

# The Pretoria-Pietersburg railway line during the South African War (1899-1902)

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## Abstract

The Northern Transvaal is an often-neglected theatre of the War. The area saw limited action during the first set-piece battle phase of the War, but was one of the last strongholds of the “bittereinders” as the Transvaal commandos were forced to retreat further east and then north during the subsequent guerrilla stage of the War. The then recently completed 290 km Pretoria-Pietersburg railway line - the Pietersburg station was opened on 1 May 1899 - played a significant role in both the Boer and British efforts in the Northern Transvaal during the last two years of the War.

The British army’s invasion of the Northern Transvaal as far north as Nylstroom by August 1900 followed the railway line and Brig.-Gen. H.C.O Plumer, who led the advance on Pietersburg in March / April 1901, also proceeded along the railway, making use of it to transport equipment. Following the occupation of Pietersburg, a key focus of the Boer war effort was to attack the railway, with Capt. Jack Hindon’s corps being the most active in this regard.

The presentation provides an overview of events in the vicinity of the railway that influenced both the Boer and British war efforts and comments on the role played by the railway line in such events and its impact on the trajectory of the War in the area.

## Paper / notes

At the outbreak of the South African War of 1899-1902 (hereafter referred to as the war), the northern Transvaal was a largely inhospitable region, sparsely populated by permanent white residents. Various black groups were living in the area.

By 1890, goods and passengers were generally transported by ox wagon and mail coaches. Doel Zeederberg, who established a monopoly over the mail coach service to the north, had coaches servicing the Pretoria-Pietersburg route three times a week and owned 700 seasoned mules. He also experimented with using tame zebras as draught animals, but their lack of stamina and their popularity amongst lions proved to be problematic.<sup>1</sup>

During the rinderpest epidemic of 1896 to 1897 very few cattle survived in the Waterberg and Zoutpansberg areas; many horses died of horse sickness in the same

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1. L. Changuion, *Pietersburg: 1886–1986* (Pretoria: Stadsraad van Pietersburg, 1986), p 57.

period and the government was forced to promote the development of alternative means of transport because of the severe shortage of draught animals.<sup>2</sup>

## The Pretoria-Pietersburg railway line

A number of inhabitants of Pietersburg and the surrounding areas were of the view that a railway line from Pretoria to Pietersburg was essential for the economic development of the region. Various requests were submitted to the Volksraad of the *Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek* (hereafter referred to as the Republic, Z.A.R. or Transvaal) during the early 1890s and in 1895 a concession for the construction and exploitation of the railway line was granted to Mr. H.J. Schoeman.<sup>3</sup>

Schoeman transferred his concession to the Pretoria-Pietersburg Railway Company Limited (hereafter referred to as the Company), incorporated in London with a fixed share capital of £500 000, of which the Z.A.R. government subscribed for £300 000.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the construction being plagued by unnecessary delays and ongoing friction between the government and the Company, the first 129 km section of the line from Pretoria to Nylstroom was inaugurated on 1 July 1898 and the remaining 154 km to Pietersburg was opened on 31 May 1899, after a total construction period of only 15 months.<sup>5</sup>

The railway line had ten girder bridges and there were seven stations, namely those at Pienaars River, Warmbaths, Nylstroom, Naboomspruit, Piet Potgietersrust, Marabastad and Pietersburg. The journey between Pretoria and Pietersburg took 10 and a half hours.<sup>6</sup>

## The outbreak of the war

At the outbreak of the war, the railway line was deemed of great importance for the Boer war effort in the northern regions of the Z.A.R. and the Executive Council instructed local officials to commandeer black men to collect firewood from government land and the private properties of individuals not performing military service and to carry it to various points along the railway line.<sup>7</sup>

For obvious reasons, the British-owned Company felt no loyalty towards the Z.A.R. government and was concerned about section 32 of the Concession Agreement, which provided that if there was to be war, the Z.A.R. government had the right to

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<sup>2</sup>. Changuion, *Pietersburg*, p 53; U. de V. Pienaar (ed.), *Neem uit die Verlede* (Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis, 2007), pp 338–343.

