



When Intelligence Made a Difference

— 19TH CENTURY —

Doctor Jameson's Raid

by Alex Vermeulen

THE VOORTREKKERS AND THE BOER REPUBLICS

Before there was ever a free South Africa, there was a Cape Colony. The Cape Colony began as a Dutch settlement in 1652 following the expedition of Jan van Riebeeck but was taken over by Britain in 1795 following the 30 Years war.¹ The British began rapidly reforming the Cape Colony, abolishing slavery and the reducing the original Boers' (farmers) status to the same as that of the African natives. Some 12,000 "Voortrekkers,"² (pioneers) resenting the change in power and British high-handedness, ventured out from the Cape between 1835 and 1843³ into the territories known as the Transvaal, the Orange Free State, and Natal, reaching modern Namibia and Angola at their furthest.⁴ This movement of people came to be known as the 'Great Trek.'

The Boers made rapid progress as farmers. They established many "Boer Republics," but the two that survived were the Orange Free State, recognized by the British Empire in 1848, and the South African Republic (commonly referred to as the Transvaal), recognized in 1852. The capital cities respectively were Bloemfontein and Pretoria, but the most significant city by far was Johannesburg. Founded in 1884 when a huge gold reserve was discovered,⁵ the city came to be the

source of the majority of the world's gold.⁶ As Britain saw it, most of the wealth of Africa lay outside its Cape Colony. Thousands of British started pouring North, bringing Boers and British into contact once more.⁷



Map of Southern Africa, c1889

PAUL KRUGER AND THE "UITLANDER" PROBLEM

Johannesburg grew quickly between 1884 and 1896, reaching a population of 100,000.⁸ Its population was heterogenous, including people from all over continental Europe, Boers, so-called "colored" peoples, various Bantu tribesmen, and British. The exclusively Boer Volksraad ("people's council") opposed British suffrage since Dutch in the Cape Colony had equal status as natives. Ironically, the Uitlanders (foreigners, i.e. the British) did pay the majority of the tax revenue. This question of the "Uitlanders" became the major political issue that helped precipitate the Jameson raid. Ethnic tensions were high, and spontaneous violence often broke out between English and Afrikaner.⁹

As frustrations grew, the Burghers (Boer Citizens), the Voortrekkers and their descendants, supported the politician Stephanus Johannes Paulus Kruger. A staunch Calvinist who had been a cavalry commander and a Voortrekker himself,¹⁰ Kruger

1. Roodt, Dan, "The Great Trek," *American Renaissance*, June 2004.
2. This word is a compound created to describe this movement of people and has no English analogue. It roughly connotes the same image as does the word 'pioneer.'
3. Roodt, "The Great Trek."
4. Parts of southern Namibia speak Afrikaans to this day and Angola still has remnants of Voortrekker shelters called hartbeeshuies.
5. The name for Johannesburg in the Sotho language is 'Gauteng,' 'the gold place.' The province encapsulating Johannesburg in modern South Africa is officially called Gauteng to this day.

6. "South African History – Gold in South Africa – The Witwatersrand," Famous South Africans and History, The South Africa Guide, <https://www.thesouthafricaguide.com/famous-south-africans-and-history/south-african-history-gold-in-south-africa-the-witwatersrand/>.
7. National Army Museum, Accessed 10/13/2020; <https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/boer-war>
8. Reid, Andrew, Lane, Paul, *African Historical Archeologies*, Springer, p.347, 2004
9. Both groups lived homogenously and were completely bilingual, but suffrage for the British was an irreconcilable point of departure.
10. Kruger, Paul, *The Memoirs of Paul Kruger*, T Fisher Unwin, 1902 pp. 31-32

was considered the embodiment of an Afrikaner. He became a hero in South Africa when he successfully opposed a British annexation in 1877, getting the South African Republic recognized again as an independent state in 1884. He was elected President in 1883.



Paulus Kruger
Wikipedia

Kruger managed successful relations with the British but was determined to block Uitlander suffrage. He not only opposed reform in the Volksraad, but battled the British Empire on economic grounds, excluding British influence in the Johannesburg gold rush. His efforts culminated in the ‘Drifts Crisis’ of October 1895,

when, after Kruger imposed new tariffs on British imports coming over the Vaal river by rail, the British began unloading all of their merchandise and fording the “drifts,” or the shallow crossings, bringing all commerce across the Vaal to a screeching halt.¹¹ The crisis soured Dutch and English alike on Kruger. Popular opinion was now willing to extend citizenship to the Uitlanders if it meant economic growth.¹²

Kruger had one final instrument to manage the Uitlander problem as public opinion drifted away from him. In the South African Republic Police, “Zarps” (Police)¹³ Chief Detective Stossel simultaneously expelled all non-Burgher detectives and employed 500 Burgher officers in Johannesburg.¹⁴ Since the Burghers now completely controlled the Zarps, they were available at Kruger’s direction to monitor the Uitlander community and the reform parties for revolutionary and dissident activity, which after October they began to do.¹⁵ The Zarps became invaluable intelligence gatherers in the coming months.

