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BOER INTERNEES IN PORTUGAL, 1901-1902

by **O.J.O. Ferreira**

*Department of History and Cultural History
University of Pretoria*

The British advance from the coastal cities of the Cape Colony and Natal on the Orange Free State and the Transvaal at the start of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) induced many Afrikaners from the Cape Colony to load their wagons and flee northwards ahead of the British forces. The British advance eventually forced them into the Eastern Transvaal, then over the Mozambican border. They arrived in Lourenço Marques by train early in September 1900.¹

The tendency to flee ahead of the British troops in order to avoid being captured also developed among Free State and Transvaal families who had the opportunity and could afford to try and find a temporary refuge elsewhere. Many of them were burghers who had deliberately strayed from their commandos, fetched their families on their farms and then trekked ahead of the British troops to stay out of the enemy's hands. It is well-known that some of these families eventually arrived in Mozambique.²

Foreigners fighting for the Boers and fearing capture by the English also made use of the escape route over Komatipoort to Lourenço Marques. Most of them were eventually shipped off to Trieste aboard the Austrian vessel *Styria*.³

¹ War Museum of the Boer Republics (hereafter W.M.B.R.), Bloemfontein: A.4508 'n Kykie in die lewe van ... C.M. de Beer, p. 3; H.P. van Straten, *Saam verban* (Stellenbosch, 1940), pp. 7-8, 15, 40, 122.

² B.J. Viljoen, *Mijne herinneringen uit den Anglo-Boeren-oorlog* (Amsterdam, 1902), pp. 125-126; A.H. Smith, 'Die Boere in Peniche, Portugal, Junie 1901 tot Julie 1902', *Africana Notes and News* 23(4), Dec. 1978, p. 147; A.M. Grundlingh, *Die "Hendsoppers" en "Joiners"* (Pretoria, 1979), p. 49.

³ J. Ploeger, 'Die geskiedenis van die gedenkteken te Lissabon ter gedagtenis aan heengegane Boeregeïnterneedes in Portugal tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog', *Restorica* 10, Dec. 1981, p. 29.

In an effort to force the Boer commandos to surrender, Lord Roberts, supreme commandor of the British forces in South Africa, sent Boer women and children to the Boer lines. Obviously this was a constraint on the mobility of the commandos who, moreover, did not have the provisions needed to accommodate the women. Barberton thereby became the gathering place for these Boer women and children until the town was occupied by the troops of Gen. J.D.P. French on 13 September 1900. Because of a lack of housing facilities and water Lord Roberts urged on Gen. Louis Botha the necessity of removing the families from Barberton. These women and children also found refuge in Lourenço Marques.⁴

By the middle of September 1900 about 3 000 burghers were assembled at Komatipoort. The majority were not mounted and could not move fast enough to escape the advancing British forces. When the British troops were approaching the border post, about 700 burghers crossed the border into Mozambique to avoid capture. Once on Mozambican territory their leader, Gen. F.J. Pienaar, ordered them to lay down their arms and they were interned by the Portuguese. According to British reckoning the group increased in time to about 2 500 men, but other sources put the number who were transported by train under guard to Lourenço Marques at about 1 400.⁵ According to Reitz, sick and wounded burghers had already been sent to Mozambique by their officers.⁶

Their stay in Lourenço Marques

In Lourenço Marques the Boer internees were accommodated in railway carriages, a camp at Rubenspoint [Figure 1] and later in rented houses and rooms. Some burghers were initially interned in the local police barracks, while the rest lived in tents in a prison camp. A few men were even accommodated on board Portuguese men-of-war lying at anchor in the harbour.⁷

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁵ P. Pienaar, *Met Steyn en De Wet* (Middelburg, 1902), p. 186; D. de Klerk, *The Boers in Portugal* (Lisbon, 1985), pp. 27, 101-102; A.M. Grundlingh, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-50; Anglo-Boer War Philatelic Society, *The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902: Philately of the Boer and British prisoners of war camps, part B: Prisoners of war camps overseas* (N.p., 1976), p. 64.

