

# The War Diaries of Dr Charles Molteno ‘Kenah’ Murray<sup>1</sup>

## Book 1: The Boer Rebellion in South Africa

November 1914 – February 1915

Edited by Dr Robert Murray  
Extracts selected and Endnotes by Robert Molteno

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### On Active Service

**11 Nov 1914.** Left C.T. 8.30 p.m. attached to 7th M.B.F.A....

**13 Nov 1914.** Arr. Bloemfontein about 2.30 p.m. Reported at Tempe and put up at Maj. Usmar's....

**14 Nov 1914.** Spent day in completing arrangements. Usmar took over Civil Hosp. in morning. I went in car to visit various departments to secure our mules, wagons, harness, horses etc. The only trouble was absence of amb. wagons. Not one to be had. Saw wagonbuilder in regard to conversion of light wagons. Afternoon at Hosp. taking over wounded.

**15 Nov 1914. Sunday.** There are altogether over 60 wounded and 14 sick now under our care so we have our hands full as all the proper machinery for correct routine has to be set in motion and at the same time our Brigade outfitted. After tea visited the

Nat. Memorial to women and children who died during the war.<sup>2</sup> Fine simple structure.

**16 - 17 Nov 1914.** Had a busy time. Warned in the morning to expect a considerable number of wounded, from a fight at Virginia near Kroonstad. The day was spent in clearing the Hosp. of all those who were fit enough to travel or be sent to Convalescent Hosp. Van Coller went over to Tempe to open the Military Hosp. there for Convalescents. 16 wounded arrived about 9.30pm. All were serious cases. One had been shot through the abdomen and was obviously dying from internal haemorrhage. I operated but it was hopeless and he succumbed about an hour later. Turned in about 1.30 a.m.

### **The Fight at Virginia near Kroonstad, Orange Free State**

Today (17th) heard something of the fight at Virginia. De Wet with about 1500 or more men tried to capture the railway station which was held by about 250 of our fellows. They held out pluckily until reinforcements and an announced train arrived. The wounded men said the rebels were very badly armed. They were using all sorts of weapons even shotguns and had very little ammunition of any sort, but they were all splendidly mounted.

A man named van Niekerk, one of the rebel leaders, was brought in today. He gave rather an interesting account of how he was wounded. It appeared that he saw a body of men advancing consisting of about 1/4 the number of his own troop. As they came up he recognised Col. Toby Smuts, who had mistaken his (van Niekerk's) party for his own side. As soon as they came up van Niekerk drew his revolver with the intention of ordering Smuts to surrender, but as he raised his hand Smuts' son recognised this mistake and fired at him at 20 yards. The bullet passed just above his heart but does not appear to have done much damage up to the present. This occurred at Mushroom Valley where the first lot of wounded came from on the day of our arrival.

This evening Col. Brand was brought in on the announced train suffering from acute appendicitis. He did not get to the Hospital till after midnight of 17th/18th. We found it necessary to operate immediately. He is bad, as suppuration has already taken place so that the operation resolved itself into clearing out the abscess cavity and putting in a drain. Col. de Kock operated. The latter was at the Diocesan College<sup>3</sup> with me in 1890 - 1894 and I had not met him since those days. He is A.D.M.S. here. Col. Brand's loss will be much felt as he is in command of all the Free State forces and a very capable man. His condition is undoubtedly very critical. He was brought in by a young medico called Swanepoel.

Swanepoel was captured at Mushroom Valley and retaken later on by Botha. He said he was attending some wounded when he noticed that a flanking force was coming up, his own troops having already left the area he was in. He did not bother as he supposed the rebels would not interfere with him. He was rudely disillusioned however when he found they were firing at him. He said that they continued firing until they were within 15 yards in spite of the fact that he was unarmed and bore a red cross on his arm. He said he expostulated and pointed at the red cross, but they only called on him to hold up his hands which he refused to do as he said he was a non-

combatant. One of them fired at him again at 15 yards and missed him at which Swanepoel called out if he fired again he would give him a thrashing. Swanepoel is 6 ft. 3 in. and broad in proportion so how they missed him I don't know.

