

## The Natal home front in the Great War (1914–1918)

*P.S. Thompson\**

Trafalgar Day, 1915 Durban Girls High School: “Assembled at 8 30 ‘The King’, ‘Eternal Father’, Prayers, ‘Hearts of Oak’, Short Address, ‘Battle Hymn of England’, Cheers for the King, our Navy and Allies, ‘Rule Britannia’ School closed at noon – Girls bought Red Cross Badges as they left school”<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

The Great War in Natal was chiefly the concern of the British community. The war effort in the province was entirely in the hands of English-speaking settler elite, which, as we shall see, displayed great diligence and zeal in the imperial cause. This is the thesis of this article on the Natal home front during the First World War. The article is also an assay of published sources on the topic. It is not a work of original research, but a survey of primary and secondary literature, which is remarkably sparse and fragmentary (as the notes will indicate) in spite of the significance of the subject, and therefore it marks a starting point for further research in the field on the eve of the centenary.<sup>2</sup>

### British colony / South African province

The European colonists of Natal were chiefly of British stock, and under the aegis of the mother country, by virtue of their education and ambition, they controlled the government and operation of the colony. Settler society reflected the class structure of the mother country, albeit modified by frontier circumstances. There was no aristocracy, and the working class was essentially a skilled and upwardly mobile force. The elite comprised large farmers and merchants, public servants and professional men, and their values and tastes were those of the British middle class. They identified completely with Britain and the British Empire.<sup>3</sup> Their support for Britain and the Empire in the Great War was instinctive.

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1 Quoted in S M Moran, “The First Hundred Years 1882–1982: Durban Girls’ Model School – Durban Girls’ High School” Typescript in Natal Society Library, n p , n d , p 61

2 In this literature I have included university theses, but have excluded newspapers. There were six important papers at the time, four in English, one in Afrikaans, and one in Zulu, and a survey of them is beyond the scope of this work. The reader will observe in due course that there appears to be nothing at all on certain aspects that have received attention in similar literature overseas, e g propaganda and morale, public morals and behaviour, religion, women. This is because there is nothing in the local literature as it touches Natal. What there is on other ethnic groups is very patchy.

3 See J Lambert, “‘The Last Outpost’: The Natalians, South Africa, and the British Empire”, in R Bickers (ed), *Settlers and Expatriates: Britons over the Seas* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010), pp 150–177; and P S Thompson, *The British Civic Culture of Natal, South Africa, 1902–1961* (Pietermaritzburg, self published, 1999), chapter 1

The British settlers were in fact a small minority of the population of Natal. According to the 1911 census the population was 1 194 043, of whom only 98 114 were Europeans (8,2%). The great majority of people – 953 398 (79,8%) were Africans, almost all of them Zulu-speakers, although only a minority of them lived in Zululand and considered themselves subjects of a Zulu king. There were also 133 420 (11,2%) Asiatics, comprising artisans, labourers and merchants of diverse origin.<sup>4</sup> The former, almost all Hindus, had come on indenture and remained afterwards. The merchants, almost all Muslims, had come of their own enterprise. Indian competition with Europeans in small trade and agriculture led to tensions, and Europeans brought pressure to bear for Indian repatriation. None the less, both Europeans and Indians realised that their position and safety on this African frontier depended upon the superiority of Britain.

The British colony had supplanted a republic of Dutch-speaking frontiersmen established in 1839. Most of the Dutch settlers had left the colony when the British took over, but a few remained, chiefly in the north. The British government extended the same rights and privileges to them as to Britons, but British settlers regarded them with some ambivalence. This continued after Natal became self-governing in 1893. The South African War had tilted this to distrust when the Dutch sympathised with their fellow Boers in the South African Republic and Orange Free State, and the feeling was aggravated afterwards when part of the former republic was annexed to Natal. Natal's British colonists were acutely aware of Britain's desire to reconcile Boer and Brit in a new dominion, the Union of South Africa, in which the Boers were a majority of the white population. They feared a recrudescence of republicanism, and wanted a federal state, but the other colonies wanted and got a unitary one.

Natal was the only colony that held a referendum – of the European electorate, of course – on whether or not to join the Union. The majority of those voting, including practically all the Afrikaners, as the former Dutch-speakers preferred to call themselves, voted for the Union, largely for reasons of economy and security; however, those voting against it and those not voting were the majority of the electorate. Thus the majority did not express themselves in support of the Union. It was as if they anticipated the worst. The *Natal Witness*, the leading newspaper in the capital Pietermaritzburg, appealed to Natal to remain “determined ... that [the Union] shall remain a British Dominion in which the worthiest traditions of the British races shall be maintained and handed down to their descendants”. During the elections to the first Union parliament, the paper warned Natalians not to forget that “whatever our South African nationhood may be, we are British first, and all the time”. More succinctly: “Be British and Stay British!”<sup>5</sup>

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4 According to the 1911 Census, the white population of Durban was 34 880, and that of Pietermaritzburg was 14 737. The two towns accounted for 50,6% of the province's white population of 98 114 (The next largest towns were Ladysmith with 2 287 and Newcastle with 1268.) See Union of South Africa, Union Office of Census and Statistics, *Official Year Book of the Union, No. 2, 1918* (Government Printer, Pretoria, n.d.), pp 153, 158–163, 188, 193. This edition contains mainly statistics for the period 1910–1917 (*Official Year Books* are cited hereafter as *OYB* with number and date.) See also M.H. Alsop, *The Population of Natal (Natal Regional Survey)*, 2 (Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1952), p 12.

5 See Thompson, *British Civic Culture*, chapter 1 and appendix; and P.S. Thompson, *Natalians First: Separatism in South Africa 1901–1961* (Southern, Johannesburg, 1990), chapters 1 and 2.

## Vindication of Empire

The outbreak of the war came as a surprise, even though war clouds had been gathering in Europe for a month.<sup>6</sup> When Britain went to war, so did the Empire, including the dominions, for the Crown was at war. The South African prime minister, Louis Botha, a respected Boer general and proponent of reconciliation, assured the British government that the South African government recognised its obligations. It would defend the Union and release the imperial garrison in the country.<sup>7</sup>

The atmosphere in Natal was tense with expectation. “A wonderful gathering” took place in the city gardens of Pietermaritzburg on the evening of 8 August, and the band of the Natal Carbineers played patriotic airs; “Natal Rings True”, headlined the *Witness*; and similar expressions of patriotic enthusiasm occurred in Durban as well as the capital.<sup>8</sup> Public meetings in both towns on 12 August pledged support to Britain and the Empire, and the mayors proceeded to launch relief funds for the purpose.<sup>9</sup>

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The quotations are in A J van Wyk, “Politieke Woelinge in Natal 1910–1915” (PhD thesis, University of the Orange Free State, 1977), pp 34–35 and 80

- 6 A Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (Macmillan, London, 1965), p 29, observes that British opinion “widely expected war as an eventual possibility, but not an immediate probability”
- 7 D W Krüger, *The Making of a Nation: A History of the Union of South Africa 1910–1961* (Macmillan, Johannesburg, 1969), pp 79–80; S B Spies, “South Africa and the First World War”, in B J Liebenberg and S B Spies (eds), *South Africa in the 20th Century* (Van Schaik, Pretoria, 1993), pp 93–95 See also “South Africa: Political Aspects of the War”, *The Round Table*, 5, 1914–1915, pp 219–230
- 8 J S Bettle, “Natalians and the Great War”, *A Century of Progress in Natal 1824–1924: The Centenary Number of “The Natal Witness”* (The newspaper, Pietermaritzburg, 1924), p 102
- 9 Corporation of the City and Borough of Pietermaritzburg, *Corporation Year Book for the Year Ending 31st July 1915* (Davis, Pietermaritzburg, 1915), p 33; Durban Corporation, *Mayor’s Minute with Departmental Reports, Appendices, and Balance Sheet for the Municipal Year Ended 31st July 1915* (Robinson, Durban, 1915), pp 1–2; Borough of Ladysmith, *Minute of His Worship the Mayor for the Corporate Year ending 31st July, 1915* (Budge, Ladysmith, 1915), p 8 These three annual publications are cited hereafter as PCYB, DMM and LMM, respectively See also Van Wyk, “Politieke Woelinge”, pp 258–259 According to B Nasson, “War Opinion in South Africa, 1914”, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 23, 2, 1995, pp 254, 255, the Natal Anglican Synod resolved not to express an opinion on the justice of the conflict but regarded it as a setback for Christian progress and unity; and the *Natal Witness* declared that the war would bring the white races closer together and bind them in future See also J Lambert, “Britishness, South Africanness, and the First World War”, in P Buckner and R D Francis (eds), *Rediscovering the British World* (University of Calgary Press, Calgary, 2005), pp 285 and 287, writes that “[t]he First World War was a defining event in the history of South Africa’s English-speaking community”, for it, “particularly the Somme offensive at Delville Wood in July 1916, gave English-speakers an intense pride in the role played by the Union of South Africa” However, it “could not have come at a worse time for the government Union was only four years old and a national sentiment had yet to evolve among whites” See also J Lambert, his “The Last Outpost”, pp 166–167, for the war period; and J Lambert, “South African British? Or Dominion South Africans? The Evolution of an Identity in the 1910s and 1920s”, *South African Historical Journal*, 43, 2000, pp 197–222 The most recent and comprehensive account of South Africa in the Great War is B Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme: South Africa in the Great War 1914–1918* (Penguin, Johannesburg, 2007), but it has little on Natal per se

The Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve in Durban was mobilised on 5 August.<sup>10</sup> Natal units of the South African Defence Force were called up on 8 August. The two regiments of Natal Carbineers assembled in Pietermaritzburg. “There was inevitably a note of suspense”, as the drums of the South Staffordshire Regiment sounded retreat outside the city hall on 12th August and the last imperial garrison left Fort Napier.<sup>11</sup> At Durban it was rumoured that the German light cruiser *Königsberg* was somewhere off the coast nearby, and the Durban Light Infantry, Natal Mounted Rifles, Naval Volunteer Reserves, and Field Artillery took up positions to secure the harbour. For several days stories of German spies, mysterious signals at night, and even strange aeroplanes caused alarms.<sup>12</sup> The infantry began a strenuous training programme to get in shape, and on 28 August was ordered away, the destination was secret – first to take the field against Afrikaner rebels and then against Germans in the northwest Cape.<sup>13</sup>

Because of the Indian agitation in the years before the war, it might seem surprising that the Asiatic population of South Africa would support the war effort, but it must be remembered that it was because of the British Empire that they were in South Africa, and they could look to it and the Indian government for assurance.<sup>14</sup> On 17 August 1914, Indians in Pietermaritzburg held a large meeting to express sympathy with Britain and to declare their readiness for active service if the government would make use of them. In Ladysmith and Newcastle there were similar demonstrations.<sup>15</sup> On 27 August the Natal Indian Association held a mass meeting in Durban, which resolved that “consideration of grievances has given way to the performance of duty to the empire”, and declared their readiness to serve in defence of the country.<sup>16</sup>

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10 Bettle, “Natalians and the Great War”, p 102

11 A F Hattersley, *Carbineer: The History of the Royal Natal Carbineers* (Gale & Polen, Aldershot, 1950), p 51 See also D Child, *Charles Smythe: Pioneer, Premier and Administrator of Natal* (Struik, Cape Town, 1973), pp 226–227

12 A C Martin, *The Durban Light Infantry* (The regiment, Durban, 1969), vol 1, pp 148–149; E Goetzsche, “*Rough but Ready*”: *An Official History of the Natal Mounted Rifles* (The regiment, Durban, n d), pp 134–135

13 Martin, *Durban Light Infantry*, vol 1, pp 149, 152–153

14 The Asiatic population of Natal according to the 1911 census was 133 439, comprising 80 490 males and 52 949 females (*OYB*, 2, 1918, p 188), of whom the great majority (perhaps 70%) lived in the greater Durban area (*OYB*, 2, 1918, pp 162–163) The Indian Immigration Act (1913) and Indian Relief Act (1914) may be viewed as modest gains, with prospects of better things to come See R A Huttenback, *Gandhi in South Africa: British Imperialism and the Indian Question, 1860–1914* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1971), pp 326–329 ) The representative Natal Indian Congress had fallen into desuetude with the departure of Gandhi See B Pachai, *The International Aspects of the South African Indian Question 1861–1971* (Struik, Cape Town, 1971), p 83 The Natal Indian Association was a relatively conservative Muslim body The so-called Indian question was pushed into the background during the war, and there seems to have been a tacit agreement that nothing should be done to exacerbate it On this see G H Calpin, *Indians in South Africa* (Shuter & Shooter, Pietermaritzburg, 1949), p 37

15 Van Wyk, “Politieke Woelinge”, pp 258, 260, 401, 410

16 G Vahed, “‘Give Till It Hurts’: Durban’s Indians and the First World War”, *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, 19, 2001, pp 43–44

“The Natives are a bit scared, naturally, seeing all the Defence Force turned out”, the administrator wrote to his sister.<sup>17</sup> Otherwise the African or native population seems to have evinced little or no interest in the European war. The recently established South African Native National Congress, in conference at Bloemfontein at the time of the outbreak, affirmed its loyalty to the King and Empire and pledged to suspend public criticism of the Union and the government and to desist from agitation against the 1913 Land Act. John Dube, its president, expressed the hope that the government would take Africans into its confidence and consider their welfare.<sup>18</sup>

The British government accepted Botha’s offer of military assistance at the outbreak of the war, but then asked if the Union would seize strategically important coastal installations in adjacent German South West Africa. Botha replied that he would cooperate with the imperial authorities in mounting an expedition for the purpose. Part of the Defence Force was mobilised and volunteers were called for service abroad, but the government must have the support of parliament for an invasion of German South West Africa.

