

**MANOEUVRE WARFARE IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CAMPAIGN IN GERMAN
SOUTH WEST AFRICA DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR**

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I Antonio Garcia declare that **MANOEUVRE WARFARE IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CAMPAIGN IN GERMAN SOUTH WEST AFRICA DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.


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ABSTRACT

This dissertation studies the First World War South African campaign in German South West Africa from 1914 until 1915. The campaign was characterised by the high mobility of the Union's mounted soldiers which enabled swift advances and rapid envelopments.

The German forces applied a defensive strategy relying on the lack of water and remoteness of the terrain to deter and prolong the Union's invasion. The German force also relied on internal lines of communication to concentrate its forces on the Union's advancing columns.

The Union Defence Forces's numbered approximately 50 000 compared to the German force of about 7 000. The campaign culminated on 9 July 1915 with the surrender of almost the entire German fighting force intact.

This study analyses whether the victory can be attributed to the Union Defence Forces's numerical superiority or the operational strategy and tactics which were applied during the campaign. It is argued that this operational strategy is congruent with the modern theory of manoeuvre warfare and that the campaign is therefore a textbook example of manoeuvre warfare theory.

KEY WORDS

First World War; German South West Africa; Union of South Africa; Union Defence Forces; manoeuvre warfare theory; mobility in warfare; logistics.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The study of manoeuvre warfare theory received a great deal of international attention in the latter part of the 20th century and has thus influenced the study of military theory as a discipline from the 1980s until the present. This dissertation applies the framework of manoeuvre warfare theory to the South African campaign in German South West Africa during the First World War.¹

The dissertation deals with the dual aspects of military theory and historical study. The literature review (Chapter 2) systematically addresses manoeuvre warfare theory and the historiography of the campaign in two separate sections. The relevant literature on manoeuvre theory highlights the themes which are central to the manoeuvre theory framework applied in this study, including the means to defeat an enemy with the least resistance and material loss. The second part of the literature review addresses the historiography of the German South West African campaign and focuses on aspects of the campaign which bear similarities and congruency to what we today refer to as manoeuvre warfare.

Manoeuvre warfare theory is a modern construct and the commanders of the campaign were not necessarily consciously executing manoeuvre warfare in the modern sense. The force groupings and their commanders applied their existing knowledge of warfare in an attempt to win the campaign in the most efficient manner. The campaign makes for an ideal case study of manoeuvre warfare theory with the advantage of hindsight.

Manoeuvre warfare theory is discussed in Chapter 3. The fundamental elements of manoeuvre warfare theory are elaborated upon and combined into a framework. In Chapters 4 to 8 the campaign is discussed in depth, detailing the course of events and analysing them with reference to the manoeuvre warfare theory framework.

The dissertation hypothesises that the German South West African campaign provided the backdrop for a deliberate and effective display of manoeuvre warfare (or warfare concepts congruent to those of manoeuvre warfare theory) which resulted in victory with minimal loss of life and materiel.

¹

Note that German South West Africa was a German colony from 1884 until 1915. German South West Africa refers to the area that is modern day Namibia.

Background

The Union of South Africa was established in 1910 as a dominion within the British Empire and Louis Botha became its first prime minister. The Union was inextricably linked to the global British wartime effort. The German South West African campaign involved the invasion of German South West Africa by South African forces as an extension of Britain's military strategy in the First World War.

The history of the formation of the Union of South Africa and the subsequent involvement in the German South West African campaign revolves around the two central and towering figures of Botha and Jan Christiaan Smuts. They were the leaders of the campaign and their military backgrounds, experience and abilities are important in the understanding of their position and approach towards the campaign.

The broad political developments within South Africa at the time provide some insight into the rise to power of Botha and Smuts. This section outlines the general political developments in the Union of South Africa from the early 20th century until the formation of the Union Defence Forces in 1912. Furthermore, it provides an overview of the Afrikaner Rebellion and the German South West African campaign. Thereafter, manoeuvre warfare is discussed briefly with reference to its modern-day study, application and relevance within the military sphere.

Prior to the formation of the Union of South Africa, Botha was a proponent of a united South Africa which he believed would only be possible through cooperation with the British Empire.² During the South African War (1899–1902) Botha was initially a Boer³ commandant and subsequently became the commandant general of the Transvaal commandos in 1900 after the death of Petrus Jacobus Joubert, the previous commandant general.