He said that the rebels were armed with all sorts of weapons including shotguns and even airguns. Most of their ammunition is sporting, that is to say the bullets are of the dum-dum type. The rebels are also wearing their defence force uniforms and also have adopted the white badge on their left arm which our troops had been ordered to wear in order to distinguish them from the rebels. They are looting and destroying all the farms of the loyalists and even wantonly destroying the thoroughbred stock and imported cattle and sheep. I think the rebellion cannot last much longer as they have no ammunition, and in the great majority of cases I don't think their hearts are in it.

### **A busy time at the Tempe Military Hospital, Bloemfontein**

**18 Nov 1914.** The days are pretty full now. Having been up till 4.30 a.m. with Col. Brand, we had to be at work again in the Hospital at 9.00 a.m. Among the last wounded (16 in number) 7 have shattered thigh bones and 5 smashed elbows. The wounds are very bad owing to the use of dum-dum bullets. We extracted a dum-dum from one case this morning. I have made friends with an old carpenter who is making wooden splints for me, and is much interested in the work. I have sent a night wire to Lorna today for her birthday tomorrow and Binkie's on 21st.<sup>4</sup> I hope these are the right dates. I never can fix birthdays for some reason unknown. We have heard today that we are to get 3 motor ambulances instead of the ordinary mule wagons.

**19 Nov 1914.** Had the first good uninterrupted sleep since leaving home and enjoyed it much. The air is so dry and bracing that in spite of having very little sleep - which usually gives me a head - I have never noticed any discomfort and feel very fit and well. My chief work at present is devising splints in shattered arms and legs. The rebels are using dum-dum bullets which break the bones up very much. This makes it hopeless to wire the bones and the only chance is to get really rigid and yet comfortable splints. The old carpenter I have struck is working well; and the splints he makes are proving very satisfactory....

**21 Nov 1914.** This is dear little Rhona's birthday. I have wished her pretty little photo many happy returns, and picture her toddling around with her sturdy stride and voluble flow of conversation.... Yesterday 6 wounded rebels arrived. I never saw a more wretched looking lot of fellows. The absolute scum of the country deluded no doubt with all sorts of promises and the prospects of loot.

### **What actually happened at Mushroom Valley<sup>5</sup>**

**22 Nov 1914.** Last night we had a very interesting account of the Mushroom Valley fight from a Lieut. Fraser, one of Sir John Fraser's sons, who took an active part as one of Brand's commando and was wounded. He had a very narrow escape. The bullet passed through his left arm, then through his handkerchief pocket without further wounding him. The same bullet then passed on and struck the man next to him passing in below his left arm and finally lodging in his spine at the level of the

9th vertebra, where we can see it with x-rays. The 2nd man's name is Lieut. Coetzee. He came off worst as one of his legs is paralysed. However both are getting on well now.

So far the papers have published very little about Mushroom Valley, so some account of it will be interesting. It seems that Col. Brand's commando was given the billet of following up de Wet while Botha and the others went to other parts to cut off his retreat. Col. Brand had about 1300 men in his commando and carried out a very rapid journey, in fact they only rested for an hour at a time for nearly 3 whole days and nights. At the end of this they made a final march of 21 miles and came on de Wet in Mushroom Valley in the early morning.

The rebels were so confident that there was no one near that they had not even put outposts or sentries. The whole rebel laager was asleep when Brand's men opened fire and Fraser described a scene of the utmost confusion. The rebels had large numbers of horses which they had looted and these stampeded and the whole laager was a scene of the wildest confusion. De Wet made off and just managed to escape owing to Col. Lukin's commando not having been able to get to its post in time. Fraser told us that his commando buried 62 rebels, and since then wounded and dead have been picked up in various directions. About 500 horses were captured and all their wagons, carts, stores and ammunition. The rebels were scattered in all directions, so that the defeat was much more complete than one had any official news of. The rebels have been looting all the stores in the villages and destroying the houses of the loyalists. De Wet is therefore for all practical purposes a fugitive. There are still 2 fairly large rebel commandos, one near Hoopstad and one under Kemp down along the Orange River.

**23 Nov 1914.** .... The young house surgeon here, whose home is not far from Matatiele had a letter yesterday to say there had been a native rising and his people had had to fly into the town and all the farmers had been called out.<sup>6</sup> I wonder how Gordon will be affected. The country seems in a ferment, but I should not be in the least surprised to hear that some of the rebels have been trying to stir up the natives.