Parliament met in special session on 9 September and voted for the invasion. The Afrikaners of the new National Party, which favoured isolationism and republicanism, condemned the expedition. Even those in Botha’s own South African Party were opposed to it, but Botha had his way with them. The Union and Labour parties sided with him. Parliament voted for the expedition. The commandant of the Defence Force, C.F. Beyers, who opposed intervention, resigned on 10 September, and the regional commander in the northwest Cape Province, Commandant S. Maritz crossed with his men into German South West and proclaimed the independence of the Union, setting off a rebellion among Afrikaners in parts of the Transvaal and Free State. The first public announcement of the rebellion was made on 26 October, and produced a great shock in the country.<sup>19</sup>

For the next three months the South African project against German South West Africa remained in suspense, because Botha had his hands full suppressing the rebellion. He did so by calling on loyal Afrikaners rather than the English, hoping to lessen the friction between the Dutch- and English-speaking sections.<sup>20</sup> None the less, an estimated 9 000 English troops took part.<sup>21</sup> On 10 December 1914 the prime minister announced that the rebellion had been crushed, and in February the invasion of German South West Africa began in earnest.<sup>22</sup>

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17 Child, *Smythe*, p 227

18 A Grundlingh, *Fighting their Own War: South African Blacks and the First World War* (Ravan, Johannesburg, 1987), pp 12–13 Grundlingh is the main source on African involvement in the war, but he has relatively little on Natal S Marks, *The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa: Class, Nationalism, and the State in Twentieth-Century Natal* (Ravan, Johannesburg, 1986) has little to say about the war See also Nasson, “War Opinion in South Africa”, pp 268–272

19 J Meintjes, *General Louis Botha: A Biography* (London, Cassell, 1970) p 239 See also Krüger, *Making of a Nation*, pp 81–88 For local press attacks on the Afrikaner opposition, see Van Wyk, “Politieke Woelinge”, pp 259, 267–269, 273, 275; and Child, *Smythe*, pp 229–230

20 Krüger, *Making of a Nation*, pp 79–89; Meintjes, *Botha*, pp 221–225

21 Lambert, “Britishness”, p 290

22 Meintjes, *Botha*, p 273

British patriotic zeal found a local target in the communities of German settlers and the missions of German churches in the province. These were well established and most of the settlers were British subjects. It was natural that they had some sympathy with Germany, and the government accepted this, just as long as it was muted and did not detract from the war effort. In Natal, with jingoism ascendant, Germans kept a low profile. Those who served in the Defence Force were exempted from service abroad.<sup>23</sup>

The South African government interned German nationals, but exempted an appreciable number, especially clergy, on their good behaviour. Men were treated as prisoners of war, for many of them were liable for military service at home, but women and children were treated as refugees. The government concentrated them at Fort Napier, in Pietermaritzburg. (An imperial garrison had vacated the fort when the war began.) Local jingoism complained, but businessmen saw a good thing, and local German settlers were quite prepared to help hapless ethnic kin. The women and children were sent to Pretoria early in 1915, and only the men remained. About 2 500 Germans were interned at Pietermaritzburg during the war. British guidelines were followed and the internees were relatively well treated.<sup>24</sup>

This was not the case for certain businessmen in the major towns of South Africa, many of whom were victimised by angry mobs following the sinking of the British liner *Lusitania* in the Irish Sea by a German submarine on 7 May 1915. In Durban on the nights of 13 and 14 May the rioters burnt and looted offices and shops, doing more injury to non-Germans than Germans, and property damages amounted to £201 764. Similar violence in Pietermaritzburg on the evening of 13 May cost £38 564. There were demonstrations but no destruction in a number of smaller centres. The municipal authorities did not come out of it well at all. In Durban, police and marines finally stopped the mob by threatening to shoot it – on the second night. The better class of people condemned the mobs, but did not support the government's attempts to prosecute their leaders. The demonstrations were obviously organised, but the organisers were not publicly identified and punished.<sup>25</sup>

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23 The most comprehensive work on the subject is G G Bruss, "The Impact of the First World War on the German Communities of Natal", MA thesis, University of Natal (Durban), 1981. On reactions at the outbreak of the war, see, among others, pp 59, 61–63, 65, 68–72, 78–90, 99. Also see Child, *Smythe*, pp 226, 236; Van Wyk, "Politieke Woelinge", pp 290, 302–303; V Stiebel, *South African Childhood* (Deutsch, London, 1968), p 26; and A J du Plessis, *The Umvoti Mounted Rifles 1864–1975* (The regiment, Greytown, 1975), p 117.

24 Bruss, "Impact of the First World War", pp 106–109, 138, 140–144, 152–153; for the administration of the camps, see pp 111–131. On the experience of the women and children from South West Africa, see H Brodersen-Mann, *Wie Alles Anders Kam in Afrika* (Kuiseb, Windhoek, 1997), pp 17–41. See also Earl Buxton, *General Louis Botha* (Murray, London, 1924), p 266; Martin, *Durban Light Infantry*, vol 1, p 193; PCYB, 1916, p 28; Van Wyk, "Politieke Woelinge", p 290; and L W F Grundlingh, "Die Engelssprekende Suid-Afrikaners se Reaksie op die Uitbreek van die Eerste Wêreld Oorlog, 1914–1915", MA dissertation, University of the Orange Free State, 1977, p 213.

25 Bruss, "Impact of the First World War", pp 179–181, 184, 186–190; Van Wyk, "Politieke Woelinge", pp 290, 292, 295–301, 304–307, 310–311, 321–322; Grundlingh, "Engelssprekende Suid-Afrikaners", pp 225, 227, 234–237, 248–249, 266, 269; L W F Grundlingh, "'n Aspek van

On 12 July 1915 the Minister of Defence, General Smuts, issued a general order announcing the conquest of the territory as the first achievement of a united South African nation.<sup>26</sup> Altogether 2 912 members of the Active Citizen Force and 993 Veteran Reservists from Natal (the Durban and Pietermaritzburg military districts) were on active service between 4 August 1914 and 24 August 1915,<sup>27</sup> and the prime minister received the plaudits of Natal for quelling the rebellion and conquering South West.<sup>28</sup> Botha called upon the electorate for a mandate to continue the war, and on 29 October 1915 the Union's second parliamentary election took place.<sup>29</sup>

In Natal, a weak South African Party had put off its annual congress in 1914, and belatedly rallied to Botha's firm stand on the war. The opposition Union Party could be counted on to support the war in any case. The main newspapers – the *Witness* in Pietermaritzburg and the *Mercury* and *Advertiser* in Durban – favoured cooperation between the two parties, and at least in Durban they worked together to avoid three-way contests with Labour.<sup>30</sup> Labour put up candidates for five Durban seats and one in Pietermaritzburg. The Labour candidates were sound on the war, although their opponents still cast suspicion upon them, but the party's radicalism and urban working-class base limited their appeal.<sup>31</sup>

The National Party (NP), though still with a small number of supporters, was making inroads in Natal. They put up candidates in the Klip River (Ladysmith), Newcastle, Vryheid and Zululand divisions, testing the water, and in the Umvoti (Greytown) division, which they actually thought they could win. In the Dundee division they supported the Labour candidate.<sup>32</sup>

The election was a victory for Botha, although the bitter contest among Afrikaners turned more of them to the NP ranks and made him more dependent on the Unionists. In the new parliament the South African Party held 54 seats, the Unionists 40, the Nationalists 27 and Labour only 4. (There were six Independents.) In Natal, only

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Blanke Suid-Afrikaanse Groepsverhoudinge tydens die Eerste Wêreld Oorlog: Anti-Duitse Opstande, Mei 1915", *South African Historical Journal*, 12, 1980, pp 71, 73, 79, 82; Child, *Smythe*, p 234; T Wilks, *For the Love of Natal: The Life and Times of the Natal Mercury 1852–1977* (Robinson, Pinetown, 1977), pp 146–147; DMM, 1915, p 18; PCYB, 1915, passim

26 Van Wyk, "Politieke Woelinge", p 261

27 *OYB*, 2, 1918, p 374

28 DMM, 1915, p 2; PCYB, 1915, p 23; PCYB, 1916, pp 29–30; Van Wyk, "Politieke Woelinge", p 261

29 Buxton, *General Louis Botha*, p 258; Krüger, *Making of a Nation*, p 102

30 Van Wyk, "Politieke Woelinge", pp 342–346; E H Brookes and C de B Webb, *A History of Natal* (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1965), p 268 See also Child, *Smythe*, p 238

31 Van Wyk, "Politieke Woelinge", pp 345–346; T Boydell, *My Luck Was In* (n p, Durban, n d), p 123; M Kentridge, *I Recall: Memoirs of Morris Kentridge* (Free Press, Johannesburg, 1959), p 58

32 Van Wyk, "Politieke Woelinge", pp 243–250, 263–264, 267–270, 282–287, 315–316, 323–34, 345–361; and A J Van Wyk, "E G Jansen en die Verkiesing van 1915", *South African Historical Journal*, 6, 1974, pp 74–87; A T Spies, "Geschiedenis van die Nasionale Party in Natal", in H Reitz and H Oost (eds), *Die Nasionale Boek: 'n Geskiedenis van die Ontstaan en Groei van die Nasionale Party van Suid-Afrika* (Nasionale Boek Maatskappy, Johannesburg, 1930), p 97

seventeen seats were at stake. Three were uncontested (Durban Berea and Victoria County for Unionists, Umzimkulu for the South African Party). The South African Party won eleven contested seats, and the Unionists two (both in Durban). The NP and Labour lost every contest, except Durban Greyville, the stronghold of the Labour leader, Tommy Boydell.<sup>33</sup>

“Never has the Premier of a self-governing country obtained a more explicit vote of confidence or a clearer mandate than are expressed in the response to General Botha’s appeal to the country”, declared the *Mercury*. “The question at issue was his attitude towards the Empire, and this attitude has been endorsed.”<sup>34</sup>

Vindication in politics was matched by expansion of the economy, and Natal prospered. Initially the war dislocated the South African economy, but very soon the economy adapted with import substitution and expanded to meet the demands of the Allied war effort.<sup>35</sup> In Natal the coal and sugar industries did very well,<sup>36</sup> and Durban became an industrial town as well as the leading port of the Union.<sup>37</sup> Skilled white labour did well, too. Employers were indulgent, and strikes practically ceased. Indians and Africans found new jobs. Unemployment was not a problem,<sup>38</sup> but inflation was – retail

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- 33 Krüger, *Making of a Nation*, pp 103–104; Spies, “South Africa and the First World War”, pp 128–129; Van Wyk, “Politieke Woelinge”, p 354 See also Union of South Africa, *Government Gazette* No 693 (5 November 1915), p 283; Government Notice No 1196 (2 November 1915) The returns are also in *The Natal Witness*, 23–25 October 1915
- 34 Quoted in Van Wyk, “Politieke Woelinge”, p 370
- 35 Spies, “South Africa and the First World War”, p 120; “South Africa: The Session”, *Round Table*, 8, 1917–1918, p 871; Bruss, “Impact of the First World War”, p 43; Child, *Smythe*, p 226; N Hurwitz, *Agriculture in Natal 1860–1950* (Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1957), p 18
- 36 On coal, see H Heydenrych and P A du Plooy, “Railway Development in Natal 1910–1929”, in B Guest and J M Sellers (eds), *Receded Tides of Empire: Aspects of the Economic and Social History of Natal and Zululand since 1910* (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1994), p 59; and A Lumby and I McLean, “The Economy and the Development of the Port of Durban”, in Guest and Sellers (eds), *Receded Tides*, p 34 On sugar see P M Dickinson, “The South African Sugar Industry 1910–1940”, in Guest and Sellers (eds), *Receded Tides*, p 158; Hurwitz, *Agriculture in Natal*, p 45; and G R Hammond, *South African Cane Growers’ Association: The First 50 years 1927–1977* (The association, Durban, 1977), pp 20–31 See also M Katzen, *Industry in Greater Durban, Part I: Its Growth and Structure* (Town and Regional Planning Commission, Pietermaritzburg, 1961), p 124, on Natal cane by-products
- 37 Katzen, *Industry in Greater Durban*, pp 43, 52 61–62, 64, 79, 110, 117; L E Neame, *Fifty Years of Progress: The Development of Industry in Natal 1905–1955* (Natal Chamber of Industries, Durban, 1956), pp 27–29; M Addleson, “An Overview of the Growth of Manufacturing in Natal”, in Guest and Sellers (eds), *Receded Tides*, p 143 See also Bureau of Census and Statistics, *Union Statistics for Fifty Years. Jubilee Issue 1910–1960* (n p, n d) (hereafter *Union Statistics*), p 12; *OYB*, 2, 1918, pp 527, 529, 543–544; *OYB*, 4 1921, pp 650, 651, 661; H G Ringrose, *Trade Unions in Natal (Natal Regional Survey)*, vol 4 (Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1951), p 16; DMM, 1915, p 4; DMM, 1917, p 1; Child, *Smythe*, pp 228, 231, 244
- 38 Ringrose, *Trade Unions in Natal*, p 16 A Factory Act and a Regulation of Wages Act, modelled on the British legislation of 1909, were passed in 1918 On this, see “South Africa: The Session”, *Round Table* 8, 1917–1918, p 871 On Indian unionisation in 1917, see Vahed, “Give Till it Hurts”, p 58; PCYB, 1917, p 10; PCYB, 1919, p 10; Neame, *Fifty Years of Progress*, p 26; *OYB*, 2, 1918, p 535; *OYB*, 4, 1921, p 655 See also Hurwitz, *Agriculture in Natal*, p 48; A de V Minnaar, *uShukela: A History of the Growth and Development of the Sugar Industry in Zululand: 1915 to the Present* (HSRC, Pretoria, 1992), p 90; and Grundlingh, *Fighting their Own War*, p 48



prices rose 38% in Durban between 1914 and 1918<sup>39</sup> – and there was much complaining about the cost of living; but inflation was largely imported and the government could do little about it. Wages lagged behind prices, and the Durban and Pietermaritzburg municipalities topped theirs up with “war bonuses”.<sup>40</sup>

In 1916 the government appointed a cost-of-living commission, when the prices of essential items had risen 23 per cent above pre-war, and gave it price fixing powers, which it applied with some success in the case of rice and sugar,<sup>41</sup> but there was no rationing such as occurred in Europe and the US. In 1918, lack of shipping threatened to reduce the importation of Australian wheat with which the Union eked out its own supply. The government did not fix the price or ration bread, but ordered that barley, maize or rye flour be mixed with wheat flour.<sup>42</sup> Schoolboys at Merchiston in Pietermaritzburg ate “Burton bread” and had no bacon for a while,<sup>43</sup> as did presumably others, but there were no serious shortages of food, whatever the price. The government levied a supertax on incomes in 1917.<sup>44</sup> The government took custody of businesses and missions controlled by German nationals, and a British Citizens Movement, urging buy-British (or Allied, second best) received municipal support in 1916–1917.<sup>45</sup> Thus patriots made a virtue of necessity.