⁶ D. Reitz, *Commando: a Boer journal of the Boer War* (London, 1935), p. 125.

⁷ D. de Klerk, *op. cit.*, p. 27; P.C. Jooste, 'Boere-krygsgevangenes in Portugal', *Die Huisgenoot* 26(973), 15-11-1940, p. 23; H.P. van Straten, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-36, 43, 47; W.M.B.R.: A. 4508 'n Kykie in die lewe van ... C.M. de Beer, p. 5.

Although the Portuguese authorities treated the internees reasonably well, conditions were not very favourable and it was feared that diseases might erupt. On the Boer side, the *Commissie voor de Refugees uit de Z.A.R.* (Commission for the Refugees from the South African Republic) was instituted. Cooperation between the Commission and the Portuguese authorities was excellent.⁸

In Lourenço Marques the scorching heat, the bloodthirsty mosquitoes and fleas as well as the fever afflicted the internees. Eleven of them died there during the few months of their stay.⁹

Lourenço Marques was only a small port which did not really have the necessary housing facilities for the interned Boers. Moreover, the British government, Portugal's "oldest ally", put pressure on the Portuguese government to send the Boer internees elsewhere. At the same time a serious epidemic of fever erupted. Consequently the Portuguese authorities decided to send the internees to Portugal, although the Cape Verde Islands were initially also considered as a destination.¹⁰

Transfer to Portugal

The freighter *Benguella*, with about 700 burghers aboard and taking the route around the Cape, left for Lisbon on 26 February 1901 and arrived on 28 March of that year.¹¹ Five internees died on the way. To the deep distress of some of their fellow passengers on the *Benguella*, the deceased were buried at sea.¹² When the burghers had landed at Lisbon some were taken by train to Alcobaça and some to Peniche, while Gen. F.J. Pienaar and his party were taken to Tomar and Comdt. H.P. Mostert and his group to Abrantes.¹³

Another freighter, the *Zaire*, left the harbour of Lourenço Marques on 9 March 1901 and sailed via the Cape to Lisbon.¹⁴ The *Zaire* was overcrowded

⁸ A.N. Pelzer, 'Burgergrafte in Lourenço Marques', *Historiese Studies* 8(2), Jan. 1948, pp. 101-102; J. Ploeger, *Die lotgevalle van die burgerlike bevolking gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902, III* (Pretoria, 1990), chap. 21, pp. 16-18, 20-21.

⁹ Institute for Historical Research (hereafter I.H.R.), Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria: Dagboek van O.R. Belling, 14-11-1900; H.P. van Straten, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-48; C.A.R. Schulenburg, *Sterfgevalle onder die Boere-krygsgevangenes van die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902* (Pretoria, n.d.), pp. 30-31.

¹⁰ O.J.O. Ferreira, 'Boerebannelinge in Portugal', *Die Taalgenoot* 59(6), Junie 1990, p. 11; Anglo-Boer War Philatelic Society, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

¹¹ I.H.R.: Dagboek van O.R. Belling, 26-2-1901; D. de Klerk, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

¹² C.A.R. Schulenburg, *op. cit.*, p. 63; H.P. van Straten, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-52.

¹³ D. de Klerk, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-66.

¹⁴ W.M.B.R.: A. 4508 'n Kykie in die lewe van ... C.M. de Beer, p. 6.

as besides the 89 burghers, 56 Boer women and 172 children, there were also about 600 Portuguese soldiers aboard.¹⁵ During the voyage three internees perished.¹⁶ The *Zaire* arrived in the harbour of Lisbon on 2 April 1901, but the internees were allowed ashore only several days later. The initial intention was to send them to Sagres, but owing to the inclement weather conditions there they were taken to Caldas da Rainha instead.¹⁷

Ten rebellious internees who had been sent to prison in Lourenço Marques were taken to Portugal in the corvette *Affonso d' Albuquerque*. Immediately on arriving in Lisbon on 12 June 1901 they were transferred to a fort at Oeiras.¹⁸