<sup>3</sup>. Changuion, *Pietersburg*, p 59; D.J. Coetzee, “Spoorwegontwikkeling in die Suid-Afrikaanse Republiek (1872–1899)”, Unpublished D Litt et Phil thesis, Unisa, 1940, pp 140–141.

<sup>4</sup>. Coetzee, “Spoorwegontwikkeling in die Suid-Afrikaanse Republiek”, p 142.

<sup>5</sup>. Coetzee, “Spoorwegontwikkeling in die Suid-Afrikaanse Republiek”, pp 142–143.

<sup>6</sup>. *Zoutpansberg Illustrated Souvenir/Gedenkboek: Official Opening of the Pretoria-Pietersburg Railway, 31 May 1899*.

<sup>7</sup>. E. Broos, “Die Noordelike Hooflaer in die Distrikte Zoutpansberg, Waterberg en Rustenburg”, *Unpublished MA dissertation, University of Pretoria, 1943*, p 7; Executive Council Decision of 4 October 1899, as cited in J.H. Breytenbach, *Die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog in Suid-Afrika, 1899–1902, Vol. 1* (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1969), p 99.

expropriate the railway. On 14 October the railway commissioner informed the Company that the railway line was to be placed at the disposal of the government until further notice. The Z.A.R. government's chief engineer, Mr. de Wildt, was appointed as general manager and all British subjects were instructed to leave the Transvaal within eight days. Boxes containing the Company's papers, which had been deposited at the National Bank for safe custody, were seized by the Z.A.R. government.<sup>8</sup>

## **The British Army and the railways**

It was evident to the British that the railways in South Africa would be of the greatest importance during this war. For the first time the British Army was required to control an extensive railway network and use it as a base for a vast number of troops throughout an extensive enemy territory. It was decided to centralise control of the railway under the Department of Military Railways. Brevet Major E.P.C. Girouard, who had constructed the railway during the Sudan Campaign, and was president of the Egyptian State Railways, was appointed as director of the railways on 7 October 1899. He held the local rank of lieutenant-colonel.<sup>9</sup>

To Girouard it was an absolute necessity that there be a staff of officers acting as intermediaries and the only authorised channel of communication between the military and civil railway officials.<sup>10</sup>

For this purpose, a number of specialist departments were established which became known collectively as the Imperial Military Railways. The staff comprised officers of the Royal Engineers corps and other soldiers with railway experience; the personnel of the Cape and Free State Railways who were loyal to the British; and a number of *Uitlander* refugees who had engineering ability and were recruited on the Witwatersrand. The Imperial Military Railways also employed as many as 20 000 black labourers.<sup>11</sup>

One of the prime objectives of the British military was to make the quickest possible temporary repairs to war-damaged railway lines; they had to be reopened with the least possible delay. At the same time, once restored for temporary use, permanent repairs had to be made. The so-called "construction trains" were used to carry out such repairs.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>. Transnet Library, Pretoria-Pietersburg Railway Company, Minute Book no. 2, Minutes of Directors' Meeting, 13 September 1899, item 673; Minutes of Directors' Meeting, 6 December 1899, item 739.

<sup>9</sup>. E.P.C. Girouard, *History of the Railways during the War in South Africa, 1899–1902* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1903), pp 7, 10.

<sup>10</sup>. Girouard, *History of the Railways during the War*, p 15.

<sup>11</sup>. Girouard, *History of the Railways during the War*, pp 7–8, 38, 41, 52, 66; Royal Engineers' Institute (Great Britain), *Detailed History of the Railways in the South African War, 1899–1902, Vol. 1* (Chatham: Royal Engineers Institute, 1904), pp 71, 74–75.

