

Ten minutes to pack! (Anglo Boer War memories)

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My maternal great uncle, Lodewyk Schutte, penned down true experiences of two pre-teen brothers, Lodewyk (Cornelius Stephanus Lodewyk Schutte; 1891 - 1964) and Gert (Gerhardus Johannes Nel Schutte; 1893 - 1963), in and around Anglo Boer War. These recollections in Afrikaans were serialized under the title, "Jeugland", and published in "Die Huisgenoot" from 20 December 1957 to 7 February 1958.] Information courtesy of Dr Tian Schutte.

I have taken the liberty of rewriting some of them into English. Here is another one of the tales:

During this time (*early 1902*), the days dragged on mostly monotonously on the farm Rietfontein in the Lichtenburg district. Mornings and evenings were spent milking Rooiblom; the rest of the day was spent gathering firewood and grinding mealies or wheat with the coffee grinder. Our playgrounds had been devastated: Grandma's house had been demolished and leveled; the poplar-grove had been cut down and the timber carted off'

Each morning the donkey commando (*workers building the Klerksdorp-Lichtenburg blockhouse line*) arrived to demolish houses, cut down trees and level embankments, and ditches. Day-by-day English patrols traversed the farmyard. The only farm animals still alive were a few cats, the dog Koljan, the dairy cow Rooiblom and of course "Griebelhaan", the rooster, accompanied by a handful of over-wrought young chickens.

One morning another such a patrol arrived. Whether they were acting on orders or out of pure vandalism, no-one knows, but they left nothing unscathed. Father Engnatus' black Landau carriage was pulled from the barn. A number of sheaves of wheat from the back of the barn were taken, stacked onto the carriage, and set alight. Just outside the barn, there was a metal corn-husker. This was broken into pieces with hammers. The children merely looked on with empty eyes; powerless against such abject vandalism.

That same evening, old Job mysteriously turned up on the farm. He was a worker from the neighbour's farm. The neighbour had not been on commando for months, neither was he at home nor had he been captured by the British. Either way, Job's accommodation was still undamaged on his boss's farm. He pretended to bring news about father Engnatus' well-being. Things were still going well with him and he was still safe with the cattle in the Koppiesfontein bush (*about 25 km west of Rietfontein*).

The very next day, just before dawn of 12 February 1902, father Engnatus, and all of his cattle were captured by the English. He was transported by train

via Krugersdorp to Durban and then on March 6, 1902, he was shipped to Kakool, Rawalpindi district as a prisoner of war (*in present-day Pakistan; prisoner number 29257*). It was only after the war that we learned how Job had treacherously gone straight from the farm to the English laager. The next afternoon, the boys' couldn't believe their eyes when they saw their cow Bloutjie and her heifer coming down the slope of the pan ahead of a herd of cattle. She aimed for the cattle enclosure, but the black horsemen drove them so hard that they had to pass. The family knew then that father Engnatius was not doing well.

The next day, the farmyard was overrun with the English soldiers once more. Soon the barn went up in flames. The stables were knocked over with long eucalyptus poles, so were the cattle enclosures.

After weeks of devastation by the donkey commando, the farm was looking desolate and empty. Only the farmhouse and a single row of eucalyptus trees remained standing, and in front of the back door, there was the large "adamsvy" tree that had lost its leaves due to singeing from the barn fire. It was a summer morning, like so many other summer mornings, and yet this particular morning will be embedded in the children's memories like no other morning.

Unexpectedly, a mounted patrol, accompanied by a mule wagon, drove up to the farmhouse.

The commander barked out his unyielding order: "I give you ten minutes to get what you want to take with you on the wagon."

Flustered mother and children scurried around. What should be taken with? What should stay? Mother tried instilling some order: "Children, first our clothing, then the bedding, pots and kettles, crockery, a few chairs, a table..."

However, we were soon cut short. "That's enough; there's no more time." Some blacks flung our possessions smack onto the wagon. The children were still busy grabbing this and that to push in among the other goods on the wagon when the order came to get aboard. But it can't be! Half the stuff was not yet on the wagon, and the dog Koljan was hiding under the shrubs

And their toy wagon, it must go with! Gert grabbed Koljan and pushed him onto the wagon, Lodewyk drew the toy wagon closer and tied its boom to the grid between the rear wheels. Sister San was still arriving with a water barrel which she hung just in front of the rear wheel, while the wagon started to move.

Fortunately, mother Beatrix and the two little ones were already on the wagon. The other family members followed on foot, but kept looking back at the abandoned farmstead and farmyard. One by one they clambered onto the wagon looking for a seat and where to hold onto because it was traveling through the rough veldt. It was quiet on the wagon, but inside their hearts was aching to say goodbye to everything they grew up with. They passed obliquely past the poplar grove, and indeed, there stood "Griebelhaan", the rooster, among the skeletons of the poplar trees seemingly as a challenge to the vandalism around him. The house was getting smaller, the yard was fading, and the fig tree was raising its bare branches as if in prayer for their protection.

Immediate matters, however, forced their attention. A handsupper riding to one side behind the wagon started harassing them about the toy wagon. What do they want to do with the thing? They should untie the thing and let go. Who, they? Never! He dismounted and approached the toy wagon to cut the thong. Sister Hester was sitting on the back-end of the wagon with loose-hanging legs and feet. Just as he bent down, she kicked the helmet off his head. He cursed, cut the thong, and went back to pick up his helmet. Just as he was back on his horse and riding ahead, the boys jumped off to recover the toy wagon. A couple of soldiers riding alongside found it a big joke. They laughed at the "funny boys", but for the boys, it is no joke, it was a matter of life and death!

The toy wagon was hurriedly re-attached to the wagon. It didn't take long before the handsupper was behind the wagon again harassing them about the toy wagon. After spitting out a tirade against the boys, he dismounted, cut loose the toy wagon once more, this time tossing it rolling into the veld. Like swallows from a nest, they flew off the wagon, grabbed hold of the toy wagon, and carried it back to the wagon. They glared at him with challenging stares and re-attached the toy wagon with what was left of the thong.

By noon, their wagon arrived at the large laager next to the Harts River at Lichtenburg. A while later two more wagons arrived with captive old men, women, and children. These were the Therons from Wolwefontein. The old oom and tante were already in their eighties. We had no food with us on the wagon, but old tannie Theron had rusks which we soaked in water before we ate them.

About five o'clock there was a big slaughtering taking to one side of the vlei. There is a long ditch a few feet deep. At the top-end was an enclosure filled with cattle. Heifers and oxen of about two years old were caught, pulled to the ditch, and slaughtered there, so that blood ran off into the ditch. Out of curiosity, Gert and Lodewyk were soon there, but what a shock! These were all their father's cattle! It was their heifers being slaughtered! You don't

slaughter such young things! Look, it's Aandblom, Bloutjie, and Angelier's calves! No, let's rather leave. They swallowed heavily on the lumps in their throats and returned to the wagon.

It was already dusk when some Tommies arrived with a cluster of clinkers and a piece of uncooked beef. Mother Beatrix told them that she had neither wood nor salt; not even a pot. Eventually, a black man came threw down a batch of firewood and handed over a can of salt. Soon a fire was going on and mother Beatrix prepared the meat for roasting on the coals. But the children simply couldn't handle the clinkers. They were rock-hard and tasted of nothing. Mother Beatrix, the sisters, and the two little ones slept on the wagon; the boys under the wagon.

Throughout the night there was a continuous cacophony of sounds. The old oom sighed: "The sounds of the Judgement day."