39 *Union Statistics*, H-23; and *OYB*, 5, 1922, p 327

40 C G W Schumann, *Structural Changes and Business Cycles in South Africa 1806–1936* (P S King, London, 1938), pp 259–262, 275, 285–287 See also *Union Statistics*, H-15, 22 and 27; *OYB*, 2, 1918, p 538; *OYB*, 4, 1921, pp 656, 659; *OYB*, 5, 1922, pp 327, 335, 341; *PCYB*, 1917, pp 9–10; *PCYB*, 1918, pp 20, 26; *PCYB*, 1919, p 10; *DMM*, 1917, pp 4, 9 On charges that certain Indian merchants were profiteering, see K Hiralal, “The Impact of the First World War on the Indian Commercial Class in Natal”, *Historia*, 46, 2, 2002, pp 433–434; Vahed, “Give Till it Hurts”, pp 56–57 The war probably exacerbated the existing commercial jealousy between whites and Indians See and Hiralal, “Indian Commercial Class”, pp 436–439; J Brain, “An Economic Transformation: The Indian Community in Natal”, in Guest and Sellers (eds), *Receded Tides*, p 204, and the demographic data in *OYB*, 2, 1918, pp 158–159

41 The Price Control Commission’s (Cost of Living) Powers Act, No 6 of 1918, authorised it to inquire into and report and advise the government on the cost of living and related matters (*OYB*, 2, 1918, p 361) On rice, see Hiralal, “Indian Commercial Class”, pp 430–432, and Vahed, “Give Till it Hurts”, pp 54–55; on sugar, see R F Osborn, *Valiant Harvest: The Founding of the South African Sugar Industry 1848–1926* (South African Sugar Association, Durban, 1964), pp 106–108; and Minnaar, *uShukela*, pp 7–8 A bill to regulate rents failed to pass, see “South Africa: The Session”, *Round Table*, 8, 1917–1918, pp 872, 874

42 “South Africa: The Session”, *Round Table*, 8, 1917–1918, p 873; Spies, “South Africa and the First World War”, p 121 The Wheat Consolidation Act, No 17 of 1918, aimed to protect the country’s wheat stock (*OYB*, 2, 1918, p 32)

43 A F Hattersley, *Merchiston: A South African School 1892–1953* (Balkema, Cape Town, 1953), p 32

44 The Income Tax (Consolidation) and Income Tax Acts, No 41 of 1917, and No 26 of 1918 See *OYB*, 1, 1918, pp 130, 132, 681 There were 5 000 individuals and 177 companies which were taxpayers in Natal as of 30 June 1916 Their taxable incomes were £4 214 336 and £1 468 863, respectively, and their tax liabilities were £180 263 and £125 846, respectively (*OYB*, 1, 1918, p 683) According to Neame, *Fifty Years of Progress*, p 28, the government introduced an income tax in 1915 and reduced the number of exemptions in 1916, but *OYB*, 1, 1918, pp 123–127, 135, mention no such legislation See also Spies, “South Africa and the First World War”, p 269

45 Bruss, “Impact of the First World War”, pp 91–97; *PCYB*, 1916, p 32; *DMM*, 1917, pp 26–27 See also *OYB*, 2, 1918, p 126 for the legislation See also Nasson, “War Opinion in South Africa”, p 269

## Funds and fund raising

Private organisations emerged to carry on charitable work associated with the war effort. The Union of South Africa, a new state whose social agencies were still undeveloped (or non-existent) provided oversight and direction, but otherwise relied on private initiative to provide for the welfare and comforts of those in service and their dependents. The importance of voluntarism in sustaining morale should not be overrated, and in these patriotic duties the Natal elite excelled. Unfortunately, no complete figures of contributions for the province have been found.<sup>46</sup> Certain amounts appear piecemeal in the literature, and these give an impression of generous contributions by individuals and institutions.

In South Africa there were various patriotic societies with strong British and imperial interests. They included the British Empire League, the Navy League, the Victoria League, and the Patriotic League, as well as the ethnic Caledonian and Cambrian societies, Irish Association, and Sons of England. They did much good work, especially in raising money, but “in tone they were jingoistic, often even racist”, which “made them deeply offensive to most Afrikaners”. Particularly so was the British League, founded in 1915, which was in the forefront of anti-German campaigns in the Union.<sup>47</sup> Yet their contributions to the war effort were essentially moral, not material. Material support came from ad-hoc organisations, which appeared immediately the war began.

The mayor of Pietermaritzburg stated in his annual Minute for 1916–1917 that “a duty rests upon the community to see than no dependents [of men in service] are called upon to suffer avoidable privation in consequence of the loss or injury of those upon whom they had to depend”.<sup>48</sup> Within a few days of the outbreak of the war the mayors of Pietermaritzburg, Durban and Ladysmith launched “war relief funds” under local committees and all seem to have been generously subscribed.<sup>49</sup>

In the winter of 1914, people did not know that the war would last a long time, but by the summer of 1914–1915 they realised that it was not going to end soon. Meanwhile, the need to rationalise funds and fund raising on a national scale resulted in war charity being divided among three major agencies. The Governor-General’s Fund was considered the most important fund in the Union.

The Governor-General’s Fund was proposed in August 1914. On his arrival in South Africa, the new governor-general, Viscount Buxton, became chairperson of the central committee and executive sub-committee. The object of the fund was “to relieve any distress caused to persons who have been called out, or who have volunteered, in the service of His Majesty during the War, or to their dependents resident in the Union”. Any soldier or his dependent could apply for assistance. A local committee or magistrate

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46 Bettle, “Natalians and the Great War”, p 106 suggests that none were available, at least in 1924

47 Lambert, “Britishness”, pp 228–229

48 PCYB, 1917, p 18

49 PCYB, 1915, p 22; DMM, 1915, p 3; LMM, 1915, pp 8–9

would make an inquiry, and a monthly or other grant would be made accordingly. Grants to dependents of men on active service were usually a monthly addition to income.

In order to ensure that the fund was truly national and administered uniformly and economically the central committee sought to consolidate all other funds having the same purpose. The local units were necessary for dispensation, and by 1917 about 120 local committees operated throughout the country, financed by monthly grants from the fund. Many simply raised subscriptions. About 50 also considered applications and gave relief.<sup>50</sup> Thus, the Governor-General's Fund incorporated local war relief funds – Ladysmith's at the end of 1914, and Pietermaritzburg's and Durban's in August 1915. The governor-general promoted the fund on tour and appealed for contributions to raise it to £1 million.<sup>51</sup>

There were two other national bodies contributing to the war effort with branches in Natal, the Gifts and Comforts Organisation and the Red Cross. The South Africa Gifts and Comforts Organisation Committee was appointed by the prime minister "to coordinate, assist, and direct all public efforts in South Africa which are not covered by the work performed by the Governor-General's Fund and the Red Cross Society", viz. to supply gifts and comforts for the use of South African forces in Europe and Africa, and, if possible, for other imperial forces as well. The central committee was in Cape Town, and there were branches in all the provinces. In Natal, the Women's Patriotic League, with headquarters in Pietermaritzburg and Durban, agreed to act as the provincial branch. The provision of comforts was systematised and provincial branches were allocated responsibilities. Monthly supplies of tobacco and cigarettes, large consignments of socks, mufflers, handkerchiefs, woollen waistcoats, mitts, and the like, as well as quantities of matches, dried fruits, sweets, and other items were provided.<sup>52</sup>

The South African Red Cross Society induced the military authorities to seek its assistance and that of the medical profession.<sup>53</sup> On 21 August 1914 the society made a press appeal for public help "to carry out works of relief for the sick and wounded in war". Its Durban committee, chaired by a member of the executive committee of the provincial council, conducted an auction sale which brought in approximately £3 000 for the central committee in England. The owners of the *Mercury* acted as honorary

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50 *OYB*, 2, 1918, pp 361–362 The total expenditure of the fund as of 30 September 1920, was £2 309 206, of which £2 090 540 had been spent on relief; a balance of £939 409 remained (*OYB*, 4, 1921, p 431) The War Special Provisions Act, No 29, 1916 (amended in No 43 of 1917 and No 25 of 1918) gave pensionable benefits to those wounded or injured or incurring ill-health on active service as well as to dependents of those who died in service. Bettle, "Natalians and the Great War", p 108, claims that a sum of somewhat in excess of £80 000 was collected in four years (of which £45 357 was raised in Pietermaritzburg) by the Women's Patriotic League, apparently (it is not quite clear) for the Governor-General's Fund

51 *DMM*, 1916, pp 3, 8–9; *LMM*, 1915, p 9; *PCYB*, 1915, p 27; *PCYB*, 1917, p 19

52 Union of South Africa, General Staff, Defence Headquarters, *The Union of South Africa and the Great War 1914–1918: Official History* (Government Printer, Pretoria, 1924) (hereafter *Official History*), pp 223–224; P Ward, "Empire and the Everyday: Britishness and Imperialism in Women's Lives in the Great War", in Buckner and Francis (eds), *Rediscovering the British World*, p 275; *PCYB*, 1916, p 30; *DMM*, 1915, p 4; *LMM*, 1916, p 11; and *LMM*, 1919, pp 8, 10

53 *Official History*, p 223

treasurers of the Red Cross Fund and worked to raise a large sum of money which was also forwarded to British Red Cross. A Natal Branch of the society was formally inaugurated on 10 February 1916.<sup>54</sup> Appeals were made at the provincial level, in the case of Natal by the Women's Patriotic League, which formed a subcommittee. The Red Cross supplied stores and equipment as well as comforts to military hospitals and to ambulance units, in South Africa and also in South West and East Africa.<sup>55</sup>

The remarkable expansion of fund-raising and relief work in 1915 is indicative of the greater war effort, reflecting the service of more and more men outside the Union. As the mayor of Durban wrote in his Minute:

The war has overshadowed all our Municipal activities; it has influenced the decisions of the Council on many important matters, and it has adversely affected our revenue. On the other hand, the war has aroused the dormant patriotism of the Burgesses, and the record of Durban's response to every call upon its resources is one of which we may well be proud.<sup>56</sup>

The rationalisation of fund raising may have reduced inefficiency in the process, but it did not reduce the work. Indeed, it enabled expansion of the work. As we have seen, committees were established by town councils to take charge of fund raising for the various war-related causes. The members of these committees are represented in the mayors' minutes as hard-working and tireless patriots; however, they had other occupations and duties as well. The names of all were English or at least recognisably British. In Durban, the merger of the Mayor's War Relief Fund with the Governor-General's Fund in 1915 resulted in a proliferation of committees.<sup>57</sup> The Governor-General's Fund had four separate committees in Durban by 1918 – the Executive and ones for Relief, Collecting, and Returned Soldiers and Reception. The mayor chaired the Executive and Relief Committees, which consisted many of the leading men of the town. The Collecting Committee comprised the chairpersons of the more important business

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54 DMM, 1915, p 3; DMM, 1916, p 7

55 *Official History*, p 223 The Red Cross Fund in Durban had brought in £34 378, as much as £11 744 during the third year alone. See DMM, 1917, p 5

56 DMM, 1915, p 1 Municipalities also made contributions in their own right, e.g. Pietermaritzburg spent £648 on entertaining passing troops and miscellaneous war items in 1916–1917. Ladysmith contributed £355 to its own War Relief Fund in 1915–1916 and £355 in 1916–1917. See LMM, 1916, p 12; and LMM, 1917, p 13. Durban made “the somewhat unusual step of investing in the great ‘War Loan’ a sum of £50 000” in 1917. It also gave troops the privilege of free bathing; set aside the large open-air swimming bath at the beach for their exclusive use, and established Soldiers' Huts and Rests. See DMM, 1917, pp 3, 5; LMM, 1919, p 9. It gave the Defence Force a site on the Marine Parade for an Imperial Rest Camp, through which thousands of troops passed en route to the front (DMM, 1917, p 3). It was at these places that the Women's Patriotic League provided for the comfort and welfare of several thousand soldiers passing through Durban en route to Europe and East Africa (DMM, 1916, p 7). For similar provision in Pietermaritzburg, see PCYB, 1918, p 27. The prime minister wrote to the mayor in August 1916, thanking the town council “for consistently letting its actions be governed by patriotic motives, even when such an attitude may have as its result considerable inconvenience if not pecuniary losses” (DMM, 1917, p 2). There were many other funds besides the major ones named here.

57 DMM, 1916, p 4. In Durban the subsequent amalgamation of the several war funds led to one Local War Relief Committee in charge.

organisations.<sup>58</sup> The municipalities provided for the collections of monies and the dispensing of comforts and refreshments, but the actual task of fund raising and serving depended on volunteers. Able-bodied men offered their lives. Other men offered money and time. Women offered time.<sup>59</sup> Many women threw themselves into war work with energy and zeal, notably those of the Women’s Patriotic League. The British Women’s Patriotic League existed before the war.<sup>60</sup> A branch was established in Natal during the first few weeks of the war, and appears in the literature as a flourishing organisation.<sup>61</sup>

“When the full story of Durban’s contribution to the War comes to be written, the work of the Women’s Patriotic League should form a prominent feature of the public spiritedness which has actuated our Burgesses throughout the momentous period”, wrote the mayor in 1916.<sup>62</sup> In Durban the league, led by wives of the elite, expanded its membership in order to coordinate all works for the benefits of soldiers. The league provided clothing and comforts to the troops in the first year and sent parcels to the various theatres of war. They dispensed hospitality to thousands of soldiers and sailors who passed through the town on the way to Europe and East Africa, and when the municipality entertained soldiers from abroad in transit, the league provided refreshments at short notice.<sup>63</sup> The Returned Soldiers and Reception Committee of the Durban Branch of the Governor-General’s Fund in 1918 had nine women and eight men. There appears to have been no chairperson (unlike the other three committees), only the male secretary, who acted as such for all four of the fund committees. The Red Cross Natal Branch in 1918 consisted (except the secretary) entirely of women – the Durban sub-committee appears to have been the local branch of the Women’s Patriotic League.<sup>64</sup>

The mayor of Pietermaritzburg similarly recorded his thanks to the ladies of the league for dispensing refreshments provided by the municipality to troops passing through the city on trains at all hours, day and night. Every train was met, and the ladies offered refreshments, fruit, cigarettes and the like to the men. The city council could not provide the league with free accommodation, as did other South African towns, so it granted them £10 per month for the rental of private premises and their expenses.<sup>65</sup> As the war went on, prolonging their task, the mayor carefully thanked the patriotic

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- 58 *The Natal Almanac Directory and Yearly Register 1918* (Davis, Pietermaritzburg, 1917), p 164  
The fund organisation is not given in the previous directories
- 59 There is a sizeable body of literature on British women in the war, and it is fair to suppose that the middle-class women in Britain and South Africa shared the same motives and sought similar outlets. See Lambert, “Britishness”, p 293; and Ward, “Empire and the Everyday”, pp 268, 269, 273, 274, 277
- 60 Ward, “Empire and the Everyday”, p 272
- 61 Bettie, “Natalians and the Great War”, p 106 Yet the only mention of it in the *Natal Directories* is in that for 1918, p 796
- 62 DMM, 1916, p 7
- 63 DMM, 1915, p 3; DMM, 1916, p 7; DMM, 1917, p 5 Bettie, “Natalians and the Great War”, p 106, states that an estimated three million servicemen passed through the port during the war: “The place was always a hive of khaki-clad activity, and a pleasant resting spot on the way to and from the world fronts of the war ”
- 64 *Natal Directory 1918*, pp 164, 165
- 65 PCYB, 1916, p 9; PCYB, 1917, p 22; PCYB, 1918, p 27

committees and leagues, and the mayoress and many ladies who helped in street collections and other events.<sup>66</sup> The mayor of Durban did likewise.<sup>67</sup>