Places of residence in Portugal

Gen. F.J. Pienaar was received with full military honours in Lisbon and accompanied to his residence in Tomar by Gen. Almeida Pinheiro. He and his party were housed in the Monastery of the Order of Christ, one of the most impressive buildings in Portugal, in which excellent examples of the Manueline style can be seen.¹⁹

Comdt H.P. Mostert and twelve other internees were housed at Abrantes in the Casa da Esperança, originally a convent but at that time under control of the Portuguese military authority.²⁰ At the request of a local newspaper that better housing be found for the Boers, the Portuguese Ministry of War in May 1901 rented one of the best houses in Abrantes for Comdt. Mostert and his family to live in.²¹ The vast plains south of Abrantes would undoubtedly have reminded the Boer internees of the land of their birth.

The original hospital in Caldas da Rainha was replaced in 1892 by a new building. In this new hospital 351 Boer internees were housed temporarily

until the bathing season started in May 1901 and they had to make way for invalids coming from all over Europe.²² The Boer men, women and children were then accommodated in the imposing military barracks and hospital [Figure 2] in a beautiful park adjacent to the spa hospital. Those Boer families who could afford it were granted permission to rent houses in the town, a privilege which many families used. The members of the *Commissie voor de Refugees* stayed in a local hotel at their own expense.²³

About 273 Boers were housed in the back of the Royal Abbey of Santa Maria in Alcobaça [Figure 3]. This abbey had been erected in 1152 on orders from the first king of Portugal, Afonso Henriques, in gratitude for his victory over the Moors.²⁴

The 337 Boers who were housed in the Fortaleza, the St. Marcos barracks, formerly a church, and in the Baluarte da Misericórdia, a part of the hospital for the indigent in Peniche, were all burghers who had taken an active part in the war. In addition, two Coloureds and a Black who had been sent to Portugal together with the Boers were also housed there, which brought the number of internees in the fort to 340. The fort in which the Boers were accommodated dates from the 16th century.²⁵ The Fortaleza again became a refuge when in the mid-seventies, after the take-over of power in Mozambique and Angola, refugees from those former Portuguese territories were housed in it. The fort is now being used as a museum.

Outside the town of Oeiras, close to the sea, stands the Fort de São Julião de Barra. This is the place where rebellious Boer internees and those guilty of infringements of the law were detained. Their numbers fluctuated from 13 to 44. The offences for which they were imprisoned were mainly drunkenness, street fighting, failure to comply with orders from the authorities, and attempts at escaping. Such attempts were the order of the day and by May 1902 43 internees had already succeeded in getting away.²⁶

¹⁵ I.H.R.: Dagboek van O.R. Belling, 8-3-1901, 9-3-1901; D. de Klerk, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

¹⁶ C.A.R. Schulenburg, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

¹⁷ V.C. Wood, 'Ons en Portugal', *Lantern* 14(3), March 1965, pp. 102-103; C. Plokhoo, *Met den Mauser* (Gorinchem, 1901), p. 142.

¹⁸ O. Adendorff, 'In Portugal word soms nog Afrikaans gepraat', *Die Huisgenoot* 36(1566), 28-3-1952, p. 30; D. de Klerk, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

¹⁹ Transvaal Archives Depot (hereafter T.A.D.), Pretoria: S.O./P.O.W. 81 Prisoners of War in Portugal; J.A.F. de Almeida (ed.), *Tesouros Artísticos de Portugal* (Lisbon, 1976), p. 552.

²⁰ O.J.O. Ferreira, 'Verblyfplekke van die Boere-geïnterneerdes in Portugal, 1901-1902', *Restorica* 17, April 1985, p. 35.

²¹ *O Abrantes*, 5-5-1901: *O Jornal de Abrantes*, 26-5-1901.

²² T.A.D.: S.O./P.O.W. 81 Prisoners of War in Portugal; O.J.O. Ferreira, 'Verblyfplekke van die Boere-geïnterneerdes in Portugal, 1901-1902', *Restorica* 17, April 1985, p. 37.