<sup>12</sup>. Royal Engineers' Institute, *History of the Railways in the South African War, Vol. 1*, p 122.

## **The Pretoria-Pietersburg line in the hands of the Boers**

Following the occupation of Pretoria on 5 June 1900, the Waterberg and Zoutpansberg districts were abandoned by the Z.A.R. government to all intents and purposes and all communication was severed. Despite repeated and urgent demands for supplies and ammunition, nothing was sent to the northern districts and many of the demoralised burghers decided to return home. The Pretoria-Pietersburg railway fell into disuse without a single locomotive being available to transport burghers and provisions.<sup>13</sup>

However, after a few weeks, reports of the reorganisation of the Boer forces and the rekindling of fighting spirit elsewhere in the country reached the northern parts of the Transvaal. General “Groot Freek” Grobler in the Waterberg and Commandant van Rensburg in Zoutpansberg, started reassembling small commandos. They moved in the direction of Pretoria and were regularly involved in skirmishes with the British.<sup>14</sup>

With the Z.A.R.’s commissariat no longer servicing the northern Transvaal, Ludwig Krause, a Pietersburg lawyer, at that stage an acting commandant, gained the consent of the government to appoint a commandeering and buying commission in Pietersburg. This commission inspected all shops in the area and discovered that there were large quantities of foodstuff and other provisions hidden away by the merchants.<sup>15</sup>

With the goods he had commandeered, Krause was able to restock the commissariat, and to refit the commandos in the field. At the Piet-Potgietersrust railway station he discovered two old engines and a number of trucks. On inspection it was concluded that the engines could still be used, but coal and oil were difficult to obtain. Ever resourceful, he persuaded a local butchery to slaughter some pigs and the lard produced served as an excellent lubricating oil. As a replacement for coal he used wood and with these substitutes, Krause managed to get the old engines up and running. He now had a light provision train, in Boer hands, travelling three times a week between Pietersburg and Pienaars River. Remarkably, despite the ongoing war, there was a regular train service capable of transporting supplies, burghers and cattle.<sup>16</sup>

## **The first British northwards march: August 1900**

Following Gen. C.R. de Wet and Pres. M.T. Steyn’s escape from the Brandwater Basin in the Eastern Free State in July 1900 Cmdt. L.P. Steenkamp, who headed the Heilbron commando, was appointed to lead the convoy and main body of Free Staters of about 900 men towards Nylstroom to graze and rest the oxen in the Bushveld. In

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<sup>13</sup>. J. Taitz, K. Gillings and A. Davey (eds.), *The War Memoires of Commandant Ludwig Krause, 1899–1900* (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1996), p 81.

<sup>14</sup>. Taitz, Gillings and Davey (eds.), *War Memoires of Commandant Ludwig Krause*, pp 81–82.

<sup>15</sup>. Taitz, Gillings and Davey (eds.), *War Memoires of Commandant Ludwig Krause*, p 92.

<sup>16</sup>. Taitz, Gillings and Davey (eds.), *War Memoires of Commandant Ludwig Krause*, pp 92–94.

the British response, Maj.-Gen. Paget was ordered to prevent any eastward movement by the Free Staters and to protect the Pretoria-Pietersburg railway line.<sup>17</sup>

Paget's brigade was reinforced by Gen. R.S.S. Baden-Powell and Col. T.E. Hickman and he pursued the Free Staters, who had joined up with Grobler's force north of Pretoria. Baden-Powell occupied the Pienaars River station on 21 August 1900 and found that the Boers had damaged the railway bridge and pillaged and gutted the local store and hotel.<sup>18</sup>

Baden-Powell occupied Warmbaths station on 22 August 1900, where he came into conflict with Grobler's contingent of an estimated 2 500 men outside the village. On the morning of 26 August, Baden-Powell occupied Nylstroom without a shot being fired, while the Free Staters relocated northwest of Nylstroom.<sup>19</sup>

