

The Concentration Camps 1899 - 1902

by Hennie Barnard

"They are not buried here; they are planted. And they will for ever be growing in the hearts of the Boer people."

B Barnard on Concentration Camp Day 21 May 1995 at Balmoral Concentration Camp Cemetery

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Aliwal North• Balmoral• Barberton• Belfast• Bethulie• Bloemfontein• Brandfort• Heidelberg• Heilbron• Howick• Irene | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kimberley• Klerksdorp• Kroonstad• Krugersdorp• Merebank• Middelburg• Norvalspont• Nylstroom• Pietermaritzburg• Pietersburg | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pinetown• Port Elizabeth• Potchefstroom• Springfontein• Standerton• Turffontein• Vereeniging• Volksrust• Vredefort• Vryburg |
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The Concentration Camps

1. Introduction

The concentration camps in which Britain killed 27,000 Boer women and children (24,000) during the Second War of Independence (1899 - 1902) today still have far-reaching effects on the existence of the Boerevolk.

This holocaust once more enjoyed close scrutiny during the visit of the queen of England to South Africa, when ten organizations promoting the independence of the Boer Republics, presented her with a message, demanding that England redress the wrongs committed against the Boerevolk.



Family arrived at the concentration camp

2. Background

The Second War of Independence was fought from 1899 to 1902 when England laid her hands on the mineral riches of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (Transvaal) under the false pretence of protecting the rights of the foreigners who swarmed to the Transvaal gold fields.

On the battlefield England failed to get the better of the Boers, and decided to stoop to a full-scale war against the Boer women and children, employing a holocaust to force the burghers to surrender.

3. Course of the holocaust

3.1. The war against women and children begins

Under the command of Kitchener, Milner and Roberts, more than homesteads and farms belonging to Boer people were plundered and burned down. Animals belonging to the Boers were killed in the cruelest ways possible while the women, whose men were on the battlefield, had to watch helplessly.



Killing sheep



Leaving the sheep rotten

The motive behind this action was the destruction of the farms in order to prevent the fighting burghers from obtaining food, and to demoralize the Boers by leaving their women and children homeless on the open veld.

Before the blast



The blast



Destroyed for king and country



However, England misjudged the steel of the Boer people. Despite their desperate circumstances, the women and children managed to survive fairly well in the open and their men continued their fight against the invader.



Women and children on the run - away from the English

More severe measures had to be taken. The English hoarded the Boer women and children into open cattle trucks or drove them on foot to concentration camps.

3.2. False pretences

To the world England pretended to act very humanely by caring for the fighting Boers' women and children in "refugee camps". An English school textbook published in 1914 in Johannesburg, but printed in England, *Historical Geography: South Africa*, by JR Fisher, makes the following claim:

"During the later stages of the war, the relations, women and children, of those Boers still in the field, were fed and cared for at the expense of Great Britain, a method of procedure which, though humane, postponed the end of the war, at the expense of many valuable lives and much money."

This statement is contradicted by various sources. The Cape Argus of 21 June 1900 clearly states that the destitution of these women and children was the result of the English's plundering of farms: "Within 10 miles we (the English) burned not less than six farm homesteads. Between 30 and 40 homesteads were burned and totally destroyed between Bloemfontein and Boshoff. Many others were also burned down. With their houses destroyed, the women and children were left in the bitter South African winter in the open." The British history text book says nothing about this.



Awfully generous of the English to care for those whose houses they destroyed!