### **Morale among the Rebels**

**24 Nov 1914.** I had a chat with one of the rebels this morning. (I have had all the rebels in one of my wards.) He told me that he had been called out by de Wet and that de Wet had told them all that they were simply assembling to show who had the greater following; Botha or Hertzog.<sup>7</sup> On arriving at the laager, quite unarmed this man was told they were going to fight the government and he must accompany the commando until he could get a rifle. He was one of the first to be wounded at Zand River near Virginia, though he never had a weapon in his hands. He then went on to say that there were many rebels who had never intended to fight and that the leaders had held back all information and that the great bulk were quite unaware of the amnesty.

One of de Wet's staff who has just been captured says that de Wet is furious with Hertzog, as he says he has let them all down and funked coming out as he should have done. I think Hertzog comes worse out this affair than any. To stir up men and egg

them on to lose their lives in rebellion and then back out, is the limit of human meanness.

So far the government have allowed none but the burgher commandos<sup>8</sup> to do the attacking work and it is wonderful to see the enthusiasm of the men "to wipe out the stain on the name of their race" as they put it. One of the Commandants in Brand's commando under my care did not turn back in storming a kopje until he had been shot through both arms and the abdominal wall. He said he had a good horse and was able to steer it with his knees until he got back to his own lines. It is wonderful to see where a bullet will go without killing. I have one man shot through the neck, who is slowly getting well. Another who was shot through one eye and out through the back of his head. This man is now quite well physically, but at times is very upset mentally. Several have survived shots through the chest, and what is more seem to suffer but the slightest inconvenience.

The news this morning is unamazing. There seems to have been a fair amount of fighting all over the country. But there is no doubt that the rebellion is now practically squashed. There will still no doubt be a good deal of clearing up work to be done. De Wet seems to be flying hither and thither with only 4 men with him pursued night and day, so I don't think it will be long before he is either taken or shot in pursuit. I am sending this away as it will give you all our news up to date.....

**30 Nov 1914.** During the past week there has been a lot of heavy rain, accompanied by much thunder and lightning. About 4 inches of rain must have fallen during the week. It has been a perfect godsend as the country was extremely dry and the last 2 seasons have been droughty ones. The commandos must have had a miserable time out in the open without any shelter at all.

It is remarkable how quickly de Wet has been knocked out this time as compared with the last war. It was done by the remarkable mobility of the commandos. As instance, Brand's commando of about 1500 men travelled nearly 100 miles in 2 days and three nights, giving themselves no rest and very little food until they caught de Wet at Mushroom Valley. So quickly did they cover the distance that de Wet had not the slightest idea they were anywhere near him.

### **Realities of life on commando**

One pictures a commando as rather a picturesque fine looking body of mounted men, but the reality is anything but imposing to look at. The burgher regards commando work as the dirty and unwashed job it is going to be and so turns out in his old clothes. They are then given a rifle and bandolier and a white band to tie round the left arm. This completes the outfit. For sleeping they usually carry 2 blankets just under the saddle to serve as a *numna* by day and cover for themselves by night. However each man has a somewhat different plan. After being on the move for a day or two and not washing or shaving you can imagine what a fearful looking lot of ragamuffins they look. It is scarcely to be wondered at that their wounds go septic. I went down to the station a few days ago to see some sick men in a commando which was resting for a meal. The station smelt exactly like a monkey house. Horses out having a feed and drink on the platform, men going about with little kettles and tins of bully beef and

loaves of bread and all in the state of the utmost filth. It was a sight to make you realise what fighting really meant to these men. Out to fight and nothing else. No comfort, no show, just out to fight for their homes. All sorts of ages, sizes, shapes, and dispositions. Some gloomy, some cheery, but all in earnest about "Onze Commando" and keen to show a commando could still do as well as ever commandos have done before. There was a pathetic note too, in such a scene. These were not professional fighters. Everyone had given up his means of livelihood to meet an emergency.

**1 Dec 1914.** The weather has been delightful since the downpour. One day's sunshine served to dry the surface, and now the grass is growing fast and the country beginning to look less like a desert. On moving to this camp we have joined the other two M.O.'s and occupy the Colonel's Bungalow. The nights are so beautiful that we have our beds out in the garden, rise early and ride before breakfast. It is a splendid chance for us to get ourselves gradually broken in for the trek.