By early September 1900, British operations in the northern Transvaal were suspended as troops were desparately required on the Delagoa Bay line and Paget was instructed to fall back to Pienaars River, 64 km north of Pretoria. This was now the northernmost British post along the Pretoria-Pietersburg railway line.<sup>20</sup>

## **The railway and guerrilla warfare in the northern Transvaal**

Following the final disastrous set-piece Battle of Dalmanutha on 27 August 1900, the Boers decided to resort to a new form of warfare by splitting the commandos into smaller and more mobile units and continuing the fight with hit-and-run tactics; they were determined to fight to 'the bitter end'.<sup>21</sup>

The Boer leaders realised the value of the northern Transvaal and on 4 September 1900, Christiaan Frederik Beyers was appointed as assistant-commandant general over the depleted Waterberg and Zoutpansberg commandos, replacing the less than competent Grobler.<sup>22</sup>

Pietersburg was an important distribution point for provisions. Depots of cattle and horses were maintained there; four large steam mills were operated to grind mealies and wheat; and salt was brought in from the nearby salt pans. Ammunition was manufactured, general repairs were carried out and a printing press published regular

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<sup>17</sup>. L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times History of the War in South Africa, 1899–1902, Vol. 4* (London: Sampson, Low, Marston & Co., 1900–1909), p 430; P.G. Cloete, *Die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 'n Chronologie* (Klerksdorp: Pieter G. Cloete, 2010), p 186.

<sup>18</sup>. F. Maurice, *History of the War in South Africa 1899–1902, Vol. 3* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1906), pp 366–367; Trooper Bisdee's notes, cited in J. Bufton, *Tasmanians in the Transvaal War* (Hobart: S.G. Loone, 1905), p 289; Royal Engineers *History of the Railways in the South African War, Vol. 1*, p 132.

<sup>19</sup>. Maurice, *History of the War, Vol. 3*, p 368.

<sup>20</sup>. H.W. Wilson, *After Pretoria: The Guerrilla War, Vol. 1* (London: Amalgamated Press, 1902), pp 96–97.

<sup>21</sup>. Changuion, *Pietersburg*, p 65.

<sup>22</sup>. Changuion, *Pietersburg*, p 67.

newspapers. Supplies from the town were being sent out to the commandos, often using Ludwig Krause's train service.<sup>23</sup>

The fighting strategy previously employed by the British military was adjusted to match that used by the Boer forces in what became known as the guerrilla phase of the war. Owing to the lack of troops to occupy the large area which was theoretically under British control, the imperial army found it impossible to do much more than hold the main towns and the greater part of the British forces was disseminated along the railway. In the northern Transvaal, Paget, with Hickman and Brig.-Gen. Plumer, operated on the Pietersburg line and were responsible for clearing the countryside of looting parties of Boers, supplies and stock.<sup>24</sup>

In an attempt to safeguard the railways, on 16 June 1900 Lord F.S. Roberts issued a proclamation to the effect that the farm nearest to the scene of any attempt to damage the line or to wreck a train was to be burnt. Furthermore, all farms within a radius of ten miles were to be completely cleared of all their stock and supplies. He also introduced further measures in terms of which the local community would be held to account for any costs resulting from damage to property and the director of the Imperial Military Railways was authorised to carry prominent civilians on the trains as hostages.<sup>25</sup>

In order to protect the stations, bridges, and railway lines and to contain Boer raids, blockhouses were erected at key points. Initially stone forts were built, but towards the end of 1900 corrugated iron blockhouses were being put up to limit costs and the time needed to build the fortifications. About 100 blockhouses were eventually erected along the Pretoria-Pietersburg railway line.<sup>26</sup>