Subscriptions made as a result of appeals and advertisements in the press was one source of funds. Another source was the street collection, which soon became commonplace. “Every Saturday witnesses a street collection in aid of one or another of these Funds, and the untiring energy and devotion of the lady collectors – than whom none work harder in these good causes – ensures substantial additions to the Funds”, wrote the mayor of Durban in 1917.<sup>68</sup>

In Pietermaritzburg, street collections became so numerous that the mayor found it impossible to give details in this Minute of 1915–1916. Since the Governor-General’s Fund was considered most important, it was permitted to hold street collections on the first Saturday of every month. Not only were there street collections but house-to-house collections, and by 1917 the city council decided that further street collections must have its approval and two collections per month were sufficient. It proved impossible to restrict street collections to two per month, and almost every Saturday had its collection. Patriotic groups competed with the local benevolent society and city orphanage for funds, to the disadvantage of the latter, and street collections enabled redress. In the first half of 1918 there were only three Saturdays without a collection.<sup>69</sup>

Schools seem to have been a ready source of funds. Fund raising encouraged patriotism and self-sacrifice among the young.<sup>70</sup> In October 1914 an interschool athletics

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66 PCYB, 1917, p 22; PCYB, 1918, p 29; PCYB, 1919, pp 25, 27 Also see Bettle, “Natalians and the Great War”, p 106

67 DMM, 1915, pp 3, 4; DMM, 1917, pp 4, 5 Press censorship deprived him of opportunities to acknowledge the work of the league, he said – presumably because to do so would divulge information about troop movements (DMM, 1917, p 2) There is practically nothing in the literature about censorship per se, and the only other reference found is in Bettle, “Natalians and the Great War”, p 102 The mayor of Ladysmith also was careful to praise them (LMM, 1916, p 11; LMM, 1919, p 10) Women’s activity in the war effort was not limited to the larger centres, if Richmond is taken as an example See S W B Shepstone (compiler), *A History of Richmond Natal from 1839 to 1937* (John Singleton & Williams, Durban, 1937), p 50 Since there was no conscription of men for the armed forces there was no corresponding replacement of their labour with that of women, as occurred in Britain and other European belligerents However, it is interesting to note that in Durban in 1917 the corporation found, with over 20 members of the borough police absent on active service, that it needed to appoint special constables About 300 persons offered their services In June 1917, the town council agreed to appoint women police to supervise districts in which white families lived near African or Indian habitations, and to deal with cases arising under the Children’s Protection Act Two were appointed as an experiment (DMM, 1917, pp 2, 27) Unfortunately, the lack of DMMs for 1918 and 1919 means we do not know whether the venture was a success and more were appointed For the Women’s Police Service and Patrols in Britain, see A Marwick, *Women at War 1914–1918* (Imperial War Museum, London, 1977), pp 81–82 and 117; and G Braybon and P Summerfield, *Out of the Cage: Women’s Experiences in Two World Wars* (Pandora, London, 1987), pp 45 and 109–110 )

68 DMM, 1917, p 4

69 PCYB, 1916, p 32; PCYB, 1917, p 19; PCYB, 1918, pp 26, 28

70 Ward, “Empire and the Everyday”, p 271, mentions a Boys’ and Girls’ League of South Africa, which encouraged “a sacrifice of a child’s personal property” through regular collections “for the

meting involving Maritzburg College, Durban High School, Hilton College and Weenen County College raised £46 which was split between the Mayor’s War Relief Fund and Women’s Patriotic League, and this became a practice thereafter.<sup>71</sup> Boys at Merchiston School in the capital were invited to surrender prizes and contribute to war funds.<sup>72</sup> The Berg Street School raised money for the Governor-General’s Fund directly and by concerts and produce sales, and bought a bed for the South African Military Hospital at Richmond Park, London, from the proceeds of a school fête.<sup>73</sup> Estcourt School staff subscribed a portion of their salary monthly to the Governor-General’s Fund. In 1917, a concert raised £20 for the Gift and Comforts organisation. Eggs were collected every month and sent to hospitals for the wounded.<sup>74</sup> Highbury School, near Durban, gave up fireworks on Guy Fawkes Day 1915 and made a donation to the Belgian Relief Fund. In 1916 it gave a concert in aid of the Red Cross and held a fund-raising fancy dress dance, the proceeds of which were divided between the Belgian Relief Fund and the Women’s Patriotic League.<sup>75</sup>

One can only guess how many schools, public and private, contributed in the manner of those few mentioned above, for which we have information, but it is not unreasonable to suppose that many other schools, perhaps most of them, contributed something sometime during the war. Rather more information is available on girls’ schools than boys’ schools and mixed schools, and reflects considerable patriotic zeal.

The girls at Durban Girls’ High School, a government school, contributed help to Belgian refugees in 1914, and in 1916 combined with Mansfield Road School to contribute £25 for a bed at the Richmond Hospital. When Girl Guides were allowed in government schools in 1918, those at DGHS collected eggs for the “The Hut” in West Street, and the school itself donated eggs to the Red Cross.<sup>76</sup> At Durban Girls College, a private school, prizes were given up in 1914 for the duration of the war; “war certificates” were issued for money collected and given to various funds. In June 1915, there was a sale for the benefit of Belgian and French children. In October there was an “open day” when every class had a stall representing one of the Allies. In November there was a sports day in aid of the Red Cross. The various functions raised £300. In addition girls made over 1 500 garments for Belgian refugees, and the school gave 70 000 eggs to hospitals in Durban – on an “egg day” all the girls brought eggs or a cash equivalent to school! In 1916 the school raised £250, and girls were allowed to spend money at a street collection for the purchase of blankets for the troops in Europe – they spent £75. Other fundraisers were a flower show on the school grounds and a “living bridge” entertainment in the town hall. “We were all dressed as playing cards and acted a

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relief of distress occasioned by war” Hattersley quotes from a letter from Lloyd George on Boy Scouts as Britain’s future soldiers and sailors See Hattersley, *Merchiston*, p 35

71 S Haw and R Frame, *For Hearth and Home: The Story of Maritzburg College 1865–1988* (MC Publications, Pietermaritzburg, 1988), p 217

72 Hattersley, *Merchiston*, p 32

73 F H Dell (ed ), *Russell High School 1879–1979* (The school, Pietermaritzburg, 1979), p 43

74 R O Pearse, *Sable and Murrey: The Story of Estcourt High School* (The school, Pietermaritzburg, 1946), p 40

75 H S D McMillan, *Highbury* (The school, Durban, n d ), p 48

76 Moran, “First Hundred Years”, p 58

game of auction bridge”, writes Yvonne Gordon-Huntley, then in Form II. “Being tall, I was the King of spades and Marjorie Moon was the Queen.” In March 1917, Durban schools took part in a “bullion day” and the college contributed £75. The end of the year prize money was given to the South African forces’ hospital in France.<sup>77</sup>

As the war went on, other ways to raise funds were devised. On 31 July 1916, a public meeting of sporting bodies in Durban was held with a view to consolidating their subscriptions to the Governor-General’s Fund. A Sportsmen’s Contribution Committee was formed. The committee proceeded to invent a Christmas Fair, a Bullion Day, a St David’s Day Collection, Ye Olde Englyshe Fair, and the Allies Bazaar, as well as lesser events and street collections, and in its first year of work the committee collected £50 000 for the Fund.<sup>78</sup> In September 1916, Durban held a “War Market” in aid of the Governor-General’s Fund, and Pietermaritzburg and Ladysmith followed its example with war markets of their own. In Pietermaritzburg the prime minister himself opened the market on 23 November.<sup>79</sup>

All these fundraisers were inevitably British derivatives. A South African woman wrote to friend in England in 1916, that “women held street collections, concerts, entertainments and sales. This was much the same as in England, except that at our sales there are fewer pictures & *objets de vertu* & more pumpkins & produce”.<sup>80</sup> The novelties of 1916 may reflect an effort to counteract any loss of sensitivity from repetition of established techniques. War markets may also have appeared to offer some bargains in a time of alarming inflation and shortages.<sup>81</sup>

The pattern of Indian support was like that of the Europeans. The community plunged enthusiastically into plays and concerts, flower and jumble sales, sporting events and street collections to raise funds.<sup>82</sup> In October 1914, Pietermaritzburg Muslim and Hindu merchants together set up a Natal Indian War Fund, with branches in the interior, with a view to providing an ambulance corps;<sup>83</sup> however, the corps was not formed, and there is no further reference to the fund in the literature. In Durban an Indian Women’s War Relief Committee was established on 6 September 1914, in Durban, on the mayoress’ initiative, and began fund raising. Several committees went to work and collected for the Governor-General’s Fund – £957 by mid-1916.<sup>84</sup> A sub-committee of the Governor-General’s Fund dealt with needy dependents of the stretcher bearer corps in East Africa (150 applications were received by mid-1916).<sup>85</sup>

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77 J Wrinch-Schutz, *The Happy Ship: A History of Durban Girls’ College 1877–1977* (The school, Durban, n d), p 86 For further glimpses of fund raisers, see *Epworth Jubilee 1948* (The school, Pietermaritzburg, 1948, no p nos); and M Tait, *Collegiate: The Story of Girls’ Collegiate School 1878–1978* (The school, Pietermaritzburg, 1978), p 42

78 DMM, 1917, p 5

79 LMM, 1917, pp 8, 13; PCYB, 1917, p 20; Child, *Smythe*, pp 243, 246

80 Ward, “Empire and the Everyday”, p 278

81 See Marwick, *Deluge*, chapter 4; and Ward, “Empire and the Everyday”

82 Hiralal, “Indian Commercial Class”, p 427; Vahed, “Give Till it Hurts”, pp 49–50

83 Hiralal, “Indian Commercial Class”, p 428

84 DMM, 1916, p 5

85 DMM, 1916, p 4



Apparently fund raising in Durban was dominated by a group of established Muslim merchants, and those less wealthy and well placed members of the community accused them of dividing the efforts on class, ethnic and religious lines.<sup>86</sup> In October 1915, the mayor of Durban asked that a “general body” should regulate fund raising. Instead there sprang up a Hindu and Christian-led Durban Indian Committee and a Muslim-led Mahomedan Merchants Committee.<sup>87</sup> (A Comforts Committee, apparently more closely associated with the former than the latter, was established in December and provided substantially for men passing through Durban and serving in East Africa.<sup>88</sup>) In March 1917, the mayor tried to get the two committees to unite, but at the first (and only) combined meeting irreconcilable differences appeared between certain leading personalities.<sup>89</sup>

### Recruiting

As with fund raising, so with recruiting: state and society collaborated successfully, in this instance to secure men for the military. The figures for the Union are 5 277 officers and 136 156 other ranks, and 382 nurses, all Europeans; a Coloured Labour Unit of 1925; and Native Labour Contingents numbering 82 769. Casualties amounted to 4 632 killed and died of wounds; 1 974 died of accident and disease; 12 036 wounded; and 2 400 captured. Total casualties amounted to 18 642 in a total of 231 591 in service.<sup>90</sup>

English Natal appears to have given generously to the imperial war machine. Again sacrifice was voluntary and not compulsory, although at times great moral pressure was brought to bear. Unfortunately, there are no separate figures for the number of men from Natal in service or for the various units in which they served. A plausible unofficial estimate gives 16 000 men in service out of a white male population of 60 000, of whom between 1 500 and 2 000 lost their lives.<sup>91</sup>

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86 Hiralal, “Indian Commercial Class”, p 428; see also p 430

87 Hiralal, p 429; Vahed, “Give Till it Hurts”, pp 49–50

88 Vahed, “Give Till it Hurts”, pp 50–51

89 Vahed, “Give Till it Hurts”, pp 52–53 An Indian Market Stallholders’ Committee, formed in August 1915, organised an Indian War Fair (15–16 December 1916), but stallholders later complained about their exclusion from an “Our Day” celebration (24 October 1918), whose slogan was “give till it hurts” See Vahed, “Give Till it Hurts”, pp 51, 58 See also LMM, 1916, p 12; LMM, 1917, p 13, where the Ladysmith War Relief Fund shows contributions of £258 1s from “Mohammedans”; and only £16 5s 9d from “Indians” in 1915–1916; and £359 1s and £16 5s 9d, respectively, in 1916–1917

90 *OYB*, 4, 1921, p 111 Compare with *Official History*, pp 229–230, which gives only killed and died in service (total, 12 452) for the various units

91 Bettle, “Natalians and the Great War”, p 105; *Union Statistics*, A–3, which gives the white population as 52 496 (in 1911) and 62 745 (in 1918 Thus 26,67% of white males were in service, compared with 27,3% in Britain; 13,48% in Canada; 13 43% in Australia; and 11,12% in New Zealand On this, see “The Military Effort of the British Empire”, *Round Table*, 9, 1918–1919, p 500 However, (see p 502) the death rate is much lower – 1,92–3,33%, compared with 11,78% for Britain; 6,04% for Canada; 8,5% for Australia; and 9,8% for New Zealand

The withdrawal of the imperial military garrison and the Union government's commitment to the conquest of German South West Africa necessitated the expansion of the South African Defence Force by the mobilisation of the Active Citizen Force and the creation of new units for "imperial service" abroad.<sup>92</sup>

The province was divided into two military districts – inland (No. 4) and coast (No. 5). The Active Citizen Force consisted of standing militia units of the former colonies. In the case of Natal these corps retained their old names and traditions even though the mounted units were renumbered as national units. All were under strength. Most of them were mobilised on 8–9 August 1914, and began recruiting to full strength and training in local camps. These included the 1st and 2nd Mounted Rifles (Natal Carbineers) in Pietermaritzburg and Ladysmith; and the 3rd Mounted Rifles (Natal Mounted Rifles) and the Durban Light Infantry in Durban. Later the 4th Mounted Rifles (Umvoti Mounted rifles) was also called into service.<sup>93</sup>

In September of 1914, Botha made a patriotic appeal to raise 7 000 men to supplement the Defence Force to fight the Germans in South West Africa. There were mass meetings in Pietermaritzburg and Durban, and the quota was soon exceeded.<sup>94</sup> In Durban this resulted in the formation of a second battalion of the Durban Light Infantry.<sup>95</sup> In Pietermaritzburg the Natal Light Horse was raised from men who had not been able to get into other units.<sup>96</sup> In early December 1914, the *Natal Mercury* reckoned that 6 000 Natalians, almost a third of the available men in the province, were in military service.<sup>97</sup>

Having crushed the rebellion, Botha was free to begin the invasion of South West Africa. The Natal mounted troops were sent to Lüderitzbucht, and formed the Central Force, to operate against the German forces in the southern part of the colony. The Durban Light Infantry served with the Northern Force in the central part of the country.<sup>98</sup>

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92 The South African Defence Force was two years old when the war broke out. The Defence Act, No. 13 of 1912 provided for a permanent force of five regiments of mounted rifles, coastal garrisons at Cape Town and Durban, and the Active Citizen Force, which consisted largely of former colonial corps. These constituted the first line of defence. The second and third lines comprised reserves, which at this stage were still to be properly organised. The legislation embodied the idea of a nation in arms. All who were not enrolled in active or reserve forces were obliged to be members of rifle associations, and schoolboys between 13 and 17 were organised as cadets. See (*OYB*, 2, 1918, pp 358–360)

93 G T Hurst (compiler), *Short History of the Volunteer Regiments of Natal and East Griqualand. Past and Present* (Knox, Durban, 1945), pp 17–18, 27, 92; Du Plessis, *Umvoti Mounted Rifles*, pp 112–117; DMM, 1915, p 1. Bettie, "Natalians and the Great War", p 102, claims that 3 000 were ready for service by early September.