²³ P.C. Jooste, 'Boere-krygsgevangenes in Portugal', *Die Huisgenoot* 26(973), 15-11-1940, p. 25; H.P. van Straten, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-84; I.H.R.: Dagboek van O.R. Belling, 22-4-1901, 12-5-1901, 16-8-1901, 12-3-1902.

²⁴ T.A.D.: S.O./P.O.W. 81 Prisoners of War in Portugal; O.J.O. Ferreira, 'Verblyfplekke van die Boere-geïnterneerdes in Portugal, 1901-1902', *Restorica* 17, April 1985, pp. 35-37.

²⁵ T.A.D.: S.O./P.O.W. 81 Prisoners of War in Portugal; M. Calado, *Peniche: na História e na Lenda* (N.p., 1984), p. 203.

²⁶ T.A.D.: S.O./P.O.W. 81 Prisoners of War in Portugal; *De Kerkbode* 20(48), 26-11-1903, pp. 583-584; O.J.O. Ferreira, 'Boerebannelinge in Portugal', *Die Taalgenoot* 59(6), June 1990, p. 22.

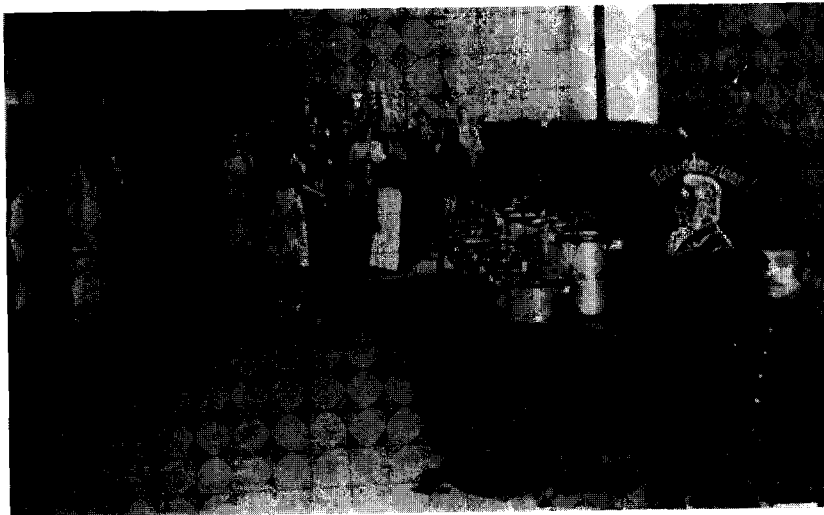
Life style

Far from their fatherland, the Boer internees had to adapt to a sympathetic but strange environment and strange conditions.

They were responsible for the cleanliness and neatness of their living quarters and their clothes. Initially there was no shortage of clothing, but with the onset of the winter towards the end of 1901 the need for warm clothes became apparent. Special committees which came into being in the Netherlands, France and Portugal collect clothes for the internees met these needs.²⁷

The Portuguese way of preparing food, and especially the over-generous use of olive oil did not suit Boer tastes and stomachs. They speedily requested the Portuguese authorities to give them raw meat, vegetables and fruit so that they could prepare the food for themselves [Figure 4]. Cooks who received a modest remuneration were appointed from their own ranks with the result that there were few complaints about food and drink.²⁸

The medical care of the Boers was entrusted by the Portuguese authorities to full-time medical officers. In each place of residence special



Boer internees in the kitchen, Caldas da Rainha. Note the sketch of Pres. Paul Kruger, State President of the Transvaal Republic

²⁷ J. Ploeger, 'Die geskiedenis van die gedenkteken te Lissabon ...', *Restorica* 10. Dec. 1981, p. 29; I.H.R.: *Dagboek van O.R. Belling*, 7-6-1901, 4-8-1901, 12-12-1901, 26-3-1902.

