioned in his report by Dr. MacKenzie has never been brought into existence and as a result of this little children have been left without any food, because one cannot give the name

6. *The Kaffrarian Rifles* was an old military unit from the Border and was not a non white formation! (Ed.).

of food to the rotten maize-flour full of different insects — with which the prisoners are fed. As a result of this the mortality of Boer women and children is very high indeed. Worst of all is the fact that military authorities have refused to deliver cases of food sent by European Committees of Aid to the camps. The same authorities have twice returned to us three hundred pounds intended for the purchase of more wholesome food — under the pretext that the women and children are not in need of anything”.

Correction of Official English Bulletins

From time to time there appear Press reports and letters from the theatre of war in the English Press, which represent events in quite a different light from that under which they are presented in official bulletins.

Thus a “Gloucester citizen” quotes passages from the letter of one of the participants of a fight in the Magaliesberg mountains between the united forces of de la Rey and Beyers and the English troops under General Clements: “In actual fact General Clements lost all his supplies and abandoned his camp with all the ammunition and baggage. At one point things became so bad for us that we tied cartridges to the guns preferring to destroy them rather than giving them to the enemy. The official report — that General Clements moved his detachments to new positions does not correspond to reality — the Boers chased us before them like a herd of cattle for fifteen miles. Our rear-guard managed to defend itself by straining to the very utmost”. Such corrections of official English despatches are essential for the future historian of the War. Unfortunately at the present time they appear as rare and exceptional occurrences.

The Organisation of Civil Rule in the Transvaal and Orange Free State

Milner’s appointment as the Chief Administrator of the newly acquired colonies of the Orange and of the Transvaal have caused, as is well-known, extreme discontent among the Boers where the very sound of the name of the ex-Governor of the Cape Colony is generally hated.

The Executive Council of the Transvaal comprised of men chosen by Milner has very little chance of inspiring any confidence in the Boers and of becoming a link of reconciliation between the head of the Administration and the population.

June 13/May 31st 1901

Certain Information concerning the Anglo-Transvaal War (Material towards a characterisation of the Boers)

A doctor who was in one of the Netherlands Medical Detachments, Dr. Behrens de Haan, returned to Europe after a stay of 18 months among the Boers. Some of his comments concerning them are not without interest: “The war has cured many Boers of their excessive self-confidence, selfishness and conceit from which they once suffered. They have now realised their weaknesses and have not only become free of them but have acquired certain virtues. Many of the narrow-minded, ultra-conservative oligarchs have been filled with a new spirit and have become aware of the necessity for broader-minded and healthier politics.

The Boers themselves do not know yet where the war will lead them, but they have only one aim in view — to defend their independence. They are not preparing plans for the future, but are guided by, as it were, an instinct of self-preservation in this struggle for what they hold dearest and holiest. They do not meditate upon the dangers and consequences of this war; they have long ago lost illusions concerning a rapid and happy ending of the war — the defeat of the English and their expulsion from South Africa, etc.

Long ago they have given up the carrying out of large-scale operations with large forces. All the reports about a large-scale simultaneous attack upon all English lines of communication — are unfounded. They do not hold the bold hope of forcing the

English to evacuate the country or of surrendering as a result of the lack of supplies — their aim is to attack railway lines and to constantly harass and weary the English — Not to allow the English to own and rule the country in peace — to prevent them from strengthening their position and establishing industries and trade — that is the objective of the Boers, which they will try to achieve for as long as possible.

Most of the attacks are carried out according to Botha's plans and orders which are passed even to the most distant outposts — Botha has no dictatorial powers, but is in general well obeyed and is treated with respect by such leaders as Ben Viljoen and Beyers. De la Rey is not under his command; he is acting independently. He is a man of strong character and acts best of all when left to his own devices. The discipline in the commandos is improving constantly. In no way similar to marauders, the Boers are well-organised in detachments and commandos formed from men of the same region — as at the beginning of the war. In each commando one can come across men from all walks of life: some are poor, some are rich — one must say that many of the rich Boers placed between two choices have preferred material advantage to their fatherland — but many of the well-to-do men have sacrificed everything and have dedicated themselves to the defence of their fatherland.

Boer commandos take to the field, execute the planned attack, then the men disperse as soon as the pursuit becomes dangerous, and all assemble again at a place previously decided upon — fully prepared for a new attack. Their capacity for rapid organization and for swiftly restoring their strength is one of the characteristic features of the Boers and what applies to military commandos holds good and is confirmed in civil administration as well.