### **Muddles and dilemmas in treating the wounded**

We all long to get on trek for our experience at present is that owing to the rush to get men into the field there has been no time for training. The result is M.O.'s go off with their columns without any clear idea of what is expected of them. This is fatal to a systematic treatment of the wounded and results in M.O.'s running short of supplies, and thereby unnecessary suffering and delay.

The scheme adopted by our forces is one adapted from the R.A.M.C. It is roughly this. Regimental M.O.'s accompany each regiment. Their duty is to render first aid in battle and to sick on the march. These cases are sent with all despatch back to the Field Amb. (We are a field amb.) Our duty is to give further treatment. Operate only on urgent cases, and then evacuate all cases to the Lines of Communication and so to the base hospital.

You will see therefore that unless each man is fully conversant with the plan there is sure to be delay and muddle. They are in the position of having to learn as they go, instead of being prepared beforehand. The main point is that every endeavour has to be made to get sick and wounded away from the point as soon as possible. The ordinary medico has considerable difficulty at the start, to realise that he must move cases he would not care to risk in the ordinary way. Here it is a case of putting the sick man to a considerable amount of risk, on account of the risk there would be to the whole regiment in having their movements hampered by an accommodation of sick. Until this is fully realised the novice at fieldwork is inclined to get an accommodation of sick which he thinks are unfit to remove, they use up his supplies and soon he himself (the M.O.) becomes useless because he has nothing else to give....

### **General de Wet captured**

**4 Dec 1914....** The news of de Wet's capture came today. Feeling is very high here and I am sure that unless the government takes very strong measures against the captured rebel leaders and de Wet in particular they will lose a great deal in prestige,

and very equally in political ways. The feeling is that unless rebellion is very firmly put down unrest will be roused again very soon....



**General Christiaan de Wet (left) and General Louis Botha (right), pictured after the Boer War. They ended up on opposing sides during the 1914 Rebellion**

### **General Beyers accidentally killed**

**11 Dec 1914....** The day before yesterday the news of Beyer's end came and the rounding up of the last rebel commando....<sup>9</sup>

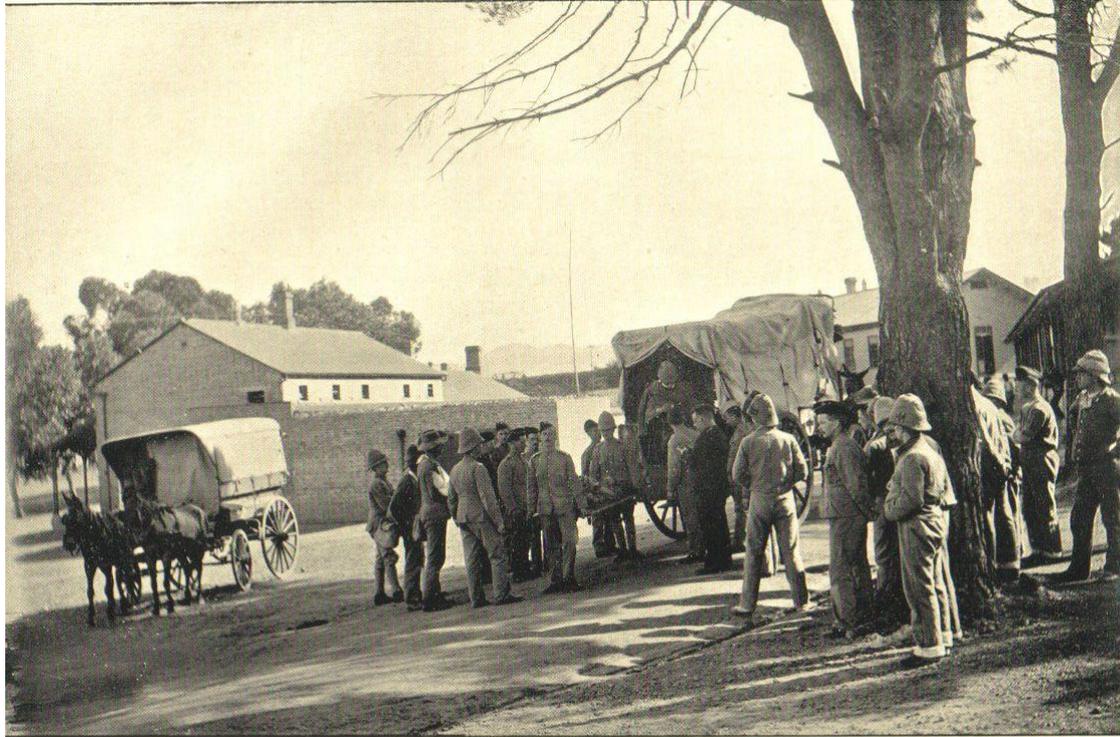
### **To Pretoria on official business**