THE BRITISH SOUTH AFRICA COMPANY AND DR. JAMESON

Imperial Britain was active during the founding of the Boer Republics. Cecil Rhodes correctly guessed the Bechuanaland to be a wealthy and undeveloped mining territory. In 1887 he established a mining empire stretching from parts of the Transvaal into the Bechuanaland called ‘Consolidated Goldfields of South Africa.’¹⁶ To cement his mining interests, Rhodes chartered his company through the British Crown. This charter founded the British South Africa Company in 1889, which came to be the primary governance structure for British subjects and interests in South Africa.¹⁷ Rhodes was now free to do as he liked in South Africa with the Crown’s backing.

Problems arose with the obstinance of Kruger and with internal company discord. In London, the British South Africa company was divided over Rhodes’ expansionist efforts. One faction included Joseph Chamberlain, Secretary of State for the Colonies, Rhodes himself, and Albert Grey, a London financier. The other faction encompassed George Cawston and Lord Gifford, the former heads of the Bechuanaland Exploration Company before its absorption by the Charter of 1889. Rhodes realized he needed more territory in the Transvaal and less oversight from the company if the enterprise was to grow.¹⁸ A letter from Grey to Chamberlain revealed conspiratorial plans to overthrow the South African Republic before Cawston and Gifford could intervene. The letter discussed stationing a force under Dr. Leander Starr Jameson on the border of the Transvaal to enable the “long expected and inevitable rising of the Uitlanders to secure for themselves the common rights of free men.”¹⁹ Rhodes’ conspiracy was to attack Johannesburg in a time of peace.²⁰

Jameson proved an intriguing choice. A skilled doctor, he moved to South Africa in 1878 and gained renown for his treatment of prominent people, including Rhodes, Kruger, and Matabeleland’s King Lobengula, from whom Rhodes had bought land when establishing Consolidated Goldfields.²¹ Jameson quickly set the medical profession aside, however, when

11. Pakenham, Elizabeth, *Jameson’s Raid*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1960. p. 38.

12. Pakenham, p. 38.

13. This acronym reflects the Dutch name for the South African Republic, the Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek.

14. Muller, Cornelis, *Policing the Witwatersrand: A history of the South African Republic Police, 1886-1899*, University of the Free State Bloemfontein, 2016. p.180.

15. A contemporary Uitlander manifesto claimed that tax money seemed to be disappearing in an undisclosed “Secret Service Fund.” (Cornelis, p. 190).

16. Pakenham, p.23.

17. Galbraith, John, “The British South Africa Company and Jameson’s Raid,” *Journal of British Studies*, Trinity College, 1970. p. 146.

18. Galbraith, p. 147.

19. Galbraith, p. 148.

20. Galbraith, p. 150.

21. Chisholm, Hugh, ed. (1911). “Jameson, Leander Starr.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 15 (11th ed.). Cambridge University Press. pp. 147–148.



Dr. Jameson

Rhodes employed Jameson on a military expedition to oust the same Lobengula.²² Jameson’s skillful execution made him a figure of international acclaim and prompted poet laureate Rudyard Kipling to take Jameson as his model for his poem *If*.²³ Rhodes’ personal affinity for Jameson, his record of accomplishment, and the

need for expansion prompted his deployment bordering the Transvaal near Mafeking.

THE JAMESON RAID

Jameson made his final preparations and set out from the Bechuanaland on December 29, 1895 with 478 armed police and a handful of Maxim guns.²⁴ Jameson kept in contact with prominent Uitlander representatives in Johannesburg to coordinate an uprising with his invasion and to smuggle weapons into the city.²⁵ But intimidation from the Afrikaner Zarps meant the Uitlanders were unprepared. Jameson subsequently invaded on his own initiative to spur them to action. Yet the Zarps caught wind of the coming invasion by interrogating prominent Uitlanders, and the rumor was that “Jameson is heading up to Johannesburg!”²⁶ One observer, the later general Manie Maritz, initially fled Johannesburg to avoid the raid but saw cavalry racing to Johannesburg’s defense from the Orange Free State while departing.²⁷ Maritz returned to Johannesburg with the Free State detachment and joined the Zarps.²⁸

The Afrikaans word for this type of cavalry is *perdekommando*. Much like the American colonial revolutionaries, the South African Republic and the Free State lacked a standing army. The *perdekommando* was the Boers’ solution to this problem. These were crack-shot Burgher horsemen who, growing up on farms in harsh country, were trained by necessity to become the most tactically versatile cavalry of their day.²⁹ Armed with their Mausers³⁰ and their force of will, hundreds marshalled from the Free State and from the South African Republic to repel Jameson.