Breytenbach writes in Danie Theron: *"The destruction was undertaken in a diabolic way and even Mrs Prinsloo, a 22 year old lady who gave birth to a baby only 24 hours ago in the house of Van Niekerk, was not spared. A group of rude tommies (British soldiers), amongst whom a so-called English doctor, forced their way into her room, and after making a pretence of examining her, they drove her out of the house. With the aid of her sister, she managed to don a few articles of clothing and left the house. Her mother brought a blanket to protect her against the cold. The soldiers robustly jerked the blanket out of her mother's hands and after having looted whatever they wanted to, put the house to fire. Afterwards the old man was driven on foot to Kroonstad by mounted kakies (British soldiers), while his wife and daughter (Mrs Prinsloo) were left destitute on the scorched farm."*

England's claim of caring for the Boer women reminds one of somebody who boasts to have saved the

life of someone he himself has pushed into the water. However, there is one vital difference: The holocaust on the Boer women and children began in all earnest once they had been forced into the concentration camps under the "care" of the British!



Family at the beginning - newly arrived with tea and bread (English Propaganda).

Despite the English claims that the concentration camps were "voluntary refugee camps" the following questions must be asked:

- From whom did the refugees flee? Certainly not from their own husbands and sons!
- How can the fact that the "voluntary" women and children had to be dragged to the concentration camps by force be explained?
- Why should the "voluntary refugee camps" be enclosed by barbed wire fences and the inmates be overseen by armed wardens? Kimberley camp had a five meter high barbed wire fence and some camps even had two or three fences!
- Why would one of the camp commanders make the following statement quoted by Emily Hobhouse: "The wardens were under orders not to interfere with the inmates, unless they should try to escape."? What kind of "voluntary refugee" would want to escape?

Perhaps the words of the Welsh William Redmond are closer to the truth: "The way in which these wretched, unfortunate and poor women and children are treated in South Africa is barbarous, outrageous, scandalous and disgraceful."

3.3. Planning for death

The English claim of decent actions towards the Boer women and children are further contradicted by the location of the concentration camps. The military authorities, who often had to plan and erect camps for their soldiers, would certainly have been well aware of the essential requirements for such

camps. Yet the concentration camps were established in the most unsuitable locations possible.

At Standerton the camp was erected on both banks of the Vaal River. It was on the Highveld, which ensured that it was extremely cold in winter and infested with mosquitoes in summer. The fact that Standerton had turf soil and a high rainfall, ensured that the camp was one big mud bath in summer, even inside the tents.

The same circumstances were experienced in camps such as Brandfort, Springfontein and Orange River. At Pretoria, the Irene Camp was located at the chilly southern side of the town, while the northern side had a much more favourable climate. Balmoral, Middelburg and other camps were also located on the south-eastern hangs of the hills to ensure that the inhabitants were exposed to the icy south easterly winds.

Merebank camp was located in a swamp where there was an abundance of various kinds of insects. Water oozed out of the ground, ensuring that everything was constantly wet and slimy.

By October 1900 there were already 58 883 people in concentration camps in Transvaal and 45 306 in the Free State.



The amenities in the camps were clearly planned to kill as many of the women and children as possible. They were accommodated in tattered reject tents which offered no protection against the elements.

Emily Hobhouse, the Cornish lady who campaigned for better conditions for the Boer women, wrote: *"Throughout the night there was a downpour. Puddles of water were everywhere. They tried to get themselves and their possessions dry on the soaked ground."*

(Hobhouse: *Brunt of the War*, page 169.)

Dr Kendal Franks reports on the Irene Camp: "In one of the tents there were three families; parents and children, a total of 14 people and all were suffering from measles."

In Springfontein camp, 19 to 20 people were crammed into one tent.

There were neither beds nor mattresses and nearly the whole camp population had to sleep on the bare

ground, which was damp most of the time.

One person wrote the following plea for aid to the New York Herald: "In the name of small children who have to sleep in open tents without fire, with barely any clothes, I plea for help."

3.4. Let them die of hunger



According to a British journalist, WT Stead, the concentration camps were nothing more than a cruel torture machine. He writes: *"Every one of these children who died as a result of the halving of their rations, thereby exerting pressure onto their family still on the battle-field, was purposefully murdered. The system of half rations stands exposed and stark and unshamefully as a cold-blooded deed of state policy employed with the purpose of ensuring the surrender of people whom we were not able to defeat on the battlefield."*

The detainees received no fruit or vegetables; not even milk for the babies.