**16 Dec 1914.** Since last writing I have been to Pretoria on business connected with our Brigade. I left on Tuesday morning and travelling all day reached Pretoria at about 1.30am Wed. It was a warm thundery sort of day with rain showers showing in various directions. All the bridges and culverts were guarded by pickets of burghers and D.F. men.<sup>10</sup> The turnouts of the burghers were most varied and remarkable. Men of all sorts of age, each got up according to his own ideas. Most seemed to favour their old clothes. Some of the officers had parts of a uniform. One man had almost a complete uniform the whole being finished off by the most jaunty-looking little pale grey civilian hat. Another rather fine looking old man had on a grey tweed riding suit, with a Sam Browne belt-revolver and so on. Every sort of mixture of civilian and

military clothing and not the least amusing thing about it all, was that no one seemed to think they were the least bit funny....

### **Train to Upington to repel Maritz's incursion from German South West Africa**

**26 Jan 1915.** In train just leaving Beaufort West. I remained in Col. Buist's office until Jan 16th when I rejoined my unit at Green Point. We were shifted the following day to Young's field, Wynberg, for the purpose of carrying out our scheme of training ourselves and other units in field work.



CONVEYING WOUNDED TO WYNBERG HOSPITAL CAMP

**Wynberg Hospital Camp, at the time of the Boer War. It would have looked much the same when Kenah Murray was there in 1914**

Everything was just getting into shape when orders came that we were to hold ourselves in readiness for immediate entrainment for the front.... Our orders came on Jan 23 the very 1st day on which according to original orders we were to have started for G.S.W. with the 1st mounted Brigade, to commence our invasion of G.S.W.<sup>11</sup> We had still to draw our amb. wagons and transport, so this was a busy time before us. However by nightfall these arrived.

Some idea of the size of our unit can be gathered from the following:

4 med. off.  
60 men  
40 natives  
140 mules  
20 horses

6 amb. wagons and 2 motors  
 6 general service wagons  
 4 scotch carts  
 2 water carts.

At 2pm on Sunday the word to inspan was given and by 2.45 the wagons were all drawn up in order of marching e.g. amb. wagons, G.S. wagons, scotch carts and water carts. The mounted men form a string along the right hand side by which words of command can be passed along.

We were due at C.T. station at 5pm, but found on arrival that the work had been too much for them and we could not expect to leave till the next morning at about 6am. Our orders were to encamp on Green Point Common once again, so off we went. G.P. Common is undoubtedly the most hopeless camping ground one could wish for. No depth of soil, dust and always windswept. That evening it was blowing hard and I imagine the men had a bad time, as they were enveloped in clouds of dust all the time, the wind blowing hard all the night. We slept fairly comfortably in a marquee we found there. Reveille went at 3.30 next morning and by 6 we were at the station once more. The trouble now was that they were short of rolling stock. However things were gradually got together and all our Brigade safely on board. It took 25 trucks and 3 coaches to carry us. We were the 20th troop train to leave in the course of 36 hours....

**29 Jan 1915.** We spent all yesterday at de Aar.... About 1pm we got our orders to go on to Upington. When I woke this morning we were just leaving Prieska. From there we are on the new stretch of railway. We have been pegging away all day through very arid looking country. The local people say that in common with the rest of the union there has been no satisfactory rain for 3 years, but whereas the drought has broken elsewhere, there seems no prospect here. We should have reached Upington at 5 p.m. but it is now past 6 and we are still about 50 miles away.