On Monday, December 30, a telegram came to Kruger in Pretoria that Jameson expected to reach Johannesburg on Wednesday.³¹ Rumor was confirmed by hard intelligence because of a mistake by Jameson. He had not cut the telegraph lines to Pretoria at his departure, a critical failure in operational security, which enabled Kruger to get word of the Raid before anyone else.³² The December 30 telegram was significant. As Jameson was a legendary figure because of his conquest of the Matabeleland and the Matabele tribe with only a few more troops than the 700 that were thought present, many British saw a chance for his success.³³

Yet the prior intelligence derailed Jameson, Rhodes, Chamberlain, and Grey’s plans. Jameson had been sent on a



land grab for gold mining on the pretext of defending the rights of the British-born of Johannesburg, but even the Uitlanders turned against him. Kruger called away the Zarps from the streets of Johannesburg as a gesture of good will and a call for a volunteer defense was put out. Many English answered. Suddenly the Uitlander representative offices, in place of the Union Jack, flew the Vierkleur of the South African Republic.³⁴ Kruger himself saddled his horse and cleaned his rifle, ready at a moment’s notice to rejoin the per-

22. The conquest of the Matabeleland enabled Rhodes to give his name to the former Rhodesia, now called Zimbabwe (Pakenham, p. 25).

23. Pakenham, p.61. The poem can be found at <https://www.poetry-foundation.org/poems/46473/jf--->.

24. Pakenham, p.47. The Maxim gun was a stationary recoil-operated machine gun with a water-cooled barrel that could fire up to 600 rounds per minute. It was invented in 1884 by Sir Hiram Stevens Maxim.

25. Pakenham, p.51.

26. Maritz, Manie, *My Lewe en Strew* (My Life and Aspiration). Durbanville, South Africa: Aurora Books, 1939. p. 5.

27. Maritz, p.5.

28. Maritz, p.5.

29. Churchill referred to the Boer horsemen as “the most capable mounted warriors since the Mongols.” Pakenham, p. 81.

30. The South African Republic and the Free State did not produce arms on their own but bought instead surplus arms such as the 1889 Mauser. This bolt-action rifle was quickly surpassed by British armaments in the upcoming Boer War.

31. Pakenham, p.53. The sender is unknown.

32. Pakenham, p.75.

33. Pakenham, p. 53.

34. Pakenham, p. 54-55.

dekommando of his youth.³⁵ The Uitlander revolution not only died, many even changed sides.

Trouble came on days two and three of Jameson's march. Just when many Uitlanders changed sides, an agent procuring supplies along the route to Johannesburg defected, leaving everything Jameson needed for Kruger.³⁶ On day two, the perdekommandos caught up and began harassing Jameson's rear.³⁷ A skirmish broke out when Jameson was ambushed from the hills.³⁸ His only hope lay in a mad dash for Krugersdorp, a town located about 30 miles outside of Johannesburg. Jameson was expecting that 300 Uitlanders and enemies of Kruger were waiting there. This information came in a letter from Rhodes' older brother, but his informants had been deceived. Jameson instead was met by Commandant Piet Cronje and 200 Boer marksmen.³⁹ Worse still, word of the raid by now was telegraphed to London, and Jameson's raiders were declared outlaws by the Queen.⁴⁰ Tired, hungry and without supplies, outmaneuvered, outmanned, outlawed, and by then outgunned, as the Boers deployed artillery on the nearby hill of Doornkop, Jameson surrendered on January 2, 1896 after losing only 30 men.⁴¹

THE AFTERMATH AND THE KOMMANDO MYTH

Dr. Leander Starr Jameson was an impressive soldier, as reaching Krugersdorp with no provisions demonstrates. But his force failed to inflict a single casualty either in the skirmishes or in his dash to Krugersdorp. This fact went a long way to create the myth of the perdekommando's invincibility, which partially influenced the Boer's willingness to enter the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. Manie Maritz's autobiography states that the Free State kommando made so profound an impact that that single sight prompted him to get involved in the affairs of young South Africa.⁴² They had certainly been quick to act, but what truly bested Jameson was the intelligence

gathering of the Zarps and the early warning telegram sent to Kruger. If Jameson had not been deficient in his counterintelligence, if the Zarps had not been actively questioning the Uitlanders, and if the Free State had not been notified so quickly, Jameson may very well have carried the day.

Kruger was generous with Jameson and his jailed raiders. He sent them to London. Rhodes seemed to recover well enough after the raid, though at great political cost in the immediate aftermath.⁴³ However, the greatest legacy of Jameson's raid was that war in South Africa between the British and the Boers was inevitable, and Kruger did little to avert it. Though Jameson's Raiders killed not a man, the British government was responsible for the death of 28,000 women and children in concentration camps during the upcoming Anglo-Boer War.⁴⁴ But if there is one absolute certainty, it is that in the three days when South Africa's fate hung in the balance, it was intelligence that made the difference.

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43. Galbraith, p. 160-1.

44. Harris, Paul, "'Spin' on Boer Atrocities," *The Guardian*, December 1, 2001

35. Pakenham, p. 55.

36. Pakenham, p. 80.

37. Pakenham, p. 81.

38. Pakenham, p. 90.

39. Pakenham, p. 90.

40. Pakenham, p. 93.

41. Pakenham, p. 95.

42. Maritz, p.5. Maritz was a controversial character. After the Anglo-Boer War he refused to sign an allegiance to the Crown. He led a 1914 rebellion against invading German South West Africa. In 1923 he was jailed for three years. In the 1930s he became a Nazi sympathizer.