94 Wilks, *For the Love of Natal*, p 144

95 DMM, 1915, p 2; Hurst, *Volunteer Regiments*, p 18

96 Hurst, *Volunteer Regiments*, p 143; PCYB, 1915, pp 24–26

97 Bettie, "Natalians and the Great War", p 103, puts the figure at 4 000. See also Van Wyk, "Politieke Woelinge", p 261. For the Natal units participating in the rebellion, see Hurst, *Volunteer Regiments*, pp 49, 92, 217; Du Plessis, *Umvoti Mounted Rifles*, pp 112–116; Goetzsche, *Rough but Ready*, p 135

98 J J Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1915–1915* (Government Printer, Pretoria, 1937), pp 82, 88, 92, 120; *Official History*, p 229; Bettie, "Natalians and the Great War", pp 103, 105, who says (p 103) that 4 000 Natalians served in South West Africa. For the Natal

South African forces took the offensive in February 1915, when Botha arrived to take personal command of the Northern Force, and the campaign ended in July with the German surrender. It consisted mainly of manoeuvres in desert conditions, all hard work for the troops, and very few battles.<sup>99</sup> The Central Force had relatively little fighting and the mounted troops had few casualties, except for the Natal Light Horse, which was roughly handled in the single battle at Gibeon (27 April 1915) and returned home early.<sup>100</sup> Following the action at Gibeon, the German forces in the south withdrew to the north of the colony, and the Central Force no longer had a part in operations, but moved by easy stages to Windhoek and then returned to the Union.<sup>101</sup> The returning troops were welcomed home and fêted as heroes.<sup>102</sup>

In September 1915 the imperial government accepted the Union's offer to form units for operations in Europe and East Africa. The Active Citizen Force had been demobilised. There was no conscription. The units for imperial service would consist of volunteers. Those who served in Africa received 3s a day, just as in South West, but those serving in Europe would receive the King's shilling: Afrikaner members of parliament resisted paying them more for a war overseas. The problem was solved by the British government agreeing to pay the men the balance, and the South African government making a general war contribution of £1 million to the British government.<sup>103</sup> A director of war recruiting was appointed. War Recruiting Committees, 141 of them, consisting of mayors, town councillors and other leading citizens, were formed in towns throughout the Union. Special recruiting campaigns were conducted by selected officers, and recruiting conferences were held at intervals to review the situation. In January 1916, the director was appointed to take command of all staffs and depots involved in recruitment, as well as to take charge of basic training and dispatch and control of troops for service at home or abroad.<sup>104</sup>

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units participating in the campaign see Hurst, *Volunteer Regiments*, pp 17, 27, 37, 49, 92, 143; and Martin, *Durban Light Infantry*, vol 1, pp 166–190

- 99 See Collyer, *Campaign: Official History*, p 229; Du Plessis, *Umvoti Mounted Rifles*, pp 123–126
- 100 Hurst, *Volunteer Regiments*, p 144 See also M Coghlan, "Out of Retirement and into the Fire", in J McKenzie (compiler), *A Man of His Time: Brigadier-General Sir Duncan McKenzie* (Triple Creek, Dargle, 2010), pp 84–150
- 101 Collyer, *Campaign*, p 93 Apparently Botha did not think much of "Old Chap" McKenzie's conduct of operations, but retained him to please Natalians See Meintjes, *Botha*, pp 258–259; and W K Hancock, *Smuts: The Sanguine Years 1870–1919* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1962), pp 396–398
- 102 DMM, 1915, p 4; LMM, 1915, p 9; PCYB, 1915, pp 33–34; PCYB, 1916, p 2; Du Plessis, *Umvoti Mounted Rifles*, p 129; Martin, *Durban Light Infantry*, vol 1, pp 190, 197
- 103 *Official History*, pp 65–66; *OYB*, 2, 1918, p 361; Spies, "South Africa and the First World War", p 111; Krüger, *Making of a Nation*, pp 104–105 Durban resisted merging its War Relief Fund with the Governor-General's Fund until the latter agreed to raise benefits for overseas servicemen's dependents proportionally (DMM, 1916, p 3)
- 104 *Official History*, pp 211–212; DMM, 1916, p 5; PCYB, 1917, p 21 Smythe did not like the invasion of German South West Africa (see Child, *Smythe*, pp 226, 229, 233), nor the sending of troops to Europe He thought that they should be kept in South Africa to check rebel Boers, "to say nothing of the natives" (pp 235, 236, 243) He did not encourage his sons to volunteer, but did not oppose two of them who went over to join the Black Watch, as long as they became officers However, he would not let his daughter go to become a nurse (see pp 237, 248)

In Durban, the War Recruiting Committee did an enormous amount of work. It held public meetings at the town hall and at Ocean Beach. It attended the national recruiting conference (November 1915), and returned to stage a weeklong rally, with pipers, a cadet band, and some of the troops in town, and a smoking concert at the Royal Hotel. Between August 1915 and May 1916, as many as 3 162 men were recruited in Durban, and an estimated 800–900 others went to Europe on their own account, presumably to join the British units.<sup>105</sup>

The Durban committee also canvassed the town for potential manpower. The base commandant selected some seasoned old noncoms to do the job. The canvass (in May/June 1916) showed there were approximately 1 100 men between 18 and 45 year of age in Durban eligible for, but not in active service. Of these, 600 were certified by medical military officers as unfit; 200 were in national government service; 100 had employers who declared they could not be spared; 100 pleaded dependents; 50 said their parents refused to let them join (the committee felt many of these were keen to join, but unfit); and 50 simply would not join.<sup>106</sup> The mayor reported in July 1917 that 5 270 men had enlisted out of 9 932 eligible (53,1%).<sup>107</sup> The Recruiting Committee decided to introduce exemption badges for the medically unfit young men. This it did, after receiving suggestions locally and making inquiries elsewhere, with the idea of sparing these men “inconvenience and unfair comment at the hands of those who inclined to think they should go”. A subcommittee was appointed for this purpose, but subsequently reported that many men neglected to wear the badges (on the lapels of their coats), in effect negating the purpose.<sup>108</sup>

The Durban and Pietermaritzburg corporations were strongly supportive of their own employees who volunteered for service, making up the difference between their civil and military pay.<sup>109</sup> In July 1916, there were 210 Durban municipal employees serving in Europe and East Africa.<sup>110</sup> In Pietermaritzburg, 197 employees saw active service during the war.<sup>111</sup>

Boys high schools in the province (and elsewhere in the Union) were enthusiastic supporters of the imperial cause, and boys, old boys and teachers were encouraged to volunteer.<sup>112</sup> There were 800 from Maritzburg College, and 500 from Durban High School who served in the war, of whom 96 and 85 died, respectively. For the private

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105 DMM, 1916, pp 5–6

106 DMM, 1916, pp 5–6 The mayor subsequently estimated the medically unfit at 800

107 DMM, 1917, p 2

108 DMM, p 5; Marwick *Deluge*, p 56, states that “badging” was introduced to identify men vital for war production and therefore not to be recruited for military service, and was initiated by the armaments firm of Vickers in September 1914

109 DMM, 1916, pp 3, 6; PCYB, 1916, p 8

110 DMM, 1916, p 6

111 PCYB, 1919, p 25 Also see PCYB, 1916, pp 8–9, 27; and PCYB, 1917, pp 20, 25

112 J Lambert, “‘Munition Factories ... Turning out a Constant Supply of Living Material’: White South African Elite Boys’ Schools and the First World War”, *South African Historical Journal*, 51, 2004, pp 75, 76, 78, 80

schools Hilton and Michaelhouse the numbers were 371 and 47; 200 and 43, respectively.<sup>113</sup>

In Pietermaritzburg Colonel Tanner and the officers of the 2nd South African Infantry (SAI), bound for Europe, were entertained to dinner in the supper room of the city hall prior to their departure.<sup>114</sup> The battalion consisted of men from Natal and the Orange Free State, but most were from Natal.<sup>115</sup> The mayor sent a message to Colonel Tanner when the battalion left South Africa: “Maritzburg wishes you and your regiment God speed, good fortune and a safe return;” and Colonel Tanner replied: “All ranks send greeting and thanks for kind thoughts. Tell fellow men their assistance required to back us up.”<sup>116</sup>

Men of the Durban Light Infantry held back from joining the 2nd South African Infantry because they wanted to join the 6th South African Infantry, which would be commanded by their colonel. At an early stage this was not for the public to know, of course, and those who were holding back experienced a different kind of moral pressure. “It was the time when many of the gentler sex thought it their duty to present every able-bodied man not in uniform with a white feather.”<sup>117</sup> The practice seems to have been imported from England and was widely applied in South Africa.<sup>118</sup> An elderly friend has told the author that her father had just returned from service in South West when he was accosted by two women on Church Street in Pietermaritzburg who pinned a white feather on him and told him he was a coward not to enlist, which he then did – and was severely wounded in France.<sup>119</sup>

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113 Lambert, “Munition Factories”, p 83 Of the 96 Old Collegians who died, 67 did so on the Western Front For the sacrifices of particular schools, see Haw and Frame, *For Hearth and Home*, p 214; H D Jennings, *DHS Story 1866–1966* (Durban High School and Old Boys’ Memorial Trust, Durban, 1968), p 137; N Nuttall, *Lift Up Your Hearts: The Story of Hilton College, 1872–1982* (Hilsonian Society, Pietermaritzburg, 1971), pp 58–59; A M Barrett, *Michaelhouse 1896–1968* (Michalehouse Old Boy’s Club, Pietermaritzburg, 1969), pp 59–61; R O Pearse, *Sable and Murrey*, p 40; *Glenwood High School Diamond Jubilee 1910–1970* (The school, Durban, 1970), p 17; W Rhees, *The Natal Technical College 1907–1957: A Jubilee History* (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1957), p 88; Dell, *Russell High School*, p 43; C Harvey-Williams (compiler), *The Illustrated History of Cedara College 1905–2005* (The school, Pietermaritzburg, 2005), p 8

114 PCYB, 1916, p 31 Referred to hereafter as 2nd SAI

115 *Official History*, p 95 Bettle, “Natalians and the Great War”, p 102, states that three fourths of the 2nd and a large percentage of the 4th were men from Natal; also that many Natalians served in the Heavy and Field Artillery; Medical Corps; Army Services Corps; and the Royal Navy; many women served as nurses

116 PCYB, 1916, p 31 The terms “battalion” and “regiment” are interchangeable in the literature on Europe, possibly because the so-called regiments were battalion size

117 Martin, *Durban Light Infantry*, vol 1, 204

118 Lambert, “Britishness”, p 293 On the practice in Britain, see Marwick, *Deluge*, p 50; A Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008), p 77; and especially N F Gullace, “White Feathers and Wounded Men: Female Patriotism and the Memory of the Great War”, *Journal of British Studies*, 36, 2, April 1997, pp 178–206

119 Mrs G I Bowren to the author She has told the story many times and it is always the same

In November 1915 the South African government raised units for imperial service in East Africa.<sup>120</sup> Most of the expedition left Durban by ship in January and February 1916. The 4th and 6th South African Horse and the 6th, 10th and 11th Infantry were regiments largely composed of Natal men.<sup>121</sup> Two companies of Indian stretcher-bearers were raised in Durban.<sup>122</sup> To meet the traffic of men and horses the council gave the Defence Force's Transport and Remounts Department the borough's Sanitary Stables and Lord's Grounds of the Agricultural Show.<sup>123</sup>

Then came the Somme. The South African Infantry Brigade went into action on 14 July 1916 with 121 officers and 3 032 men. When it was relieved from fighting in Delville Wood, about 750 were left. The 2nd SAI suffered 482 casualties, including all its officers.<sup>124</sup> Pietermaritzburg's mayor wired the commanding officer: "Citizens of Pietermaritzburg proud of achievement of South Africans in recent operations and while offering warmest congratulations on their success would express sympathy for losses they hope for speedy recovery of the wounded."<sup>125</sup> Durban's mayor also: "Durban sends the heartiest congratulations on the splendid work achieved by you and ours in the general advance, and while sympathising with your losses trust that the wounded are doing well."<sup>126</sup> The brigade did recover, but not at its old strength, and then it suffered about 1 150 casualties at Butte de Warlencourt on 9–19 October.<sup>127</sup>

The brigade was again rebuilt, to a strength of 1 448 with drafts between April and July 1917. The 2nd SAI then had 37 officers and 601 men. They were heavily engaged at Ypres in September, and lost 61 killed and 224 wounded and missing. In March 1918, again at the Somme, the brigade was annihilated in the first battle of the Ludendorff offensive. It was rebuilt with drafts (17 officers and 945 men) early in April, and again destroyed in the second battle, at the Lys. The brigade was reduced to a composite battalion. It retained its name, but with two Scottish battalions attached. Only in August, with the arrival of a thousand more drafts, was the battalion upgraded to a brigade again.<sup>128</sup>

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120 The East African expedition apparently did not enjoy complete public support Smythe complained to his sister that he was "no good at flagwagging" but had to address a public meeting in the Pietermaritzburg city hall at the end of November He was not popular with a strong Labour contingent in the crowd, he had a bad cold and could not make himself heard, and they made such a row that he had to retire "This voluntary recruiting is a rotten business There was no trouble when they turned out to the men for South West Africa, under the Defence Act, but now there is any amount of trouble and ill feeling" See Child, *Smythe*, p 239