²⁸ C. Plokhooy, *op. cit.*, p. 143; D. de Klerk, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-36.



Boer internees in the hospital, Caldas da Rainha

apartments were set aside for the sick [Figure 5]. In Caldas da Rainha young Afrikaans girls helped to nurse women and children. Patients who were seriously ill were transferred for treatment to the Military Hospital near the Basilica da Estrêla in Lisbon.²⁹

Religious services were conducted with the permission of the Portuguese authorities. Great joy undoubtedly reigned when Revds. G.J. Hugo of Riebeeck West, P.B.J. Stofberg of Mochudi and A.G. du Toit of Prins Albert visited the internees, confirmed members, held services and administered the sacraments. Besides these three ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church, the Rev. J. Beijer, who was staying in the Netherlands, came to work amongst the internees.³⁰ There were many members of the Reformed Church who were less happy about the preaching of the Word by the ministers of other churches. In Alcobaça the leading Reformed member, Comdt. N.J. Grobler, founded the *Christeljk Bijbel Vereeniging* (Christian Bible Society) in August 1901, while the Rev. Stofberg was responsible for

²⁹ H.P. van Straten, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-71; O.J.O. Ferreira, 'Boeregeïnterneerdes in Portugal, 1901-1902', *Lantern* 37(1), Jan. 1988, p. 55.

³⁰ P.C. Jooste, 'Boere-krygsgevangenes in Portugal', *Die Huisgenoot* 20(973), 15-11-1940, p. 25; I.H.R.: *Dagboek van O.R. Belling*, 9-5-1901, 13-10-1901, 15-2-1902; W. Fouché, *Pieter Stofberg* (Cape Town, 1908), pp. 83-85; H.P. van Straten, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-78.

the founding of the *Christelike Strevers Vereening* (Christian Endeavour Society) at Caldas da Rainha.³¹

As regards education, there was a school with 171 pupils in Caldas da Rainha where J. de Bruyn, R.A. van Ouden and C. Plokhooy acted as teachers. In Alcobaça there was a "Boer-School" [Figure 6] where adult internees were instructed in several subjects, amongst them bookkeeping and French. In Peniche internees also made use of the opportunity to receive instruction, a privilege many of them had not enjoyed in their fatherland.³²

The Boer internees did not organize many leisure time activities although a few concerts were presented and enthusiastically supported by the Portuguese. Religious festivals were observed and on Christmas day 1901 the Portuguese women of Caldas da Rainha held a Christmas tree party for the Boer children.³³ The internees liked joining in the festivals of the Portuguese, but many of the Calvinists were averse to the "idolatry" practised during religious ceremonies. As the internees enjoyed considerable freedom of movement, long walks and excursions to the beach were popular. They often played cricket and football, while target shooting was a popular pastime. The presence of many donkeys in Portugal encouraged the young Boers to organize a donkey race. In Caldas da Rainha the internees could frequently attend bull fights. A few dexterous ones made trinkets, but this pastime was not practised on as large a scale as that found in the prisoner of war camps on St. Helena, Ceylon, the Bermuda's and in India.³⁴

The relationship between the Boer internees and the Portuguese authorities and people was generally very cordial. Plokhooy probably summed up the feelings of the majority of the internees when he wrote: "Life at Caldas da Rainha is certainly becoming pleasant, and who dares grumble about it grumbles without cause."³⁵ Under these circumstances it

³¹ I.H.R.: G/B.P. N.J. Grobler Collection: N.J. Grobler, Alcobaça - Mrs. S.H.F. Grobler, Johannesburg, 15-3-1902, 23-5-1902; W. Fouché, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-86; O.J.O. Ferreira, 'Boerebanneling in Portugal', *Die Taalgenoot* 59(7), July 1990, p. 10.

³² I.H.R.: Dagboek van O.R. Belling, 31-5-1901; H.P. van Straten, *op. cit.*, p. 120; V.C. Wood, 'Ons en Portugal', *Lantern* 14(3), March 1965, p. 103; D. de Klerk, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

³³ O.J.O. Ferreira, 'Avelino Belo (1872-1927), Portugese keramiekkunstenaar en bewonderaar van die Boere', *South African Journal of Cultural History* 6(1), Jan. 1992, p. 15.