### **Upington on the Orange River – the turning point**

**30 Jan 1915.** Upington. When I woke this morning we were standing in a siding at Upington. The town lies on the Northern side of the Orange River, and must be about 1 ½ miles distant in a direct line from where we stand. All around us is a busy railway terminus gradually springing up on a waste of brown powdery sand, with drought stricken and stunted looking trees and bushes scattered thinly about. Beyond stretch mighty plains, as far as the eye can see, broken here and there with low ridges and occasional curious-looking little kopjes of big stones. Everything looks dried up to the last degree. The river is marked by a belt of green trees resembling weeping willows, which grow close to the water's edge on either bank.

I was dressed by 6.30 when van Coller and I sallied forth to report our arrival. We trudged along the railway track in the deep soft sand for about a mile, until we got to the outskirts of the trees fringing the river. Here we found some of the commandos encamped among the trees. I foresee we shall have great difficulty with these. They have no discipline and do what they like when they camp. At this place they



**The Orange River at Upington, when not in flood**

were scattered among the trees in little knots. The horses tethered to the same bushes beneath which the men slept and ate. No attempt at any method in sanitation or provision of clean water for drinking. Just all higgledy-piggledy.

Presently the railway track took us over a temporary bridge across a *spruit*, in itself a very considerable river, and then a little further on we came on the edge of the main stream. At this point it is about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a mile broad and flowing very fast. They say it has been rising steadily for some days past and is now too high for it to be safe to use the Pont. After waiting some time a petrol launch came over and in this we crossed to the other side. The path from the river passed through some most verdant looking gardens which were irrigated from the main stream, and lay in what is really an extension of the river bed in times of extreme flood. On emerging from this to the level of the plains on the other side we found a motor bike which we got and were soon deposited at the Headquarters. Col. Brits was not there yet, so after making further enquiry as to his whereabouts we made our way over to "The Hotel" and had breakfast.

The town of Upington is not beautiful. The houses are scattered about in some sort of order, but the intervening spaces can hardly be called roads. After breakfast we ran Col. Brits to earth in a lovely spot. Striking across the arid rubble strewn apology for a street and down a steep slope towards the river we crossed a water furrow and entered at once into a most luxuriant garden. It was just a tangle of vines, fig trees and creepers of the convolvulus type, almost smothering the path leading into it. In this garden stood a pergola heavily matted over with vines, and here in the cool shade we found Col. Brits and his staff about to have breakfast. I did admire his good generalship in the choice of this lovely spot to camp. After a short chat we returned and have decided to remain for the present in the train. It is blazing hot but more comfortable than camping on the dust.

## Maritz's defeat

So far we have had no news of what is on foot. All sorts of rumours but nothing certain. About an hour ago we heard some heavy gunfire and then some rifle shots. I have just been watching from the top of an engine water tank and saw a big commando saddle up in one of the camps on the other side of the river and make off at a gallop in an Easterly direction along the river. There were a few more rifle shots later but now all is quiet and I last saw the dust of the commando disappearing among some ridges about 5 miles away.

**2 Feb 1915.** The last two days have been awfully hot. We heard no more of what the firing was about, but on that day Maritz and 3 of his staff were brought in to arrange terms. The sequence of events has been as follows. Jan 23 - Maritz sent a message in to Upington to tell them to remove the women and children as he intended to attack the place the next day. This he did.

Those who took part in this affair said it was quite the battle of the rebellion. Maritz had about 1200 rebels who were all equipped in German outfit and had apparently been well drilled during their sojourn in G.S.W. He also had 200 Germans with big guns.<sup>12</sup> Their guns considerably outranged ours, but in their anxiety to capture the situation they brought them unnecessarily close, so that our fellows in the C.F.A. [Cape Field Artillery] were able to get within range and once they did this their shooting seems to have been very good as they soon put one of the German pom-poms out of action and eventually did such execution that the rebels were forced to retire. One of the gunners told me that, at the point he was in charge of, the rebels came up for the attack in splendid order and though he soon got the range and began putting shell after shell into the midst of them they never gave way, and when eventually it got too hot for them they retired in perfect order. I'm not sure quite what the casualties were but we had about 10 men killed and about 20 wounded while I believe the rebels lost pretty severely as they left 18 dead when they were driven off.