121 Hurst, *Volunteer Regiments*, pp 144–145, 148, 150–152, 155–156, 160–161; And *Official History*, pp 66, 86 Bettie, "Natal in the Great War", p 105, states that Natalians made up the 6th and 10th Infantry and the 4th and 8th Horse, and many were in the 11th and 12th Infantry

122 Vahed, "Give Till it Hurts", pp 44–46 According to Hiralal, "Indian Commercial Class", p 428, they were mainly Natal-born, of Tamil and Telegu origin By August 1916, there were 377 men in German East Africa See DMM, 1916, p 4

123 DMM, 1917, p 2

124 *Official History*, p 111, which states that there were only 143 who marched out of the wood when the brigade was withdrawn

125 PCYB, 1916, p 31

126 DMM, 1916, p 2

127 *Official History*, p 119

128 *Official History*, pp 129, 136, 150, 162–163, 168

And then the losses in German East. The 2nd Infantry in France and Flanders was repeatedly destroyed by enemy shot and shell, but the 6th, 10th and 11th Infantry and the 4th and 8th Horse in German East Africa were practically destroyed by disease, starvation and exhaustion.<sup>129</sup> The official history states:

The health of the white personnel as well as that of the Indian troops of the Expeditionary Force had [by September 1916] become gravely undermined, and wholesale weeding out of those who, from repeated attacks of fever and dysentery, had practically become physical wrecks, was an urgent necessity, as was a substantial increase of force in the way of reinforcements from outside ... All white troops declared by medical boards to be medically unfit were returned to the country of their origin. Under these arrangements approximately 12,000 white troops left East Africa between the middle of October and the end of December, 1916.<sup>130</sup>

The regiments were disbanded and the remnants were consolidated in composite regiments,<sup>131</sup> but the campaign in 1917 was just as hard, and by the end of the year all European units were evacuated from East Africa.<sup>132</sup> The remnant of the Indian corps returned in March of 1918.<sup>133</sup>

On 23 November 1916, Smythe wrote that a great many men were returning home as invalids, chiefly with malaria, and 8 000 were expected by the middle of December.<sup>134</sup> The Defence Force had to expand its medical corps quickly “to cope with the return of thousands of men from East and Central Africa in a state of health so shattered by the deadly diseases to which they had fallen victims as to require long months of careful hospital treatment.” The corps organised hospitals and convalescent camps at various bases. A large general hospital with between 400 and 600 beds was established in Durban. Auxiliary hospitals (mainly for convalescents) were formed at Durban and Pietermaritzburg. Hospitals for special purposes (including treatment of “natives”) were formed at Pietermaritzburg and Jacobs in Durban. Four veterinary hospitals were established at remount depots in the Union, including ones in Durban and Pietermaritzburg.<sup>135</sup>

The Pietermaritzburg city council offered the City Hall for hospital purposes for East African convalescents, but the military authorities declined because the premises

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129 *Official History*, pp 72, 73, 76, 79, 80, 82, 92, 217, 219; Hurst, *Volunteer Regiments*, pp 147, 150, 154, 159; Vahed, “Give Till it Hurts”, pp 48–49

130 *Official History*, p 82

131 Hurst, *Volunteer Regiments*, pp 155, 154, 159

132 For casualties of units with a strong Natal representation, see *Official History*, pp 86, 90, 225, 229; Hurst, *Volunteer Regiments*, pp 18, 147, 150, 158–162; Martin, *Durban Light Infantry*, vol 1, pp 224, 286, 290 For a detailed account of the campaign from a Natal perspective, see Martin, *Durban Light Infantry*, vol 1, pp 201–322

133 Vahed, “Give Till it Hurts”, p 49 Also see *Official History*, p 82 The Indian stretcher bearers were also hard hit There were 17 who died on active service, while 92 returned after a year, their health undermined

134 Child, *Smythe*, p 245

135 *Official History*, pp 212, 216, 217 (quotation on p 212) ; Bettle, “Natalians and the Great War”, pp 105–106; DMM, 1917, p 3 See also Moran, “First Hundred Years”, p 68

were unsuitable. The Natal University College council then offered its new buildings and grounds. Student numbers had fallen, as 72 students and graduates volunteered for service. The military authorities accepted the offer. Huts were built for 500 convalescents in a short time, and the first group of patients (150) arrived on 2 December 1917. The city had set up a special committee to look after their entertainment, and they were greeted by a large crowd at the railway station, given refreshments, and some members of the public who had them drove the patients to the camp in their motor cars. The College moved to the old Natal Government Railways headquarters in Loop Street – except for the science laboratories, and a wooden spiral staircase was built adjacent to one of the rear entrances of the college building so that Professor Bews (Botany and Geology) could reach his laboratory on the first floor without trespassing on the hospital premises. Faculty and students returned to the college building in 1918, but the military authorities evidently retained the hutments, for in October 1918 it put some of them at the corporation's disposal during the influenza epidemic.<sup>136</sup>

### Staying the course, 1916–1918

After two years of war and no end of it in sight, one might expect signs of flagging of morale amongst the British patriots of Natal. It does not take a very close reading of the literature to see war weariness setting in. There were disappointments enough to increase the sense of frustration as victory continued to elude the Empire.

First, there was the fear that the Afrikaners, some of them anyway, might sabotage the war effort. In December 1915 the new parliament debated the pardoning of the Afrikaner rebels, and agreed that as soon as the country's security allowed, pardons should be made in special cases. On the 20 December the government released the leading rebel general and 118 others. The *Mercury* and *Witness* condemned the release. In the autumn of 1916 there were rumours of another Afrikaner rebellion impending, yet by February 1917 all the imprisoned rebels were free. This was intolerable for the jingoes. Smuts' sister wrote to him from Pietermaritzburg in August: "We have been here some time now, but like Natal less than ever. The majority of people here are extremists – either Jingoes or Nationalists – and we SAP supporters (who are few and far between) get no sympathy anywhere." "Isn't the *Witness* poisonous?" Botha's wife wrote to Lady Campbell in Durban. Botha referred privately to its editor, Horace Rose, as "Horrors" Rose.<sup>137</sup>

The National Party continued to expand in Natal. In 1916 the provincial party held its second congress in Ladysmith, and ones annually thereafter. By 1918 there were 37 branches in the province.<sup>138</sup> The Germans launched a major offensive in France in March, and Botha called for a resolution in the House of Assembly expressing pride in

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136 PCYB, 1918, pp 27–28 E H Brookes, *A History of the University of Natal* (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1961), p 17

137 Van Wyk, "Politieke Woelinge", p 373, and the quotations are on pp 198 and 318 See also Spies, "South Africa in the First World War", p 126; Meintjes, *Botha*, pp 251–252 According to S Haw, *Bearing Witness: The Natal Witness 1846–1996* (The newspaper, Pietermaritzburg, 1996), p 170, Rose had to back off when he was threatened with a court case for libelling Hertzog

138 Spies, "Geschiedenis van die Nasionale Party in Natal", p 97



South African soldiers at the front and praying for British and Allied success. It was an emotional moment. The Germans had broken the British line on the Somme and the South African infantry brigade lost heavily in the battle. The NP opposed the resolution, but it passed 63–21. When the count was announced, Colonel Henwood, the Unionist member for Durban Central, who had not distinguished himself in the house otherwise, stood in the middle of the floor and called out “The King!” The house and gallery rose and sang “God Save the King” – all except the Nationalists, and the *Mercury* and *Witness* roundly denounced them for it.<sup>139</sup> In April, as the situation on the Western Front deteriorated, the NP members distanced themselves even more from Britain, and the *Mercury* called them traitors to the flag and instigators of domestic strife.<sup>140</sup>

Again there were rumours of an Afrikaner rebellion, and the prime minister issued a manifesto urging loyal South African to support the constitution.<sup>141</sup> In June, when the situation on the Western Front was in the balance, Botha spoke at Estcourt, and allayed Natal fears for South African unity, and the South African Party MP for Pietermaritzburg, North Thomas Orr, told constituents the Nationalists were not involved in any rebellious movement. Still, the *Witness* complained that they misconstrued Wilson’s and other Allied declarations on the self-determination of peoples dishonestly, and if South Africa had the right to become a republic, then Natal had the right to reject it.<sup>142</sup>

Second, there was the matter of African loyalty, or rather a lack of it. Early in 1916 rumours circulated in northern Natal and northwestern Zululand that while the British were distracted overseas, there would be a rebellion to restore Zulu independence and the royal house. If the rumours did not originate with them, certain Afrikaners actively promoted them, adding that Germans from East Africa would land on the coast and give the rebels support. The chief native commissioner, Charles Wheelwright, discounted the rumours, and informed the young claimant to the Zulu throne, Solomon kaDinuzulu, that he should curb his royal ambitions.<sup>143</sup>

Then the imperial government asked for a Native Labour Contingent to serve in France. The matter was turned over to the Department of Native Affairs rather than the Defence Force. There was no warmth for the proposal amongst either Africans or

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139 Brookes and Webb, *History of Natal*, pp 269–270, quoting L E Neame’s *General Hertzog*, pp 197–198. See also G H Nicholls, *South Africa in My Time* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1961), pp 18–119; and L Blackwell, *African Occasions: Reminiscences of Thirty Years of Bar, Bench, and Politics in South Africa* (Hutchinson, London, 1938), p 75

140 E G Haines, “Natal and the Union, 1918–1923”, MA dissertation, University of Natal (Durban), 1976, p 22. According to Van Wyk, “Politieke Woelinge”, p 268, Botha wrote to Smuts: that the *Witness* “... vat werklik die laagste en gemeenste houding teen die Afrikaners op wat maar wezen kan. Iets zal moet doen worden om daar een eende aan te brengen, want dit help nie die kwaaddoeners in dit land meer en vergroot die haat van wat Brits is ook meer.”

141 “Unrest in South Africa: Part III, the Threatened Rebellion”, *Round Table*, 10, 1918–1919, pp 199–200; Spies, “South Africa and the First World War”, p 126

142 Haines, “Natal and the Union”, p 22

143 N Cope, *To Bind the Nation: Solomon kaDinuzulu and Zulu Nationalism 1913–1933* (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1993), pp 68–74. See also Bruss, “Impact of the First World War”, pp 156–157

Europeans in Natal. The recruitment drive netted few volunteers in either Natal or Zululand.<sup>144</sup>

It was Solomon's opportunity. The government would not support his claim to Zulu paramountcy, and obviously he would not support the government's recruitment drive. A bargain was struck between the prime minister and the uncrowned king. In January 1917 the government announced Solomon's appointment as chief of the reconstituted Usuthu tribe, historically the backbone of Zulu royalism. This was hardly kingship, but it was as much as his father had received with similar ambitions.<sup>145</sup> Solomon now gave his support to the government's recruitment drive. In July a great meeting was held at Nongoma for the purpose, and he addressed 12 000 people, but not one of them volunteered for the labour contingent, and they went home without even touching the meat prepared for the feast. Even with Solomon's support the government's campaign was a total failure.<sup>146</sup>

In 1918 the film "The Symbol of Sacrifice" was a romance set against the background of the Anglo-Zulu War. It was scripted by Horace Rose of the *Witness*. The story of the war was largely fiction, with a German named Schneider inciting the Zulu to fight their would-be friends the English.<sup>147</sup>

Third, Germany was not being defeated. Indeed, there were times when it seemed to be winning the war, and there was a recrudescence of harshness in anti-German feeling. Following the death of Lord Kitchener in June 1916, the prime minister warned Durban against anti-German demonstrations.<sup>148</sup> In Pietermaritzburg the authorities took measures to avert a disturbance, but none the less some unrest occurred, which led the government to consider moving the Germans interned at Fort Napier to Kimberley. The city council opposed this, and the mayor, Percy Taylor, led a deputation to meet the prime minister, who politely gave them to understand that he was guided by imperial considerations for the safety of captive enemy subjects. The deputation assured the prime minister that the camp would not be attacked, and he at once cancelled instructions for trains to remove the internees.<sup>149</sup> Smythe observed: "The internment camp has been quite a boon to Pietermaritzburg in these bad times, not only [for] the money spent on and by the prisoners, but there is a regiment called the Veteran Regiment of about 1 200 men to

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144 Cope, *To Bind the Nation*, pp 75–76; Child, *Smythe*, p 244; Grundlingh, *Fighting their Own War*, pp 61, 65–67, 70 Grundlingh attributes the failure of the recruitment campaign generally to a basic mistrust of the white man, sensitivity to the government's land policy, and fear of losing jobs at home because of serving abroad. At least some whites in Natal opined (in the press) that blacks would get new ideas in Europe which would lead them to cause trouble back at home. For the Zulu there was also a dread of going upon the ocean, reinforced by the sinking of the *Mendi*, carrying men of the contingent, in the English Channel in March 1917. See Cope, *To Bind a Nation*, p 81; Grundlingh, *Fighting their Own War*, p 74

145 Cope, *To Bind the Nation*, pp 75–79. Botha hinted privately that Solomon might be further elevated, depending on his good behaviour (p 78)

146 Cope, *To Bind the Nation*, pp 80–81

147 Haw, *Bearing Witness*, pp 155–156. The author has seen the film

148 Meintjes, *Botha*, p 286; Spies, "South Africa and the First World War", p 126

149 PCYB, 1916, pp 28–29

guard them. This is composed of all the old scalawags and stoney brokes in the country, but they are quite good enough for the job.”<sup>150</sup> There were about 2 400 men interned in the camps at this time.<sup>151</sup>

In 1917 there was a tightening of security in connexion with the German East African campaign. Coastal areas became top security zones, and all enemy subjects between the ages of 17 and 60 were removed to a distance of 23 miles from the sea. The Trappist monks in this zone had to go to Mariannhill and remain there, except to give last rites and the like. Rumours told of German aeroplanes being seen in the vicinity of the monastery, and the abbot offered a reward of £100 to anyone who could prove it, but there was no taker.<sup>152</sup> A new weekly newspaper, *The Imperialist*, appeared in Durban, which constantly propagandised pro-British and anti-German reports.<sup>153</sup> All German music was banned, and the police magazine *Nongqai* reported in August that the atmosphere in the town was “redolent of ‘the molten hate of the Hun and his works’.”<sup>154</sup>

The prime minister visited Fort Napier in August. Subsequently, the usual complaints and representations were received from internees, but the government was not prepared for the riot which took place. The cause was not so much bad management of the camps or ill-treatment of the prisoners as restriction of amenities and boredom and frustration. The “old scalawags” on guard were part of the problem. They obligingly smuggled things into the camp, such as brandy and whiskey, which they sold at £1.10s a bottle, and prisoners called them “Bluebottles” because they stung so much. They could not stop the rioters setting fire to several buildings; some of the prisoners escaped and one was shot.<sup>155</sup>

The Special Service Company of the 6th Infantry was at Potchefstroom, training for a second tour of duty in German East Africa. It consisted mainly of Durban veterans. The authorities ordered it to Pietermaritzburg at once. The company made a record thirteen-hour train trip and arrived at the fort. The internees recognised that these were trained troops, and order was immediately restored.<sup>156</sup> The ringleaders of the riot were tried and imprisoned, and some improvements introduced in the camp regimen.<sup>157</sup> Guard duty for the Special Service Company was not onerous and allowed much leave in town – it was “the pleasantest time experienced by the men since the war began”, and with regret they returned to Potchefstroom at the end of September.<sup>158</sup> Presumably the old guard returned with new discipline, and there were no more outbreaks.