The meat and flour issued were crawling with maggots. Emily Hobhouse writes: *"I have in my possession coffee and sugar which were described as follows by a London analyst: In the case of the first, 66% imitation, and in the case of the second, sweepings from a warehouse."*

In her book, **Met die Boere in die Veld** (With the Boers in the field), Sara Raal states that *"there were poisonous sulphate of copper, grounded glass, fishhooks, and razor blades in the rations."* The evidence given on this fact is so overwhelming that it must be regarded as a historical fact.

3.5. No hygiene

The outbreak of disease and epidemics in the camps were further promoted by, inter alia, the lack of sanitary conveniences. Bloemfontein camp had only 13 toilets for more than 3 500 people. Aliwal North camp had one toilet for every 170 people.

A British physician, Dr Henry Becker, writes:
"First, they chose an ill-suited site for the camp. Then they supplied so little water that the people could neither wash themselves nor their clothes. Furthermore, they made no provision for sufficient waste removal. And lastly, they did not provide enough toilets for the overpopulation they had crammed into the camps."



A report on a Ladies' Committee's visit to Bloemfontein camp stated: *"They saw how the women tried to wash clothes in small puddles of water and sometimes had to use the water more than once."*

3.6. Hospitals of homicide

Ill and healthy people were crammed together into unventilated areas conducive to the spreading of disease and epidemics. At first there were no medical amenities whatsoever in the camps.

Later doctors were appointed, but too few. In Johannesburg there was one doctor for every 4 000 afflicted patients.

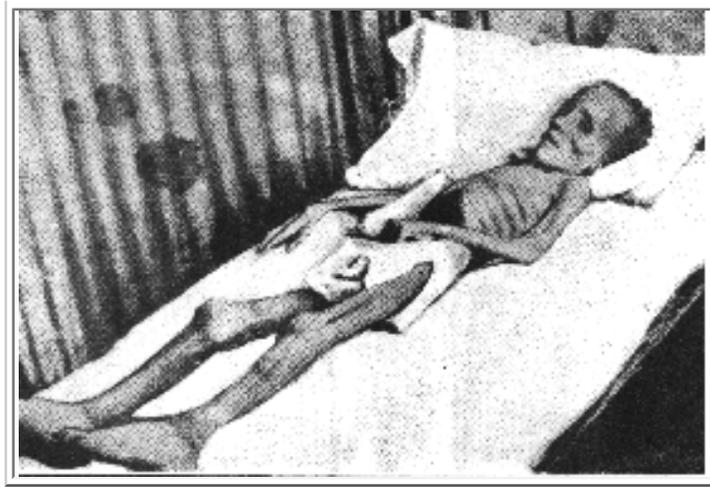
A report on the Irene camp states that, out of a population of 1325 detainees, 154 were ill and 20 had died during the previous week. Still this camp had only one doctor and no hospital.

In some camps matters were even worse. The large Bloemfontein camp did not have a single doctor; only one nurse who could not possibly cope with the conditions. During a visit to Norvalspont camp Emily Hobhouse could not even find a trained nurse.

The later appointment of medical personnel did not improve the conditions. They were appointed for their loyalty towards the British invasion; not for their medical capability. They maltreated the Boere.

Emily Hobhouse tells the story of the young Lizzie van Zyl who died in the Bloemfontein concentration camp: *"She was a frail, weak little child in desperate need of good care. Yet, because her mother was one of the 'undesirables' due to the fact that her father neither surrendered nor betrayed his people, Lizzie was placed on the lowest rations and so perished with hunger that, after a month in the camp, she was transferred to the new small hospital. Here she was treated harshly. The English disposed doctor and his nurses did not understand her language and, as she could not speak English, labeled her an idiot although she was mentally fit and normal. One day she dejectedly started calling:*

LIZZIE VAN ZYL



Mother! Mother! I want to go to my mother! One Mrs Botha walked over to her to console her. She was just telling the child that she would soon see her mother again, when she was brusquely interrupted by one of the nurses who told her not to interfere with the child as she was a nuisance." Shortly afterwards, Lizzie van Zyl died.