**The veld at Upington – not much changed today from a century ago**

This failure to take Upington seems to have been the finishing touch for Maritz as he now dare not go back to G.S.W. and his men are too disheartened to carry on the struggle. So apparently he asked to be allowed to come in to make terms. This was the reason of his visit on

Saturday. We know nothing of what took place, but suppose that as in other cases surrender would be unconditional. In any case he and his staff returned on Sunday. So we ought to hear news in a day or two. It seems that the Germans do not mean to surrender with their guns and have probably trekked back to G.S.W. It is a great pity that the Orange River has become so flooded that neither ourselves nor any of Col. Brits' commando have been able to get across the river. The only means of communication is by a petrol launch. Neither the new Pont put up by the government nor the old one belonging to the town can be worked. I rather think, if Col. Brits had been able to get his force across the river, he would have had a go to round up the Germans as well as the remainder of the rebels.

As it is the river is very high. The main stream is 365 yards across, and besides this there is a side stream about 50 yards across, which is running very strongly. It is a wonderful sight to see this enormous volume of water running through this desert. The only rivers I have seen to compare with it in size are the Rhine at Cologne and the Danube at Vienna.

Sunday was very hot. I don't know what the official reading was but it must have been somewhere about 110 or more in the shade. It has been up to 120 recently. On Monday we had a change in the shape of a dust storm. As there is no vegetation except an occasional very dried up looking bush, and all the soil is light and powdery you may imagine what an unpleasant time we had. We took refuge in our railway carriages but here the temperature was 105 and atmosphere laden with fine dust. This went on pretty well all day, but towards evening the wind dropped a bit and van Coller and I got on our horses and made for the river. The river water unfortunately is so laden with fine mud that it was only like washing in thin mud. However it was wet and cool. During the night the temperature has dropped very much and this morning it is cool and bright, for which we are all very thankful.

There is no more news as to what has been decided. All we know is that Maritz and co. have returned to their forces which are lying beside a big water pan about 40 miles away. There is no water between this and that so that it would be well nigh impossible to send a force out to attack as if the capture of the water was delayed even an hour or two the attackers would be doomed. One report says that Maritz and his men were sent back in a motor and that when they reached their camp they stripped the car of all its spare tyres, petrol, oil and grease leaving the chauffeur just sufficient to get back to camp. If this is the case I should say it means that Maritz intends clearing off with the Germans and leaving his men to their fate....<sup>13</sup>

### **Desert heat**

**5 Feb 1915.** Friday.... Monday and Tuesday were terribly hot, in fact every day at Upington was. We had no special thermometer, but I found each day that my clinical thermometer which I kept in my tunic pocket hanging in the coolest part of our carriage, always rose over 105. There was no relief from it anywhere as even in the shade of the trees along the river the sand under foot was so hot and powdery that it seemed to make very little difference to ones comfort to get into the shade. The least puff of wind, or any person or animal passing by, sent clouds of dust into the air. Altogether I don't think I have ever experienced such intolerable heat. There was no

escape from it anywhere. I tried all sorts of dodges from sitting with nothing on at all to clothing heavily. No clothes at all was worse than any other dodge as ones skin became burning dry and hot with no protecting layer of moisture. One comfort was that hot though the sun was it does not burn ones skin like the coast sun does. One could walk about with bare arms and legs with impunity and fear no serious sunburn if due care was taken.



**Kenah Murray and his friend and colleague, van Coller, entrain, late 1914**

Upington must be a miserable place to live in. We were delighted to leave and I don't anticipate any anxiety to return there again. We covered the distance of 120 miles between Upington and Prieska in something under 18 hours, which works out an average of 6-7 miles per hour for the sum. The delay is chiefly due to want of water. Each engine carries 4000 gals more water than usual and where the water supply is weak it takes a long time to fill up....