## **The second British northwards march: March-April 1901**

By March 1901, Pietersburg and three-quarters of the 290 km railway line terminating at the town were still under Boer control. Lord Kitchener was determined to clear the Boer government out of Roosenekal in the eastern Transvaal and to break up the Boer forces assembled in the area. In preparation for this, the railway from Pienaars River to Pietersburg was to be occupied and the drifts over the Olifants River secured to block potential northern and western escape routes. The occupation of Pietersburg would, at the same time, have the benefit of eliminating the Boer supply depot there and the town could well prove useful as a base for British manoeuvres to the south.<sup>27</sup>

Plumer was selected to lead the advance on Pietersburg and at Pretoria and his column was reinforced to a total strength of up to 1 500 mounted men, eight field guns,

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<sup>23</sup>. Amery (ed.), *Times History of the War*, Vol. 5, p 196.

<sup>24</sup>. Amery (ed.), *Times History of the War*, Vol. 5, pp 46–47.

<sup>25</sup>. M. Bossenbroek, *The Boer War* (Amsterdam: Polak & Van Gennep, 2012), p 272.

<sup>26</sup>. J.H. Hattingh, "Die Britse Blokhuisstelsel tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899–1902", *Unpublished MA dissertation, University of the Orange Free State, 1997*, pp 46–47, 117.

<sup>27</sup>. Amery (ed.), *Times History of the War*, Vol. 5, pp 195, 197, 199; L. Creswicke, *South Africa and the Transvaal War*, Vol. 7 (Edinburgh: T.C. and E.C. Jack, 1900–1902).p 43; R.L. Wallace, *Australians at the Boer War* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing, 1976), p 317.

and a pom-pom. A large quantity of food and forage was loaded onto wagons, rolling stock was accumulated and the march along the railway line commenced on 26 March 1901. Plumer arrived at Pienaars River on 28 March, where he was reinforced by 'C' Section pom-poms and the 2nd Gordon Highlanders.<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, local black people had informed the Boers about the massive preparations at Pienaars River and the Boers damaged the railway line immediately to the north of the terminus. The line had to be repaired by the Royal Engineers, who also laid down a siding at Pienaars River to accommodate the extra trains.<sup>29</sup>

The advance to Warmbaths commenced on the afternoon of 29 March 1901. Due to the heavy, sandy roads, the railway was used for the carriage of the transport and guns. The construction train, armoured in the centre, proceeded at walking pace, pushing empty wagons in front as a safeguard against detonations on the line. Five supply trains followed under protection of strong infantry escorts.<sup>30</sup>

The British advance guard found the baths and hotel in Warmbaths abandoned and they occupied the town without a shot being fired. Surrendered Boer families were sent to Pretoria by train and the main column proceeded towards Nylstroom, where limited resistance was offered by a few scattered snipers. The town was occupied on 1 April 1901.<sup>31</sup>

Construction trains followed the troops and repaired the railway, while detachments of the telegraph division repaired the wires. Infantry detachments of the Gordon Highlanders were left behind as a garrison at various points on the railway line in the rear. It appears that Plumer arrived sooner than the Boers expected and that this limited their destruction of the railway line.<sup>32</sup>

After being delayed for a day by heavy rains, Plumer's column occupied Naboomspruit station on 3 April 1901, Piet-Potgietersrust on 5 April 1901 and the main column resumed its advance on 7 April in a heavy downpour of rain.<sup>33</sup>

Very little resistance was offered by the Boers. One of the smaller bridges was damaged and two mines exploded under a construction train but there was limited damage and the Royal Engineers managed to effect the necessary repairs. A group of 12 Boers, assumed to be responsible for the detonation, was captured and these

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<sup>28</sup>. Amery (ed.), *Times History of the War*, Vol. 5, pp 200–201; 'War Office, July 9, 1901', *London Gazette*, No. 27331, 9 July 1901, p 4544; *Wilson, After Pretoria*, Vol. 1, pp 429–431.

<sup>29</sup>. J. Green, *Story of the Australian Bushmen, being Notes of a Chaplain* (Sydney: William Brooks, 1903), pp 49–50.