Hardly have the English left a village, town or region after a short-lived occupation, than the Boers return immediately and again form their civil administration. They appoint a "Landdrost", allocate work to the kaffirs, collect taxes, etc. Although the English take many of the inhabitants with them they do not take all of them and enough people remain on the spot to ensure internal order and good management. Therefore it is without any justification that the English represent President Schalk Burger and the State-Secretary Reitz as rulers without any subjects. Thanks to this talent one can assert with certainty that whatever devastation and ruin that the English leave the country in at the end of the War, the Boers will soon succeed in bringing it back to its former flourishing condition.

Information from the Front

According to information received in Brussels through a courier from Lourenco Marques and by-passing the English censorship, it appears, contrary to the English official statement, that the commander Ben Viljoen succeeded with very small losses in breaking through the cordon of the enemy, six or seven times superior in strength, at Witbank. The Boers from Botha's detachment have carried out a successful attack against the Douglas Mines in the region of Ermelo, where they captured 147 cases of dynamite, which were essential to them in order that they might blow up trains. The Boers managed to capture three trains at the beginning of May (New Style) between Klerksdorp and Johannesburg in the vicinity of Wonderfontein, South of Krugersdorp. One of the trains was carrying footwear, the other carcasses of animals. Further, in the same letter there is a mention of the fact that the English are continuing to burn and to destroy farms and other Boer property and belongings which is in complete contradiction of the announcement the Government has published in the White Paper. From that, one could deduce that as from January (New Style) the English forces had put an end to this barbaric way of waging war.

The Devastation of the Country by the Armed Forces

Certain letters from English soldiers published among other in the newspaper

Daily News leave no doubt on this score. A letter dated May 10th from General Randall's Division states: "From the moment we left Harrismith we burned and destroyed all buildings which we came across". One of the Yeomenry who was in the column, which left Standerton on May 5th among the 600 men in pursuit of Grobler, wrote on May 7th: "Yesterday and today we were kept busy burning down farms. First we removed poultry and all livestock and then set fire. This is rather a brutal occupation, but it is indispensable to prevent our critics from talking at home". From the 17th Company of the Yeomenry a letter dated May 5th reads as follows: "What a delightful sport we had at Reitz, we burned down the village so well that one could no longer recognise it. We broke all the furniture, domestic utensils, stoves, etc. the pianos met with the worst fate of all".

The Plight of the Wives and Children of the Boers

Each day we hear new complaints about the terrible position of the wives and children of the Boers imprisoned in different camps by the English. During the week from the 22nd to the 30th of April out of 3,125 people 30 died; next week 24, from the 6th to 13th of May, 26. In all, in three weeks, 80 people, which represents 435 people out of 1,000. This means that the rate of mortality is twenty times the normal rate.

These figures, which apply to the Johannesburg camp, assume an even more sinister meaning if we take into consideration that this hecatomb consists mainly of children whose normal mortality does not exceed 12% per year.

Below is given a testimony of an eye-witness of the privations endured at Potchefstroom. *The Mutual Aid Society* at the Hague equipped and sent several nurses to South Africa to care for the women and children. One of them, having arrived at Kimberley wrote on May the 5th: "Our food is bad; we have no beds. The women and children are given one blanket each and they sleep on bare ground. There are 1,200 people imprisoned here, men, women and children. Measles is raging among the children. The rate of mortality is very high. In twelve days, since I have been here, 5 children have died. During the three months of the camp's existence 27 children have died, etc."

News of De Wet

For a long time nothing was heard of de Wet. According to the latest information he is at Gatsrand with about 1,000 men. The latter stretches to the South of the railway line to Potchefstroom; it begins to the North of Frederikstad and turns to the North-East and ends at Elsburg, south of Johannesburg. On the other side of the railway is Suikerbosrand in the direction of Heidelberg. Gatsrand is an excellent locality for Boer operations. Great hopes were placed on it in May 1900 after the English crossed the Vaal. These hopes were not justified on account of the disorganisation and panic which spread among Boer commandos at the time.

The occupation of this locality by de Wet with a strong detachment would be all the more significant as de la Rey is stationed to the North in the hilly region between the Witwatersrand and the Magaliesberg. Therefore the English, placed between two fires, would have to strain to the last fibre to keep up their position in the Western Transvaal.

The arrival of de Wet in the Transvaal from the Orange Republic underlines even more the success achieved by the Boers at Swartfontein — admittedly at the price of heavy casualties.