Botha received much acclaim for successfully holding the defensive positions at the Tugela River on the Natal Front and for forcing the British forces to retreat after the Battles of Colenso and Spioen Kop.⁴ Botha's military ability came to the fore during the conventional phase of the South African War but also extended to the guerrilla phase (March 1900 to May

² H.C. Armstrong, *Grey Steel, J.C. Smuts: A Study in Arrogance* (London: Arthur Barker, 1937), 150.

³ The term 'Boer' can be translated to mean 'farmer' in Afrikaans and was generally used to refer to members of the Afrikaner grouping.

⁴ T. Pakenham, *The Boer War* (London: Abacus, 1979), 174; Armstrong, *Grey Steel*, 97.

1902) after the fall of Bloemfontein and Pretoria. After the war, Botha made large strides to reconcile the interests of English speakers and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans.

Following the South African War, Botha and Smuts were included in the central committee of the Het Volk political party, which was formed in the Transvaal in 1904. Het Volk promoted Afrikaner interests but also focused on the reconciliation of all South Africans. Smuts put great effort into his proposal for the constitution of the Transvaal after which he devoted all his energies into the Transvaal election campaign.⁵ Their collaborative effort brought results when Botha was elected as the prime minister of the Transvaal and Smuts became the colonial secretary and minister of education in 1907.⁶

Botha formed the South African Party together with Smuts, his friend, colleague and confidant. The South African Party aimed to unite the different white political parties in the four provinces with the objective of creating a Union. Smuts and Botha formed a strong partnership in politics. Botha had a charismatic personality; he was popular among his followers and inspired them with his magnanimity and optimism.⁷

In contrast, Smuts was the quiet thinker, the intellectual of the partnership. A recipient of many academic awards, he graduated from Victoria College in Stellenbosch in 1891 and received a scholarship to attend Cambridge University where he graduated with top honours in 1893.⁸ Smuts then returned to South Africa where he pursued a career in law and politics.⁹ He was appointed as state attorney and aide-de-camp to President Stephanus Johannes Paulus Kruger of the ZAR in 1898, and headed a commando during the guerrilla phase of the South African War in 1901. Smuts is described as hard working with boundless energy.¹⁰

Smuts worked vigorously towards a united South Africa and was responsible for compiling the framework for the Union of South Africa, which he put forward at the Intercolonial Conference in May 1908.¹¹ The Union of South Africa was formed in May 1910 and formal elections were held in September of the same year. Botha became the first prime minister of

⁵ W.K. Hancock and J. van der Poel eds., *Selections from the Smuts Papers, Volume III* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 205.

⁶ Armstrong, *Grey Steel*, 166.

⁷ A. Lentin, *Jan Smuts* (Johannesburg and Cape Town: Jonathan Ball, 2010), 19.

⁸ Armstrong, *Grey Steel*, 7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 35, 36.

¹⁰ Lentin, *Jan Smuts*, 23.

¹¹ Hancock and Van der Poel eds., *Selections from the Smuts Papers*, 331.

the Union of South Africa in 1910. Smuts was appointed as minister of mines, interior and defence.¹²

The Defence Act of 1912 was the source of much discussion and debate in the parliament of the newly formed Union of South Africa.¹³ The turbulent past of the Union made matters of defence a prominent talking point. Following the formation of the Union of South Africa, the Defence Act was promulgated on 14 June 1912, which commissioned the formation of the Union Defence Forces.¹⁴

Smuts was the minister of defence and was largely the architect of the Defence Act with the support of John Johnston Collyer and HRM Bourne, who was appointed undersecretary of defence.¹⁵ Collyer was a captain when the Defence Act was drawn up from 1910 until mid-1912. He subsequently became chief staff officer during the German South West African campaign, carrying the rank of lieutenant colonel. He eventually retired as a brigadier general and chief of general staff.

The Botha government wanted a defence force that could defend the interests of the Union in any type or size of conflict.¹⁶ At its inception in 1910 the Union did not have a permanent national defence force because historically, each of the four provinces in the Union modelled its own particular style of defence as an independent outgrowth of its individual type of government. The Cape had a small permanent force, Natal had a militia-style force, while the Transvaal had a volunteer system, as did the Orange Free State. The Union Defence Forces was formed in 1912 and incorporated the military forces of the four provinces.¹⁷

The Union Defence Forces comprised the Permanent Force; Active Citizen Force; Coast Garrison Force; Royal Naval Volunteers Reserve; and provision was also made in the Defence Act of 1912 for Special Reserve Units. The Union Defence Forces established the Permanent Force on 1 April 1914, which was known as the South African Mounted Riflemen.¹⁸

¹² Armstrong, *Grey Steel*, 201.