³⁴ F.J.G. van der Merwe, *Sport en spel in die Boerekrygsgevangenekampe tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902* (Stellenbosch, 1992), pp. 129-130; H.P. van Straten, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-74, 91-93, 123-124, 131-132; D. de Klerk, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-38, 41, 48; I.H.R.: Dagboek van O.R. Belling, 20-9-1901, 18-1-1902.

³⁵ C. Plokhooy, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

was only natural that close friendships were formed, courting did not fail to take place and several marriages were in fact contracted [Figure 7].³⁶

Repatriation

Amongst the internees were those who, even before the formal conclusion of peace on 31 May 1902, took the "Oath of Loyalty" to the British crown. Shortly after the declaration of peace the Portuguese government agreed to hand over the internees, who were now regarded as British subjects, to the British government so that repatriation arrangements could be finalized. On 10 July 1902 the taking of the oath had been concluded and on 19 July 1902 the internees boarded the English man-of-war, the *Bavarian*, and left the harbour of Lisbon for South Africa. Foreigners amongst the internees were not allowed to return to South Africa and were referred to their respective consular representatives in Portugal. Gen. F.J. Pienaar refused to accompany his compatriots and in November 1902 he was still in Portugal.³⁷

The return voyage on board the *Bavarian* was uneventful. Only one passenger, a little girl, died at sea. The ship moored in Table Bay on 4 August 1902. The following day the men went ashore in Cape Town and were taken by train straight to Simonstown, where they were housed in the former Bellevue prisoner of war camp. There they were dismissed on 12 August 1902 and sent back to their pre-war homes, or temporarily to concentration camps in the vicinity of their homes. Women and children who could pay for their own keep and transport to their homes were also allowed to go ashore in Cape Town. The others were taken to Port Elizabeth on board the *Bavarian*; they landed there on 7 August and were housed in the local concentration camp until they could be taken to their homes. By 28 September 1902 all the internees had been united with their kinsfolk.³⁸

Erection of a monument

Thanks to the consideration with which the Boer internees were treated in Portugal only 14 of them died there and were laid to rest in the different

³⁶ K. Roodt, 'Boere-krygsgevangenekampe (in die Ooste en in Portugal)', *Die Huisgenoot* 15(1960), 16-8-1940, p. 23; D. de Klerk, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

³⁷ J. Ploeger, *Die lotgevalle van die burgerlike bevolking ...*, chap. 22, pp. 51-55.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, chap. 22, pp. 55-58; J.J. Roodt, *Die Port Elizabethse konsentrasiekamp, 1899-1902* (Unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Port Elizabeth, 1990), pp. 194-196.

local cemeteries. In 1912-1913 the government of the Union of South Africa had a central monument erected for them in the English cemetery of the St. George Church in Lisbon. The Portuguese stonemason H. Miguel Prazeres created the monument in red Portuguese marble. It is in the shape of an obelisk about five metres high and crowned by a cross. The inscriptions are in Dutch and English. During the unveiling ceremony conducted by two Anglican divines on 28 April 1913 **[Figure 8]** the British and Portuguese national anthems were played by a Portuguese military orchestra. In his speech the British representative in Lisbon, Sir Arthur Hardinge, pointed out that the deceased internees experienced the loneliness and boredom of exile until the bitter end and that they were buried far from their familiar homes in a friendly but foreign country.³⁹

³⁹ O.J.O. Ferreira, 'Eensame monument in die vreemde', *Die Taalgenoot* 40(9), Aug. 1971, pp. 6, 8; J. Ploeger, 'Die geskiedenis van die gedenkteken ter gedagtenis aan die heengegane Boeregeïnterneerdes in Portugal', *Restorica* 10, Dec. 1981, pp. 29-32, 45.