Treu, a medical assistant in the Johannesburg concentration camp, stated that patients were bullied and even lashed with a strap.

Ill people who were taken to the camp hospitals were as good as dead. One woman declared: *"We fear the hospitals more than death."*

The following two reports should give an idea of the inefficiency of the camp hospitals: *"Often people suffering from a minor ailment were violently removed from the tents of protesting mothers or family members to be taken to hospital. After a few days they were more often than not carried to the grave."*

"Should a child leave the hospital alive, it was simply a miracle."

(Both quotations from **Stemme uit die Verlede** - a collection of sworn statements by women who were detained in the concentration camps during the Second War of Independence.)

3.7. The highest sacrifice

In total 27 000 women and children made the highest sacrifice in the British hell camps during the struggle for the freedom of the Boerevolk.

Mrs Helen Harris, who paid a visit to the Potchefstroom concentration camp, stated: *"Imagine a one year old baby who receives no milk; who has to drink water or coffee - there is no doubt that this is the cause of the poor health of the children."*

Should one take note of the fact that it were the English who killed the Boers' cattle with bayonets,

thereby depriving the children of their food sources, then the high fatality rate does not seem to be incidental.

Despite shocking fatality figures in the concentration camps, the English did nothing to improve the situation, and the English public remained deaf to the lamentations in the concentration camps as thousands of people, especially children, were carried to their graves.

The Welshman, Lloyd George, stated: *"The fatality rate of our soldiers on the battlefields, who were exposed to all the risks of war, was 52 per thousand per year, while the fatalities of women and children in the camps were 450 per thousand per year. We have no right to put women and children into such a position."*

An Irishman, Dillon, said: *"I can produce an endless succession of confirmations that the conditions in most of the camps are appalling and brutal. To my opinion the fatality rate is nothing less than cold-blooded murder."*

One European had the following comment on England's conduct with the concentration camps: *"Great Britain cannot win her battles without resorting to the despicable cowardice of the most loathsome cure on earth - the act of striking at a brave man's heart through his wife's honor and his child's life."*

The barbarisms of the English is strongly evidenced by the way in which they unceremoniously threw the corpses of children in heaps on mule carts to be transported to the cemeteries. The mourning mothers had to follow on foot. Due to illness or fatigue many of them could not follow fast enough and had to miss the funerals of their children.

According to PF Bruwer, author of **Vir Volk en Vryheid**, all the facts point out that the concentration camps, also known as the hell camps, were a calculated and deliberate effort by England to commit a holocaust on the Boerevolk

4. Consequences

4.1. "Peace"

As a direct result of the concentration camps, the "Peace Treaty" of Vereeniging was signed, according to which the Boer Republics came under British rule.

4.2. Called up by the enemy

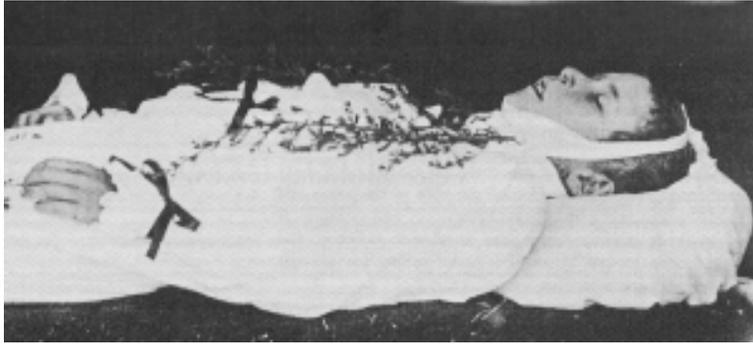
It is a bitter irony that during World War I England laid claim to the same boys who survived the concentration camps to fight against Germany, which was well-disposed towards the Boerevolk.