¹³ W.A. Dorning, 'A Concise History of the South African Defence Force 1912–1987', *Militaria, South African Journal for Military Studies*, 17, 2 (1987), 2.

¹⁴ A.C. Lillie, 'The Origin and Development of the South African Army', *Militaria, South African Journal for Military Studies*, 12, 2 (1982), 7.

¹⁵ Dorning, 'A Concise History', 2.

¹⁶ H. Strachan, *The First World War, Vol 1: To Arms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 547.

¹⁷ J.J. Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915* (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1937), 13, 14.

¹⁸ Lillie, 'The Origin and Development of the South African Army', 8–10.

The largest component of the Union Defence Forces was the Active Citizen Force which comprised many of the old commando units from the previous military establishments of the four provinces of the Union South Africa. The strength of the Active Citizen Force on 31 December 1913 was 23 462.¹⁹ The Union Defence Forces had a total strength of 30 000 in early 1914.²⁰

The Union of South Africa found itself in a precarious position at the outbreak of the First World War. The Union Defence Forces was still in its developmental stage and was untested as a cohesive fighting force. The Union of South Africa was a dominion of Britain and when the British Empire declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914, the Union of South Africa was in effect also at war with Germany.²¹ The British Empire requested the Union of South Africa to invade German South West Africa, capture its seaports and destroy its wireless communication stations.

Botha and Smuts supported the British war effort but JBM. Hertzog contested the assumption that the association with the British Empire constituted an automatic involvement in the war.²² In parliament, as was the case in the population at large, there was support for and against the proposed invasion of German South West Africa. The Defence Act of 1912 stipulated that members of the Union Defence Forces could only render defence in protection of the Union of South Africa.²³ Accordingly, Botha motivated the invasion of German South West Africa as necessary in the defence of the Union. Botha's motion for the invasion was passed in parliament on 10 September 1914 by 91 votes to ten.²⁴ The Union officially entered the First World War on 14 September 1914.²⁵

By this time Britain was already engaged in warfare with the Germans on the Western Front in France. Britain mobilised its colonies and dominions because the international war effort required many troops and other resources. Furthermore, Britain wanted her international trade and control of the sea routes to be safeguarded. In this regard the Union of South

¹⁹ Lillie, 'The Origin and Development of the South African Army', 10.

²⁰ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 16.

²¹ R.J. Bouch, *Infantry in South Africa* (Pretoria: Documentation Service SADF, 1977).

²² Strachan, *The First World War*, 545.

²³ Dorning, 'A Concise History', 4.

²⁴ Strachan, *The First World War*, 546; L'ange gives the final votes as 92 to 12 in favour of Botha: G. L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service* (Rivonia: Ashanti, 1991), 17.

²⁵ I. Van der Waag, 'The Battle of Sandfontein, 26 September 1914: South African Military Reform and the German South-West Africa Campaign, 1914–1915', *First World War Studies*, 4, 2 (2013), 3.

Africa played a key role in ensuring that the sea routes to the east via southern Africa were secured.

Great Britain wanted the Union Defence Forces to take control of the ports of Lüderitzbucht and Swakopmund on the coast of German South West Africa, thus preventing Germany from using them to refuel, re-supply and repair German warships. In addition, the wireless stations in Windhoek, Lüderitzbucht and Swakopmund, which were able to provide and maintain communications between Berlin and German warships at sea, had to be destroyed.²⁶

The plan devised for the South African campaign involved the amphibious landing of South African forces at Walvis Bay and Lüderitzbucht. Botha was in overall command of the operation and also took personal command of the northern operations which comprised a two-pronged easterly advance on the capital of Windhoek.

The southern operations involved an easterly and subsequent northern drive from the Union force at Lüderitzbucht and a northerly cross-country advance from the forces south of the Kalahari Desert. The northern operations had the objective of the railhead at Karibib which led to the capital of Windhoek. The southern operation had the aim of concentrating on Keetmanshoop so as to restrict the movement of the German forces in the south. Karibib and Windhoek were captured on 6 and 12 May 1915 respectively. Botha then made a final drive to surround the German forces via Grootfontein and Tsumeb. The German force surrendered with its fighting capability almost completely intact on 9 July 1915.²⁷

At the beginning of the campaign the Union faced an internal threat in the form of the 1914 Afrikaner Rebellion. This uprising was a manifestation of the dissatisfaction felt by many Afrikaners about the Union's involvement in a "British" war at a time when anti-British sentiments were still very much in evidence in the aftermath of the South African War. Seeing this as an opportunity they could exploit, the Germans fomented rebellion by meeting with prominent republican-inclined Afrikaner military leaders who were heading the rebellion, such as Commandant SG Maritz and General CF Beyers.²⁸ The Afrikaner Rebellion merged with the German South West African campaign in that it delayed the invasion plans. The

²⁶ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 7.