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150 Child, *Smythe*, p 236 The letter is dated 3 August 1915 Martin, *Durban Light Infantry*, vol 1, p 310, describes them as mainly elderly, unfit for war service and not all trained as soldiers

151 According to Bruss, “Impact of the First World War”, p 115, there were 2 427 on 3 August 1916, of whom 2 213 were Germans; 192 Austro-Hungarians; 6 Turks; and 16 naturalised British subjects

152 Bruss, “Impact of the First World War”, pp 145, 147, 148

153 Bruss, “Impact of the First World War”, p 56

154 Lambert, “Britishness”, p 289

155 Bruss, “Impact of the First World War”, pp 107, 111, 119–122 Censors found £24 903 in money in the prisoners’ correspondence

156 Martin, *Durban Light Infantry*, vol 1, p 310

157 Bruss, “Impact of the First World War”, p 120

158 Martin, *Durban Light Infantry*, vol 1, p 310

Quite apart from exasperating problems with Afrikaners, Zulus and Germans, the unending war and its attendant ills were a test of loyal Natal's strength and will to fight.

Miss Moore Smith had returned to Durban Girls' College from England following the outbreak of the war. She had told the girls that she never wanted to hear them sing "It's a long way to Tipperary" because she had seen thousands of British troops singing it as they marched off to war, never to return. The war never seemed out of her mind. The girls no longer added sugar to tea. They stopped wearing ribbons in their hair. At noon each day they stood during lessons for a half minute silent prayer. Every Wednesday at 1.40 p.m. a "war service" was held, before afternoon classes began at 2. Every Friday Miss Moore Smith gave compulsory lectures, at the end of which they always prayed: "Give us peace, O Lord, in our time."<sup>159</sup>

"It is too sickening to read the long list of casualties, and we seem to get no further forward", wrote Smythe in August 1915. And then, of the Somme, a year later:

The casualty lists have been appalling I think almost everyone I know personally in the South African Brigade has been killed or wounded I think every Government office in this building has had one or two men killed And these are all loyal men, how are we going to combat the Dutch rebels who are all sitting at home?

He found it hard to concentrate on local matters in the 1916 session of provincial council; debate seemed frivolous. In March of the following year: "Frightful casualty lists are coming in from the South African Contingent in Flanders. Jim Ross [a farmer in the Nottingham Road district] has lost two of three sons killed. Jim MacLean, who lives beyond Souter, has lost both of his. It is all too sickening."<sup>160</sup>

In the schools, too, beginning with the Somme. News of losses were received "with sickening emphases" at Michaelhouse.<sup>161</sup> And the Natal Technical College alike.<sup>162</sup> Alan Paton recalled that in October 1916 Maritzburg College was plunged into gloom by the news that one of the boys who had left to join up in 1914 had been killed; but there was also a sense of pride: boys in Form VI waited impatiently for the matric exams so they could go.<sup>163</sup> At Durban High School there were times when the headmaster A.S. Langley "tried to announce the death of an Old Boy ... but could not go on and had to leave the hall, his face streaming with tears".<sup>164</sup> The boys and old boys also knew of the miseries of war in German East Africa, from letters of their peers in the school magazine.<sup>165</sup> Early in 1918, a roll of honour was unveiled at Estcourt School by the

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159 Wrinch-Schutz, *The Happy Ship*, p 85

160 Child, *Smythe*, pp 236, 243, 242, and 249, respectively, and p 233, referring to Gibeon

161 Barrett, *Michaelhouse*, p 60

162 Rhees, *Natal Technical College*, p 88

163 A Paton, *Towards the Mountain: An Autobiography* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1984), pp 31–32

164 Jennings, *DHS Story*, p 121; see also p 165 Langley kept the photographs of all who died framed and hung in his study, and his eyes filled with tears when he told Jennings about them (see pp 121, 137) By August 1916 the *Witness* had stopped publishing photographs of all the young men killed (Haw, *Bearing Witness*, p 170)

165 See Jennings, *DHS Story*, pp 145–147

mayor.<sup>166</sup> By this time Durban high school girls were taking flowers to soldiers' graves in the military cemetery.<sup>167</sup>

In such circumstances overseas service would become less attractive, especially with so with many invalidated men coming home. In Pietermaritzburg a Returned Soldiers Committee was formed to welcome and help them. Recruiting was rather more difficult now, and the Recruiting Committee was augmented by a Privacy Committee to facilitate enlistment by those who seemed to hesitate.<sup>168</sup> Just as with fund raising, so with recruiting: new techniques were applied. On 17 July 1917 a novel recruiting demonstration took place, in which the band of the Natal Carbineers led a procession from the railway station to Alexandra Park, including representatives of patriotic and friendly societies, schoolchildren, Boys Scouts and Girl Guides. There were also some local soldiers who had returned home, including ones wounded at Delville Wood; but the most important contingent in the demonstration were 50 men of the imperial forces who had seen service in Europe, who were sent up from Durban for the purpose. It was estimated that at least 3 000 people gathered in the park, where there was a sports programme.<sup>169</sup>

Another novel recruiting technique was the first visit of an officer of the Royal Air Force, Major Miller, DSO, who toured the Union in an aeroplane. Durban Girls' High School closed at 11 a. m. so that the girls could walk to the racecourse to see the major land in his aeroplane.<sup>170</sup> He arrived in Pietermaritzburg on 23 April 1918, his landing witnessed by thousands. He was entertained to a luncheon in the Supper Room, and then gave a lecture in the Rinko, illustrated by lantern views. His tour stimulated recruiting, but notably for his own branch.<sup>171</sup> The mayor of Pietermaritzburg stated in August 1918 that the purpose of recruiting was to keep the South African brigade in France in existence, while the community was "plunged into mourning" because of its heavy casualties.<sup>172</sup>

The war hurt now. The mayor of Pietermaritzburg reported in 1917: "The City has sent many of its sons to the front and in proportion to the number of those available the number of those who have gone is a cause for gratification. Many of them have laid down their lives, leaving homes filled with sorrow. Others have been wounded or stricken by disease."<sup>173</sup>

His counterpart in Durban was similarly reflective:

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166 Pearse, *Sable and Murrey*, p 40

167 Moran, "First Hundred Years", p 71

168 PCYB, 1917, pp 20, 21; PCYB, 1918, pp 26–27 Bettle, "Natal and the Great War", p 106, says that the committee made discreet inquiries and gave money for clothes and other needs to men who otherwise might not enlist

169 PCYB, 1917, pp 21–22 See also Nuttall, *Lift Up Your Hearts*, p 59 It is not stated how many recruits were obtained

170 Moran, "First Hundred Years", p 70

171 PCYB, 1918, p 28

172 PCYB, 1918, pp 26–27

173 PCYB, 1917, p 18

We are still in the throes of the Great European War, and although it has been said that we in South Africa, far removed from the main theatre of conflict, have felt its effects but little in comparison to other portions of the Empire, the nature and magnitude of the struggle have been brought much nearer home this year than before<sup>174</sup>

On another occasion the mayor of Durban said:

Perhaps the most impressive service of the whole year ... was that held on the first anniversary of the battle of Delville Wood, July 17, in memory of the gallant South Africans who have fallen during the present War. At this Service many of the parents, wives, and other relatives of South African heroes were present as was evidenced by the signs of mourning apparent on every hand, and the attendance at the Service was a worthy tribute to the memory of those men who had made the greatest sacrifice of all<sup>175</sup>

Public observances of major events now followed a pattern of large meetings with addresses and resolutions, religious leaders leading services of intercession or thanksgiving, and contingent programmes according to the circumstances.<sup>176</sup> Annual observance of the declaration of the war became a formal ritual. Improvised observances – as of Kitchener's death and the victory at Jutland – fitted the general mould.<sup>177</sup> Still, the pattern allowed flexibility. Both major centres celebrated American entry into the war on American Independence Day. In Pietermaritzburg it was a demonstration and a concert in aid of the American Red Cross Fund. In Durban it was a Service of Thanksgiving.<sup>178</sup>

There were innovations. In Durban there was a Watch Night Service on New Year's Eve 1916, which took the form of a special service of intercession for the Allied cause.<sup>179</sup> In 1918, the Union-wide practice of observing a minute's pause at noon, in remembrance of those at the front, was adopted. In Pietermaritzburg one of the bells of the city hall rang one minute beforehand to draw the attention of the public. The mayor's chaplain appealed to the local press for cooperation, which the mayor says was "very sympathetically responded to". Another movement introduced was a monthly "Citizens'

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174 DMM, 1917, p 1 Gregory, *Last Great War*, p 133, states that in the British instance soldiers could not fully express themselves about their experiences at the front, but none the less they told more about them than is sometimes realised, and that their relatives and friends listened to what they said much more than is usually supposed

175 DMM, 1917, p 4 Lambert claims in "Britishness", p 296 that "Delville Wood was the pinnacle of South Africa's First World War experience" He goes on to quote (p 297) the *Mercury*, 18 July 1917, in its article "Delville Wood Day", that "the call went up from Delville Wood for further men" The "legend of the Wood" was used to encourage enlisting and wounded men were used to shame men into volunteering

176 In "Britishness", pp 294–295, Lambert deals briefly with the conflation of religion and patriotism and gives several examples There is nothing else on the subject for South Africa, but some insight may be gained from Gregory, *Last Great War*, chapter 5: "Redemption" Also see Marwick, *Deluge*, p 298

177 See DMM, 1916, p 2; DMM, 1917, p 1; PCYB, 1916, p 32; PCYB, 1917, p 20; PCYB, 1918, p 27; PCYB, 1919, p 27 See also Moran, "First Hundred Years", p 63; and (on Kitchener's death), Pearse, *Sable and Murrey*, p 40

178 DMM, 1917, p 4 PCYB 1917, p 21

179 DMM, 1917, p 4

Service in fellowship with the men at the front”, which began in May 1918. According to the mayor this service was “becoming very popular” as indicated by the attendance.<sup>180</sup>

In Pietermaritzburg the children of men at the front were entertained in the city hall on Boxing Day, 1916. An appeal for £75 was made in the *Witness*, and brought in more than that amount.<sup>181</sup> In 1917 they were entertained at Christmas at the Natal Creamery for an hour – about 350 of them – and then “marshalled” and led to the nearby Rinko for a “suitable programme”.<sup>182</sup> Entertainment did not cease with the end of the war. In 1918, Empire Day was celebrated by a demonstration of children in the city hall. “Suitable films” were shown, and addresses were given by the bishop of Pretoria and the Honorable F.S. Tatham. Afterwards the children went to Alexandra Park, where a sports programme had been arranged for them. The weather was perfect, and, the mayor observed, the children entered “fully into the spirit of the occasion”.<sup>183</sup> The Returned Soldiers League took over the Christmas entertainment at the mayor’s request. There was tea followed by a concert in the supper room of the town hall, where two very large Christmas trees were set up. The concert was interrupted by a visit of Father Christmas, attended by two “burly Old English Beefeaters”, who gave out presents. According to the mayor, the participants voted the entertainment a great success.<sup>184</sup>

In 1918 Ladysmith (and one may assume the larger centres, although it is not specifically mentioned) a Whippet tank was exhibited at the Agricultural Society show ground as part of a fund raising for the Governor-General’s Fund, and the tank obligingly fired several hundred rounds of ammunition.<sup>185</sup> The Women’s Patriotic League marked Their Majesties’ Silver Wedding Anniversary by making 65 feather pillows for distribution to the wounded in hospitals, and in October arranged a sports day as part of the South African Railways’ “Big Push” and raised £55.<sup>186</sup>

On 9 September 1918 several stevedores in Durban were stricken by influenza. Further cases appeared among their fellow workers. A party of workers, perhaps from Natal or from Mozambique, carried the disease to the Reef. Thus the Spanish Influenza pandemic was introduced into South Africa. The first wave was relatively mild in Natal, and later it was supposed that it might have immunised people to an extent against the lethal second wave from abroad, in October.<sup>187</sup>

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180 PCYB, 1918, pp 28, 29

181 PCYB, 1917, p 21

182 PCYB, 1918, p 29

183 PCYB, 1919, p 29

184 PCYB, 1919, p 27

185 LMM, 1919, p 8; and Gregory, *Last Great War*, pp 220–233, on the “Tank Bank” in Britain

186 LMM, 1919, p 9

187 H Phillips, “‘Black October’: the Impact of the Spanish Influenza Epidemic of 1918 in South Africa”, *Archives Year Book for South African History*, 53 (Government Printer, Pretoria, 1990), pp xviii, 1, 102, 127 It was observed that Natal had suffered less in another influenza epidemic, in 1889–1890, and it was suggested that different strains of organisms had operated there! See Phillips, “Black October”, p 188

South Africa had no public health act and its Health Department did not have sufficient authority or personnel to deal with the epidemic. The authorities became aware of the crisis on 8 October and the cabinet in an emergency meeting proclaimed the “epidemic influenza” a “contagious infectious disease” in terms of existing legislation. Local authorities were urged to take action, for the department could do no more than act in a supervisory capacity and took advice from London. When the epidemic climaxed in October the medical burden fell on district surgeons and ad-hoc local committees, supported by the Defence Force.<sup>188</sup>

With this forewarning, local authorities were empowered to close schools and places of amusement and to prohibit public meetings, and they did so. We have the mayor’s fairly detailed account of the progress of the disease in the case of Pietermaritzburg, but unfortunately no such account for Durban. Early in October the city medical officer of health advised the Pietermaritzburg city council to prepare for an outbreak. He was given a free hand and told to devote himself entirely to it. A relief committee was formed to deal with applications for medicines, nursing and food. A district nurse was appointed and free medicine was provided for the poor. A station was also opened to give free vaccinations. The Education Department asked day schools, in recess at the time, not to reopen. The public was warned not to attend public meetings. There was a large public hospital in the city, but it could not be expected to cope with all the cases. Hutments on the University College campus which had been used for military convalescents were opened as an emergency hospital for Europeans. The city’s existing epidemic hospital was reserved for Indians and Africans.<sup>189</sup>