<sup>30</sup>. Amery (ed.), *Times History of the War*, Vol. 5, p 201; Green, *Story of the Australian Bushmen*, pp 49–50; "War Office, July 9, 1901", in *London Gazette*, No. 27331, 9 July 1901, p 4544.

<sup>31</sup>. *Wilson, After Pretoria*, Vol. 1, 431.

<sup>32</sup>. Green, *Story of the Australian Bushmen*, pp 50–51; Wallace, *Australians at the Boer War*, p 317; and *Wilson, After Pretoria*, Vol. 1, pp 431–432.

<sup>33</sup>. Amery (ed.), *Times History of the War*, Vol. 5, p 202; Green, *Story of the Australian Bushmen*, p 51.

men were placed in the trucks ahead of the engine. It was their task to identify any further explosives on the track.<sup>34</sup>

## **The occupation of Pietersburg**

On 8 April 1901, Plumer occupied Pietersburg. Beyers, with 500 burghers and a Long Tom gun evacuated the town the night before and the British captured a 7-pounder Krupp gun, ammunition, gunpowder and dynamite. Over the next three days the Royal Engineers set about demolishing the Boer's provision base. They blew up the flour mills, a shell foundry, a wagon and dynamite factory, a small-arms repair shop and Boer ammunition. The local newspaper plant was also destroyed after the British produced 500 copies of the first and only English edition of the *Zoutpansberg Wachter*. This was edited and printed for distribution as a souvenir amongst the troops.<sup>35</sup>

After a few days, 900 Boer civilians were sent from Pietersburg by train to a camp near Pretoria. Although they were informed that only limited baggage was allowed, some nevertheless saw fit to take along valuable items such as pianos, sewing machines and bicycles to the railway station. These had to be abandoned in the veld and were duly collected and taken over by the British troops.<sup>36</sup>

With the occupation of Pietersburg, the railway line from Pretoria to Pietersburg and therefore the entire railway system of the Z.A.R., was now under British control. Railway staff officers were placed in charge of each station and a small detachment of railway sappers were made responsible for maintaining the line, ensuring that transportation would be possible without a break. A large number of trains were used to transport Boer prisoners and refugees to Pretoria; they then returned loaded with provisions and reinforcements. Pietersburg became a useful base for the British to "sweep" the area.<sup>37</sup>

## **Train wrecking**

Since May 1901, Beyers had collected several hundred burghers – especially those who were familiar with the area – in the mountainous country of the Waterberg, and he was openly avowing his intention of cutting the railway. Cpt. Jack Hindon, the famous Boer trainwrecker, also decided he could do good work on the railway line and arrived at the Naboomspruit station in August 1901.<sup>38</sup>

During July and August, three significant train attacks were launched along the Pretoria-Pietersburg railway line.

### Attack at Tobias Zijn Loop north of Naboomspruit on 4 July 1901

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<sup>34</sup>. Amery (ed.), *Times History of the War*, Vol. 5, p 202; Wallace, *Australians at the Boer War*, p 318.

<sup>35</sup>. Amery (ed.), *Times History of the War*, Vol. 5, p 203; Wilson, *After Pretoria*, Vol. 1, p 434.

<sup>36</sup>. Amery (ed.), *Times History of the War*, Vol. 5, p 203; Green, *Story of the Australian Bushmen*, p 54.

<sup>37</sup>. Wilson, *After Pretoria*, Vol. 1, p 434.

<sup>38</sup>. Wilson, *After Pretoria*, Vol. 2, p 607; G.S. Preller, *Kaptein Hindon: Oorlogsavonture van 'n Baasverkenner* (Cape Town, Bloemfontein and Port Elizabeth: Nasionale Pers, 1942). p 216.