### **The Rebellion at an end; back to Cape Town**

**24 Feb 1915.** We remained 3 days at de Aar, and then journeyed slowly down to Cape Town. I say slowly - for we took 56 hours for the journey which under ordinary circumstances is done in about 24. The railway was congested with traffic and engines had been so constantly worked that they were giving out all along the road.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Dr Robert Murray transcribed and edited the whole of his grandfather's Diaries. I, Robert Molteno, have made some further changes for this web version. These include reproducing only selected extracts

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of the full Diaries. What appears here comprises a bit less than half the original. Four dots (...) indicate where sections of the full text have been omitted. I have also inserted headings in order to make clear the ground Kenah's letters cover. Explanatory endnotes have also been inserted. But no copyediting or alterations to the actual text have been made.

<sup>2</sup> The Boer War, 1899-1902. This memorial commemorates the Boer women and children who died in their thousands while incarcerated in the concentration camps set up by the British forces in order to deprive the Boer commandos of food and other sources of support in the countryside.

<sup>3</sup> Most of the Molteno and Murray boys went to this Church of England school in Cape Town at this time, and have continued to send their sons there in the succeeding generations. Modelled on the English public school, the Diocesan College, or 'Bishops' as it is more popularly known, has been one of the most reputable schools in South Africa since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>4</sup> Kenah and Hilda Murray had two daughters at this time, Lorna and Rhona.

<sup>5</sup> The firefight at Mushroom Valley on 12 November 14 was, Robert Murray points out, a crushing defeat for the Rebels and a turning point in the rebellion.

<sup>6</sup> There was a serious scare among white farmers in the remote area of East Griqualand that African tribes in the Eastern Cape would take serious advantage of the civil war between whites in South Africa that was occasioned by the outbreak of the First World War. Elsewhere on this website, there will be a description of this scare affected the families of Gordon and Evelyn Murray, and Elliot and Effie Stanford.

<sup>7</sup> Shortly after the end of the War in 1902, the Boer War generals disagreed as to how best to protect Afrikaner interests. Generals Botha and Smuts represented the initially dominant tendency. This was to work with English-speaking white South Africans and accept the Dominion status offered by Britain. This status involved almost complete political autonomy except in foreign affairs and the declaration of war. General Hertzog took a different line. He founded the National Party in 1912 on the basis of appealing exclusively to Afrikaner nationalist feeling and aiming at total sovereignty. Both tendencies were united on the political exclusion of Black South Africans (whether of African, Coloured or Asian origin) and their economic subordination and social exclusion. The Rebel leaders in 1914 assumed, wrongly it turned out, that General Hertzog would support them.

<sup>8</sup> The South African Defence Force was organised at this time in two different ways. The old commando structure from the 19<sup>th</sup> century was retained. These were all volunteers (including the officers), and mainly white farmers. They mobilised only when required. The other structure was a more conventional one of permanent force units which consisted of a small number of professional soldiers, greatly supplemented during the First World War by volunteers from the urban areas who joined up. There was, as Kenah points out, a certain tension between the very different styles of these two elements.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Murray comments that De Wet, broken-hearted at the death of his son Danie at the battle of Doornberg, was captured while on his way to join Maritz in German South West Africa, while Beyers drowned in the Vaal River. These events effectively ended the rebellion, apart from Maritz's final attack on Upington.

<sup>10</sup> See the previous endnote.

<sup>11</sup> German South West Africa (G.S.W.).

<sup>12</sup> A certain number of Boer Rebels had taken refuge in German South West Africa following the collapse of the Rebellion in December. South Africa was already formally at war with Imperial Germany as an automatic consequence of the British declaration of war in August 1914. The German colonial authorities in G.S.W. now tried to make difficulties for South Africa by sponsoring and supporting this incursion by General Maritz into the Northern Cape. It was easily defeated, as Kenah describes, and with its defeat the Rebellion came finally to an end. This, in turn, freed the South African forces to mount their own invasion of German South West – which is the subject of the next portion of Kenah's Diaries.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Murray comments that this indeed turned out to be the case. Maritz fled to German South West, leaving his men to surrender. When Union of South Africa forces under General Botha later defeated the Germans in South West Africa, Maritz crossed into Angola, the dream, as one writer puts it, of a "trek to Pretoria to pull down the British flag and to proclaim a free South African Republic" shattered forever. All rank and file rebels taken prisoner were released in 1915; their leaders, in 1916. Only Jopie Fourie, a rebel officer who did not resign his rank and who was responsible for 40% of the rebellion casualties, was executed.