Thereby they had to lay their lives upon the line for the second time to the benefit of England.

Kroniek van die Kampkinders (Chronicle of the camp children) by HS van Blerk describes how, after World War I, this generation were, in addition, kept out of the labor force and how they were impoverished - all simply because they were Boers.

4.3. Immortalised in our literature

In this modern world it seems as if few people realize the hardships our forefathers had to endure in order to lose our freedom only without forfeiting the honor of our people.



Therefore, it is proper to look at the reflection of the concentration camps in our literature, where the nobility of our forefathers is immortalized.

(In the translation of Afrikaans into an other language, it is unavoidable that most of the splendour of the original words will be lost, but the translator will do his utmost to at least convey the message.)

A new song to an old tune

C Louis Leipoldt (excerpt)

You, who are the hope of our people;

You, who our people can barely spare;

You, who should grow up to become a man;

You, who must perform your duty, if you can;

You, who have no part in the war;

You, who should sing and jump for joy -

You must perish in a children's camp

You must be eliminated for peace:

Fold your hands tight together,

Close your eyes and say amen!

Whooping-cough and consumption, without milk:

bitter for you is the fate of life!

There is your place, at the children's graves -

Two in one coffin, a wedding couple!

Al you gain is that we will remember:

Our freedom more precious than woman or child!

In the Concentration Camp

(Aliwal North, 1901) C Louis Leipoldt (excerpt)

You are cringing away from the gusts of the wind

The chill seeping through the hail-torn tent -

Your scanty shield against torturing torrents;

The June chill bursts over the banks of the Vaal -

And all you can hear are the coughs from your child, and the

ceaseless patter of rain on the canvas.

A candle stub, just an inch before death

faintly flickering in a bottle

(a sty offers more comfort and rest)

But here, at night every thought is

a round of torture and tears.

Here, the early-born child flounders

Here, the aged fades away

Here, all you can hear is wailing and sighs

Here, every second is a lifetime of dread;

Every minute leaves scars

on your soul, sacrifice without end.

Forgive? Forget? Is it possible to forgive?

The sorrow, the despair demanded so much!

The branding iron painfully left its scar

on our nation, for ages to see, and the wound is too raw -

Too close to our heart and too deep in our souls -

"Patience, o patience, how much can you bear?"

Leipoldt also wrote heartbreaking verses on a soap box to the memory of children who could at least be buried in this luxury:



They made you in England, little soap box

To serve as coffin for our children

They found little corpses for you, soap box

And I have witnessed you as coffin.

Equally unforgettable is AG Visser's description of an orphan in the concentration camp in his poem,

The Youngest Burgher:

The camp of women is ruled by silence and darkness

The misery kindly concealed by the night

Here and there a minute light is flickering

Where the Angel of Death is lingering.

In this place of woe and of broken hearts

A young boy's muffled whimpers quiver through the night

Who can count all the tears, who can measure the grief

of an orphan alone in the world

Later on in the poem De Wet describes the struggle to the escaped child who wishes to join the commando:

Freedom demands from our ranks

Men of courage who taunt mortal danger.

But also in the camp, the mother, the nurturer

And the innocent child on her breast.

And the reward? Perhaps on the plains

A lonesome grave doused by no tears.

Sometime, perhaps, posterity might honor our heroes...

Boy, do you feel up to it? General, I do!

4.4. We may not forget

In total there were 31 concentration camps. In most cases, the adjoining cemeteries are in still in existence and are visited as often as possible by Boer people to mentally condition themselves to continue their struggle towards freedom.

There were concentration camps at: Irene, Barberton, Volksrust, Belfast, Klerksdorp, Pietersburg, Potchefstroom, Vereeniging, Turffontein, Balmoral, Nylstroom, Standerton, Heilbron, Kimberley, Bloemfontein, Middelburg, Kroonstad, Heidelberg, Krugersdorp, Vryburg, Vredefort, Brandfort, Springfontein, Bethulie, Norvalspont, Port Elizabeth, Aliwal North, Merebank, Pinetown, Howick and Pietermaritzburg.