The onset was momentous. Throughout the Union an estimated 139 471 persons – 11 726 whites and 127 746 coloureds – died of influenza, pneumonia and broncho-pneumonia between 1 August and 30 November 1918.<sup>190</sup> In Natal, 362 whites, 1937 Indians and coloureds, and 11 663 Africans succumbed.<sup>191</sup>

In Pietermaritzburg about one third of the European population and about half of the coloured population of the borough were affected. About 12 000 cases were reported, but only 343 persons died – 51 whites, 10 coloureds, 193 Indians and 89 Africans. Tramways ran on a partial schedule for several weeks; many staff were sick, but there also were fewer stops.<sup>192</sup> Boy Scouts acted as hospital orderlies and sickroom visitors, and also carried medicines to cripples’ homes and acted as telegraph messenger boys.<sup>193</sup> The epidemic lasted about two months, and was practically over by the end of

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188 Phillips, “Black October”, pp 101, 105, 106, 111

189 PCYB, 1919, pp 21–22 On schools being closed, see Dell, *Russell High School*, p 43 (one of the teachers died); and Pearse, *Sable and Murrey*, p 40

190 OYB, 2, 1918, p 763

191 OYB, 2, 1918, p 763; Phillips, “Black October”, p 158 White deaths in the Cape Province were 5 855, the Orange Free State 2 242, and the Transvaal 3267 (OYB, 1 1918, p 763) Phillips also cites (p 157) a National Health Services Commission report in 1944 which estimated that 142 000 had died of influenza, and he himself estimates (pp 159, 176) that the deaths numbered between 250 000 and 350 000

192 PCYB, 1919, pp 22–23

193 Hattersley, *Merchiston*, p 35



November.<sup>194</sup> In Ladysmith there was no hospital, but committees were organised and volunteers came forward to help, yet the mayor admitted that they all were “baffled” by the disease, which was “insidious” and “disastrous”.<sup>195</sup> The *Natal Witness* noted that the epidemic brought ploughing to a complete halt in the Camperdown division.<sup>196</sup> On Zululand sugar farms practically all the cane cutters were stricken and many died; and there was an average drop of 25 per cent in production during the 1918–1919 season.<sup>197</sup>

## Peace

In just a few months the Allies recovered and took the offensive. The reversal of fortunes was sudden and quick. The news of the armistice came as a surprise. Celebrations had a spontaneous character, and local authorities could not elaborate on them when public gatherings were restricted on account of the influenza epidemic.<sup>198</sup>

Ladysmith. “To all intents and purposes, we knew this meant complete capitulation”, said the mayor. He called a united service at the Oval, attended by a large gathering, which “gave thanks to almighty God for the Empire’s deliverance from the hands of its enemies and the prospect of an early and abiding peace”.<sup>199</sup>

Pietermaritzburg. An immense crowd immediately gathered in front of the city hall, and the mayor addressed them from the portico. He moved a resolution to be sent to the King, expressing great thankfulness and joy at the cessation of hostilities, and the hope of a victorious and lasting peace. The many sacrifices incurred in the conflict were noted. The resolution was carried by acclamation, and His Majesty and leaders were cheered. A holiday spirit prevailed for several days. On Sunday, 17 November, there was a thanksgiving service, conducted by the mayor’s chaplain, at which between 3 000 and 4 000 people were present.<sup>200</sup>

In Durban, the news soon spread. Yvonne Gordon Huntley remembers:

In the middle of an English literature lesson, all the sirens and church bells in the town rang out and ships in the bay sounded their hooters. At first we did not realise what had happened. Then Joy Tyzack leapt to her feet and shouted, ‘It’s peace! It’s peace!’ We all rushed to the windows. Miss Moore Smith, who was taking a class in the garden, came

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194 PCYB, 1919, p 56

195 LMM 1919, p 12

196 Phillips, “Black October”, p 192

197 Minnaar, *uShukela*, p 90

198 There was a second outbreak of influenza at the end of June the next year, starting amongst school children. Representations were made at once to the administrator of the province, and the Education Department closed government schools; private schools followed. The symptoms were milder and there were fewer cases – in Pietermaritzburg there were only 843, and it was not necessary to open the epidemic hospital for cases – although the death rate was higher. There were 31 European deaths. But relatively few Indians and Natives were infected. Again the epidemic lasted about two months. See PCYB, 1919, pp 22–23, 45; and Phillips, “Black October”, p 188

199 LMM, 1917, p 7

200 PCYB, 1919, pp 23–24

running up with the girls shouting and waving and presently a message was sent around the school that we could all go home at once<sup>201</sup>

The news was received on the afternoon of Monday, 11 November. The bells of the Emmanuel Cathedral pealed. Hooters throughout the town clanged. Trams came to a stop. People left their work and gathered in the streets, delirious with happiness. Everyone was smiling. Strangers shook hands and exchanged congratulations. They crowded the town hall, but no one listened to what the speakers said. They knew the words were of thanksgiving, and the sentiment sufficed. The celebrations continued for a week.<sup>202</sup>

The troops returned home. The Defence Force had gained some experience of demobilisation with the large number of men who returned from East Africa in 1917. When the armistice came it was in a position to take immediate steps for demobilisation of an estimated 36 000 troops. Imperial authorities were asked to send forces home in batches of no more than 2 000 per week. Defence Headquarters established a Demobilisation Board for the speedy return of soldiers to civilian life. The Commissioner for Returned Soldiers had an officer in each camp to interview returnees and to arrange for possible employment, if required. Local War Recruiting Committees, which were no longer needed as such, were amalgamated with Returned Soldiers Advisory Boards (there were three) and Returned Soldiers Employment Committees (of which there were 54). (In 28 other centres local committees of the Governor-General's Fund did the work.) All staff were volunteers, but they were assigned government-paid clerical assistants.

Four dispersal camps were established throughout the Union, one of them in Durban for returnees via the east coast of Africa. The accommodation and hutments there were ample for the purpose. A Returned Soldiers Advisory Board was set up in November and December 1918, consisting of a staff officer, the chief magistrate and representatives of local organisations, which assumed the responsibility for all kinds of work, including employment, pensions and grievances. The demobilisation of troops from East Africa and Egypt was completed by mid-July and from Europe by August 1919.<sup>203</sup>

On 21 August there was a banquet in honour of General Tanner and 250 returned soldiers in the Pietermaritzburg city hall, with toasts, speeches, and music.<sup>204</sup> In Ladysmith a Springbok Reception Committee, chaired by the mayor, saw that all returning men were met at the railway station and taken to their homes – or, if they were only breaking their journeys there, accommodated in local hotels. Several receptions were given to Returned Soldiers in the Klip River District.<sup>205</sup>

The apparatus of the war effort was dismantled. The Citizens' Service in fellowship with the men at the front soon ceased. The Noonday Pause was discontinued

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201 Y Gordon-Huntley, quoted in Wrinch-Schutz, *The Happy Ship*, pp 86–87

202 Wilks, *For the Love of Natal*, pp 147–148; Wrinch-Schutz, *The Happy Ship*, p 87 See also Moran, "First Hundred Years", p 72; McMillan, *Highbury*, p 53; and Barrett, *Michaelhouse*, p 63

203 *Official History*, pp 219–221

204 PCYB, 1920, p 25

205 LMM, 1919, p 19

at the end of 1918. The Women's Patriotic League continued to entertain passing troops at council expense, but stopped eventually in 1919 when there were no more.<sup>206</sup>

In Pietermaritzburg, street collections were increasingly difficult to organise after the armistice. There was a final appeal for the Governor-General's Fund in 1919, to put it on a basis to carry on in future. Pietermaritzburg's quota (city and district) was set at £15 000. However, when £13 000 was collected the appeal was stopped, because other places in the Union had oversubscribed. The Red Cross also made an appeal through the press (notably the *Witness*), and the city and district contributed just under £6 500 and the province almost £81 500! An appeal in the press for a Save the Children Fund, for sufferers in central Europe, fetched almost £800, although schools apparently contributed specially to it.<sup>207</sup>

The official Peace Celebrations in Pietermaritzburg took place from 2–5 August 1919. The main streets were illuminated and the [South African War] peace memorial and a special arch were decorated in the court gardens. On Saturday evening, the 2 August, the administrator of the province made a short speech, after which a male choir gave a patriotic concert. On Sunday there was a children's service in the city hall, followed by a thanksgiving service at 4 p.m. At the same time, there was a service for Africans in the Market Hall. Monday was Children's Day, beginning with a procession from the city hall to Alexandra Park. The white children were drawn up at the Oval and addressed by the mayor. General McKenzie, who had commanded the Natal mounted men in South West Africa, presented medals to members of the Defence Force. After that the children filed off to different parts of the park for refreshments and sport, i.e. the European children did. Coloureds celebrated on the adjacent hockey grounds, Indians at the drill hall, and Africans at the race course. In the evening there was an open air concert in the Market Square, and then a Victory Ball in the city hall. On Tuesday 5 August there was a football tournament in the park, with side shows for children, and in the evening another concert and a fireworks display on the Market Square. The celebrations concluded with a fancy dress dance in the city hall.<sup>208</sup>

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206 PCYB, 1919, pp 25–27

207 PCYB, 1919, p 26; and PCYB, 1920, pp 25–26

208 PCYB, 1920, p 25 There is no reason to doubt the genuineness of feelings expressed with regard to peace and victory at the end of the war, even though the programme may seem stereotypical. Natal *anglais* Lambert, "Britishness", p 297, states that "most English-speakers seem to have maintained their faith in the Empire and in the justice of the imperial cause. Civilians continued to use imperial rhetoric to express their perceptions." There is no study of war-weariness and reaction against the war in South Africa as such, and one may question the applicability here of Ward's generalisation for the dominions ("Empire and the Everyday", pp 269–270) that "a 'pervasiveness of death' invaded everyday life", while acknowledging of course that "grief often invaded every waking moment of the bereaved". In considering the attitude of the Natal colonial elite one should bear in mind Gregory's contention (*Last Great War*, pp 116, 149–151, 230, 244) that in Britain the middle class experienced the greater incidence of injury, yet this "most war-weary section of the population became the most fierce and intolerant patriots of the population because of their sense of great sacrifice" (p 245).

## Conclusion

For Natal the Great War was a test of loyalty and sacrifice in the cause of Empire. The people stood the test. The social fabric remained intact and the community may even have gained in cohesion. It is obvious that the war effort was sustained principally by those of British stock, but in the circumstances this was to be expected. For them it was a cause won, and victory justified the effort. It was not just money and time dedicated to the war effort. A relatively large number of men served under arms and many died. The emotional strain was reflected in the memorials and remembrances during the succeeding years of peace.<sup>209</sup> It has been the purpose of this article to recount the home-front story for the first time. The disparate and fragmentary published accounts and descriptions of wartime events have been brought together and moulded into a comprehensive account. Yet the account is necessarily tentative, and it is hoped that future research will fill the manifest gaps and lacunae and other writers will provide interpretation and contextualisation in a new history of the province in the Union.

## Abstract

The Great War or First World War in South Africa has received relatively little attention. A score of books deal more or less with the fighting, but practically nothing has been written about the “home front”. This article seeks to rectify the imbalance in part by focusing on the home front in the province of Natal. It does two things. First, it presents a narrative of home-front operations. It begins with the popular reaction to the outbreak of the war; and proceeds to fund raising and recruiting activities; the maintenance of morale against war weariness; and, finally, a joyful embrace of peace. The thesis is that the imperial, English-speaking sections (European and Asiatic) of the population genuinely supported the war effort (whereas Afrikaners and Africans were largely indifferent or hostile towards it) and the British settler elite willingly and effectively took responsibility for the local civilian effort. Second, the article represents an assay of the existing literature on the subject. Thus it is significant historiographically, and on the eve of the centenary points a way to future research and writing on South Africa in the war.

**Keywords:** South Africa; Natal; First World War; Great War; home front; civilian morale in war; war funds and comforts; British settler imperialism; South African politics 1914–1918.

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209 According to Bettel, “Natalians and the Great War”, p 106: “There was no thought of self or pride or reward, but one great common cause” See also Thompson, *British Civic Culture*, pp 22–23, 47–49 Lambert states in “Britishness”, p 298 (citing a leader in the *Pretoria News*, 29 December 1916) that: “The end of the war left the English-speaking South Africans with an intense sense of pride ... South Africa had been found wanting neither in loyalty nor in valour and could hold her head up among the Dominions At the same time, they were aware of the extent to which the war had changed the relationship of the Dominions with Britain, making nations of them” This may be true for those who lived in Cape Town and on the Reef, but not for Natal; as is clear in Lambert, “Last Outpost” On this see also L E Neame, *Some South African Politicians* (Maskew Miller, Cape Town, 1929), p 123, where he writes: “Politically the trouble with Natal is that it is too Natalian That it is in the British Empire can never be doubted That it is part of the Union of South Africa is not always quite so obvious”

## **Opsomming**

### **Die Natalse tuisfront en die Eerste Wêreldoorlog (1914-1918)**

Die Eerste Wêreldoorlog in Suid-Afrika het relatief min aandag ontvang. 'n Opname van boeke hanteer min of meer met die stryd, maar bykans is niks geskryf oor die “tuis front” nie. Hierdie artikel poog om gedeeltelik die wanbalans reg te stel deur te fokus op die tuisfront in die provinsie van Natal. In die opsig word twee aspekte ondersoek. Eerstens, bied dit 'n verhaal aan van tuisfront bedrywighede. Dit begin met die gewilde reaksie van die uitbreek van die oorlog, en gaan verder oor fondsinsameling en werwings aktiwiteite, die instandhouding van moraal teen oorlog vermoeidheid, en ten slotte, 'n vreugdevolle omhelsing van vrede. Die tesis is dat die imperiaal, Engels-sprekende dele (Europees en Asiatiese) van die bevolking die oorlog werklik geondersteun het (Afrikaners en Afrikane was grootliks onverskillig of vyandig) en dat die Britse setlaar élite gewillig was om verantwoordelik te wees vir die plaaslike steun in die opsig. Tweedens, die artikel verteenwoordig 'n berekening van die bestaande literatuur oor die onderwerp. Dit is historiografies belangrik en op die vooraand van die eeufees stel dit 'n benadering bekend van hoe om toekomstige navorsing en die skryf oor Suid-Afrika in die oorlog te benader.

**Sleutelwoorde:** Suid-Afrika; Natal; Eerste Wêreldoorlog; Groot Oorlog; tuisfront; burgerlike moraal in die oorlog; oorlog fondse en troos; Britse setlaar imperialisme; Suid-Afrikaanse politiek 1914–1918.