On 4 July 1901 at around three o'clock in the afternoon, Beyers and 70 men detonated a charge of dynamite under the engine of a goods train travelling between Pretoria and Pietersburg on the farm Tobias Zijn Loop six km north of Naboomspruit. The train was escorted by 28 men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Gordon Highlanders under Lieut. A.A.D. Best, who were placed in ordinary (not armoured) trucks. The explosion damaged the engine and destroyed the track, so that the train left the rails. The Boers opened fire on the train and the escort jumped out, attempting to reply. Best was shot through the leg but continued fighting courageously. He was hit again and ordered to surrender, but refused to do so and was killed. The battle did not last for more than 20 minutes and the Gordon Highlanders fought bravely, but in the end, only four of them were neither killed nor injured and the survivors surrendered. The Boers ransacked the train for food and other supplies and set alight to whatever they could not carry away.<sup>39</sup>

#### Attack at Hartbeeslaagte near Warmbaths on 10 August 1901

On 10 August 1901, about three miles north of Groenvlei, near Nylstroom, Hindon and Lieut. Henri Slegtkamp with 35 men, attacked a train with an armoured truck which was escorted by 2nd Lieut. J.L.G. Burnett and 14 men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Gordon Highlanders.<sup>40</sup>

Following the explosion that derailed the train, heavy firing ensued between the Boers and the train escort. Seven Boers were killed, including the German, Carl Craemer, the famed designer of the explosive device used to detonate explosives under railway lines. When an armoured train arrived from the south and then another one from Pietersburg and began to fire on the Boers, they had to retreat without any loot.<sup>41</sup>

#### Attack at Grootvlei near Hammanskraal on 31 August 1901

Hndon and 120 men derailed another goods train with an armoured truck at Grootvlei near Hammanskraal on 31 August 1901. Lieut.-Col. C.F.S. Vandeleur, who was due to take over command from Lieut. H. Grenfell at Nylstroom, some 45 men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion West Riding Regiment and a number of civilian passengers were on the train. Two loads of dynamite were detonated under the train and during the subsequent firing between the attackers and the train escort, Vandeleur, nine British soldiers, three white civilians and two black persons were killed. The Boers looted ammunition, dynamite and food supplies, including a case of champagne which they opened with gusto to celebrate the birthday of Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands on the same day.<sup>42</sup>

To prevent further Boer attacks on trains, Lord H.H. Kitchener ordered that Boer prisoners of war and civilians were to travel in trucks at the front of trains. Barend Vorster, an ex-Volksraad member, was one of the first to be transported in this fashion.

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<sup>39</sup>. A.D. Greenhill Gardyne, *The Life of a Regiment: The History of the Gordon Highlanders, Vol. 3, (1898–1914)*, pp 269–270; Wilson, *After Pretoria, Vol. 2*, pp 617–618.

<sup>40</sup>. Greenhill Gardyne, *Life of a Regiment*, p 271.

<sup>41</sup>. T. Schutte and P. Coetzee, *Treinvernielers (Pretoria: Kraal Uitgewers, 2019)*, pp 244, 246; Greenhill Gardyne, *Life of a Regiment*, p 271.

<sup>42</sup>. Cloete, *Die Anglo-Boereoorlog*, p 292; Schutte and Coetzee, *Treinvernielers*, pp 253–254.

Due to this new initiative by the British and the approach of summer with its accompanying horse sickness in the Bushveld, attacks on the railway ceased and Hindon and his corps relocated to the south of the railway line.<sup>43</sup>

## Conclusion

It is ironic that the rail network of the Z.A.R. including the Pietersburg line, which was the pride and joy of the Republic, became a useful asset to the British forces during the war, enabling them to transport vast amounts of troops and supplies to good effect. The British occupation of the northern Transvaal with its poor road network and lack of water supplies was, to a large extent, facilitated by the use of the Pretoria-Pietersburg railway line – surely never anticipated by the Boers when the line was opened less than a year before the outbreak of the war.

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<sup>43</sup>. Preller, *Kaptein Hindon*, pp 233, 248; Schutte and Coetzee, *Treinvernielers*, p 261.

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