4.5. Pillars of support

Amidst all the misery brought upon our people by the English, there were pillars of support: firstly the certainty that our cause was just and fair and based upon faith. However, there also were people who made major sacrifices in an effort to ease the burden of Boer women and children.

No study of the concentration camps could possibly be complete without mention of the name of Emily Hobhouse. This Cornish lady was a symbol of light and decency for Boer women and children.

Emily Hobhouse did everything within her power to assist the women and children. As a result of her efforts to persuade the invaders towards an attitude of humanity and reason, she was banned from South Africa by the British authorities.

However, the Boerevolk remains grateful towards Emily Hobhouse for her efforts and her remains are resting in a place of honor under the Women's Monument in Bloemfontein.

Other people who spoke out against the barbaric methods of England were: J Ellis (Irish), Lloyd George (Welsh), CP Scott (Scottish), William Redmond (Welsh) and Ramsey McDonald (Scottish).

5. Effects

1. Today, the numbers of the Boerevolk are at least 3 million less that it would have been, had the English not committed genocide on the Boerevolk. This robs our people of our right to self-determination in the new so-called democratic system. (In truth, democracy means government by the people and not government by the rabble as is presently the case in South Africa.)
2. The holocaust, together with treason committed by Afrikaners (take note: not Boere) such as Jan Smuts and Louis Botha, forced the Boerevolk to sign the peace accord of Vereeniging which deprived our volk of its freedom.
3. The alien and inferior British culture was forced onto our people.
4. The various indigenous peoples of South Africa were insensitively bundled into one Union without giving a thought to their respective identities and right to self-determination.
5. As in the case of the Boerevolk, the local black nations were effectively robbed of their freedom,

which gave rise to the establishment of the ANC in 1912 (two years after the foundation of the Union) to struggle for black nationalism.

6. **The British system of apartheid**, which they applied all over the world (for instance also in India, Australia and New-Zealand), had to be imported to control the mixed population. The first manifestation of this were signs reading "Europeans" and "Non-Europeans". No Boer ever regarded himself as a "European". Apartheid invoked racial friction and even racial hatred which has in no means abated to this very day, and the bitter irony is that the Boerevolk, who had not been in power since 1902 and who also suffered severely under apartheid in the sense that apartheid robbed them of their land and their work-ethics, are being blamed for apartheid today.
7. England's pretence for the invasion was the rights of the foreign miners. Yet after the war, these very same miners were treated so badly by their English and Jewish bosses that they had to resort to general strikes in 1913 and 1922 (3 and 12 years after the establishment of the British ruled Union), during which many mine-workers were shot dead in the streets of Johannesburg by the British disposed Union government. So much for the rights of the foreign miners under English rule.
8. The efficient and equitable republican system of government of the Boer Republics was replaced with the unworkable Westminster system of government, which led to endless misery and conflict.

6. Summation

The concentration camps were a calculated and intentional holocaust committed on the Boerevolk by England with the aim of annihilating the Boerevolk and reeling in the Boer Republics.

Comparing the killing of Jews during World War 2, proportionately fewer Jews were killed than Boer women and children during the Second War of Independence.

Yet, after World War 2, England mercilessly insisted on a frantic retribution campaign against the whole German nation for the purported Jewish holocaust. To this day, Germany is being forced to pay annual compensation to the Jews, which means that Germans who were not even born at the time of World War 2, still have to suffer today for alleged atrocities committed by the Germans. Should England subject herself to the same principles applied to Germany, then England must do everything within her power to reinstitute the Boer republics and to pay annual compensation to the Boerevolk for the atrocities committed against the Boerevolk.

"Their only crime was that they stood between England and the gold of Transvaal."

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