A queer state of affairs is revealed by the Cape Town newspaper *The Cape Times*. It may be attributed either to a complete muddle in the English military organizational spheres or to the insufficiency of ready cash. This newspaper is well-known as a fanatical publication hostile to the Boers. Men who have finished their term of military service belonging to the regular army are besieging Cape Town offices in

thongs demanding the accumulated salaries due to them. However, nobody is hurrying to satisfy their legitimate demands; the money earned for serving in a hard campaign is often kept back by the government for no reason at all, sometimes for several months on end. What is more, many volunteers, before engaging themselves in the services made the arrangement that the salary due to them should be sent to their families and thought that in this manner they had provided for their dependents. Returning from the campaign they discovered that their families, having received nothing from the government, and having been left destitute, have been obliged to turn to public charity and State help. Therefore the very first item which greeted them when they returned to their homes was a reminder from the law-courts concerning the return of the money spent on the upkeep of their families.

III

Letter of the Military Attaché Maximov⁷ to the Chief of the Intelligence Committee
20/7th March 1900

Although I arrived in Pretoria on February 24th/12th I have not yet had an opportunity to get to the front and cannot write about military actions, not having been an eye-witness. But you may be interested to know about general conditions and so I can share with you my observations and the information I have recently received. President Kruger is extremely popular, not only in the Transvaal but, as I was able to ascertain three days ago, in the Orange Free State Republic as well. In spite of his being no longer young (he is now 75) he is full of life and energy and is also endowed with a remarkable brain and political acumen. Having left Pretoria on February 27th to see the position at Ladysmith, Kruger was in Bloemfontein at 11 a.m. on the 5th March. There he was received with wild enthusiasm by the population. After a meeting with President Steyn and a short rest, Kruger left yesterday morning for Modder River to see the de Wet troops guarding the way to Bloemfontein. The position is some 90 kilometres from the capital. In succession to General Cronje⁸ who had been Commander-in-Chief of the Orange Free State Republic General de la Rey has been appointed in his place. From all accounts he is a very gifted and popular general. Although the Boers have had some setbacks during the last few days the Transvalers have not lost their nerve and are decided to wage war to the last man. The Free Staters were rather in a confused state of mind after the loss of Cronje and of his army — which was turned to profit by the secret well-wishers of the English; but the arrival of President Kruger put everything right and after his brief and inspiring speech the Free Staters rallied and went back to the front.

That English did not make good use of their important success and lost much time, giving the Boers the chance to recover from the set-backs and to enter the fight again—until such time as Europe should intercede for them. They rendered a very great service to Europe having destroyed the prestige of our common enemy; Europe must show her gratitude by taking part. The country has been laid waste too and the innocent settlers (guilty only of the fact that gold was found on their farms) are perishing to please a small group of greedy capitalists who are responsible for this war.

7. Lieutenant-Colonel Evgeni Iakovlevitch Maximov, retired, Military Correspondent of the newspapers *Rossiya*, *Novoye Vremia* and *St. Petersburgskiy Vedomosti* was with the Boer forces.

8. On January 27th 1900 the detachment commanded by Gen. Piet Cronje was surrounded by superior forces at Paardeberg and surrendered after fierce resistance. The event made a painful impression on the Boers; panic started which forced the high command to temporarily disband the troops. However they soon rallied. The successful operations partially compensated for Cronje's defeat and the struggle flared up with renewed force.

On the 4th of March I was presented to President Steyn and stayed with him for more than two hours and talked with him as a journalist. Thanks to English sources, people in South Africa have the strangest notions about Russia. I gave explanations to all the questions asked — including Finland. It seems that my truthful way of speaking made quite an impression on those present . . . Steyn was so put out that he was ready to conclude a separate peace. I proved to him how unprofitable that would be and gave him the idea of sending a mission, first to the Tzar, to Berlin, to Paris and to the Hague. A telegram has already been sent to Salisbury: "Why are we waging war. Time we ended it, we would have offered to do so earlier but you were suffering defeats. Now a success — military honour rehabilitated — offer peace — if you do not agree will defend freedom to the last". They are expecting a reply and will send a deputation after that. We are on the eve of peace.

Colonel Gurko⁹ arrived here on February 27th and, having paid his respects to the President went on March the 2nd to Modder River to de Wet's troops. President Kruger is expected back here on the 9th of March. General Olivier is camping in the Drakensberg with 4,000 men protecting Harrismith — and General . . . I have forgotten his name, I believe Janssen, with 3,000 men in Stormberg. Near Komsberg there are about 1,000 men and I do not know how many there are with de Wet. Yesterday de la Rey went to join him with 3,000 men.

The post is about to go and so I am obliged to conclude this letter.

9. Lieutenant-Colonel Vassili Iossifovitch Romeiko-Gurko was an officer of the General Staff with the Commander-in-Chief of the Warsaw Military region. Soon after the beginning of the Anglo-Boer war he was sent to the front as a Russian Military Attaché with the Boer forces.