

Boere-oorlog en Nieu-Seeland

Buitmakery pla nog

• Tom Watson

Die stof van die 1899-1902 Boereoorlog het na 120 jaar nog nie in Nieu-Seeland gaan lê nie. Die stelling word gemaak dat die buitmakery van een Christen op 'n ander nie as 'n "trofee" beskou kan word nie.

Daar word beweer dat die Nieu-Seelandse soldate die boere se Bybels, wat die kosbare besittings van die boerevolk was, gebuit en gesteel het. Hul familie-geskiedenis was onder andere daarin vasgelê. Juwele, horlosies, ens. was ook buitgemaak.

Daar word nou 'n veldtog geloods in Nieu-Seeland dat die Bybels wel terugbesorg word aan die Suid-Afrikaanse burgers.

Die Herald het besluit om die beriggewing uit Nieu-Seeland net soos dit ontvang is, in Engels te plaas.

Nigel Robson, 'n senior historikus by die kantoor vir "Maori Crown Relations" word as die kontakpersoon beskou.

"Although the practice of looting is as old as warfare itself, it was especially prevalent during the 1899-1902 Anglo-Boer War, and New Zealand troops were wholehearted participants. In an attempt to deny Boer forces their support networks, the British commander, Lord Kitchener, ordered the adoption of harsh measures that often included burning Boer farmhouses, slaughtering livestock and incarcerating thousands of civilians.

For New Zealand soldiers tired of monotonous rations, the Boer livestock and vegetables became primary targets during these operations, but they also looted homes. Trooper Luke Perham jokingly told his mother that contingent members were turning into "notorious thieves", while his brother Frank described operations in the field: "At the first farm house we reached, the fun commenced. We were told we could take whatever we liked".

Several men were forced to pay restitution after slaughtering Boer sheep, and one was briefly imprisoned for stealing from private homes. However, another New Zealand soldier described his contingent leaving "tear and desolation" in its wake when troopers received permission to loot two outlying villages.

After burning the Boers' homes and killing their animals, the trooper claimed "the women, with their frightened children huddling round them, stood looking sadly on, one here and there railing ineffectually in Dutch, but most weeping in silence". Not all New Zealand soldiers were comfortable targeting civilians, with one complaining "we are all dead sick of making war on women and chickens and cattle".

Trooper Harold Dickinson described the looting a Boer property: "You should have seen the things the fellows took. One fellow of ours got a gold watch and chain, another a silver one, and others also got valuables. I myself would not go near the place, as I reckoned it a damned shame".

During these operations, soldiers often removed Boer family bibles. Already reeling from the slaughter of their livestock and the destruction of their homes, the disappearance of these treasured heirlooms, which often included family records going back generations, was an added blow to the deeply pious Boers.

The language New Zealand newspapers used when referring to the bibles reflected differing perceptions of the morality of their acquisition. Some described the bibles as "looted" or "stolen", while others claimed they were "captured".

A Catholic trooper from Opotiki removed the Janse Van Vuuren family bible before the Boers Witpoort home was burnt. Joseph Johannes Fritz's bible was exhibited in the New Zealand Parliamentary Library, while



The New Zealand Third Contingent, known as the Rough Riders, leaving Lyttelton for the Boer War in February 1900.



The first contingent of New Zealand Mounted Rifles leaves the Karori camp in Wellington in October 1899, heading for the Boer War. Their horses had been sent to the troopship the day before.

another "found" by Trooper George Powell in the home of a Boer magistrate was displayed in Wanganui Museum. A museum visitor was appalled that its collection had been "disfigured by a looted Boer bible" Masterton politician Alexander Hogg concurred, describing the bible's theft as sacrilege and indignantly observing, "What a trophy for one Christian to loot from another!"

Shortly after the war ended, the Wellington Peace and Humanity Society added its voice to those calling for the return of Boer family records and heirlooms, with the scale of the looting becoming apparent in 1903 when the British commander-in-chief requested the return of bibles that had "disappeared" from Boer farms.

A correspondent to a New Zealand newspaper suggested the general should have gone further by encouraging the return of watches, rings and letters looted from Boer homes. In the same year, the press reported that, in the recent past, Boer bibles had been exhibited in many cities throughout New Zealand. A contingent member's father asked a Christ church politician to arrange the return of Peter van der Berg's family bible containing the Boer's will, a lock of hair bound with blue ribbon, Christmas cards and several "pathetic little souvenirs".

The looting of bibles was not, however, limited to New Zealanders, the family bible of Daniel Rossouw was taken to Australia

by a member of the New South Wales Imperial Bushmen, while Boer general Piet Cronje's bible was exhibited as a war trophy in the British House of Commons. In 1947, during a visit to South Africa by King George VI, the bible of Boer president Paul Kruger was returned after being taken to England by a British general.

Although prime minister Richard Seddon arranged the repatriation of several bibles, a number remained in New Zealand. During his team's 1921 New Zealand tour, Springbok JS Oliver received a bible that had been looted from the Olivier family home by a member of the Seventh

Contingent. In 1926 a Bible belonging to the Louw family was returned and, almost 27 years after the war ended, the Janse van Vuuren bible was finally repatriated. In 1936, the Auckland Star reported that there were "many Boer bibles still in the hands of New Zealanders".

Even today, New Zealanders may have Boer bibles in their possession without realising their significance to their original South African owners.

If anybody knows the whereabouts of Boer bibles in New Zealand, please contact Nigel Robson at byzantine60@gmail.com.



MY BACK SCHOOL
nou beskikbaar
A5, halfblad per dag
skoolrooster binne

SCOLARY
202
Heilbron
Herald