²⁷ Dorning, 'A Concise History', 4.

²⁸ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 5; B. Farwell, *The Great War in Africa 1914–1918* (New York: Norton, 1986), 75.

Union Defence Forces first had to suppress the rebellion before commencing with the campaign.

English and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans had varying and layered feelings about the war. It is clear that in 1914 the Union of South Africa was by no means unified as a nation and there were differing beliefs and identities. There were many impoverished, barely literate Afrikaners who lived in rural areas who certainly did not identify with the British cause.²⁹ Apart from political differences, Afrikaner poverty and pre-disposition to rebel was also linked to the grave economic situation in the decades following the South African War.³⁰

The German complicity in the rebellion had implications in that Maritz did not support Colonel H Lukin (later Sir, Major General Lukin) at the Battle of Sandfontein. It is therefore argued that the rebellion was part of the German South West African campaign from a purely military point of view.

Botha and Smuts acted decisively by utilising the Union Defence Forces to suppress the rebellion. The Botha government conceded lenient and conciliatory peace terms with the rebels at the culmination of the uprising between late 1914 and early 1915.³¹ The end of the rebellion allowed for the continuation of the German South West African campaign.³²

The German South West African campaign was unique in that it employed the Union Defence Forces for the first time in conventional warfare as an expeditionary force. At the beginning of the campaign the South African forces numbered approximately 50 000 compared to the modest German force numbering about 7 000.³³ The German forces (the *Schutztruppe*)³⁴ adopted a defensive strategy from the outset. Their commander, Colonel J von Heydebreck hoped to make maximum use of the geography of the colony as well as the German internal lines of communication to delay the Union Defence Forces for as long as possible. In this way he hoped to prevent their redeployment to other theatres of the Great War.³⁵

Having dealt broadly above with the political developments in the Union of South Africa and the formation of the , and providing an overview of the Afrikaner Rebellion and its links with

²⁹ B. Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme* (Johannesburg: Penguin, 2007), 10.

³⁰ Van der Waag, 'The Battle of Sandfontein, 26 September 1914', 7.

³¹ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 84.

³² Dorning, 'A Concise History', 4.

³³ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 158.

³⁴ The *Schutztruppe* were the colonial forces of imperial Germany.

³⁵ Van der Waag, 'The Battle of Sandfontein, 26 September 1914', 3.

the German South West African campaign, this study now moves on to deal with the relevance of manoeuvre warfare theory in the present day and its application to the study of the German South West African campaign.

The dissertation links the German South West African campaign to manoeuvre warfare theory. This theory aims at achieving the defeat of the enemy with the least effort and losses and in the shortest possible time. It places significant emphasis on mobility in forcing the enemy to surrender as opposed its complete destruction. The focus of manoeuvre warfare is on movement as opposed to firepower, with the objective of placing your opponent in an untenable situation which induces defeat.³⁶

Manoeuvre warfare theory is a contemporary theory which is applied to warfare in South Africa and internationally on the basis of its merit as an established approach to warfare.³⁷ The South African defence establishment (Union Defence Forces, South African Defence Force and South African National Defence Force) currently places great emphasis on the study of manoeuvre warfare and the application of its principles in warfare.³⁸

Attrition warfare theory emphasises firepower and the destruction of the enemy in pitched battle. This theory is the polar opposite of manoeuvre warfare theory which stresses movement and mobility to defeat the enemy.³⁹

In order to understand the reasons behind the South African victory in the German South West African campaign, the dissertation will examine whether the Union won because of superior numbers or because of its superior strategy and tactics. Thomas Richard Ungleich holds the opinion that the British and South African victory was a result of superior military numbers which resulted in the defeat of the Germans in a campaign which is often regarded as of little consequence in the broader picture of the First World War.⁴⁰

Ungleich's version, which is the most recent pro-German secondary account of the campaign, argues that the South African numerical superiority forced the Germans to retreat

³⁶ Chapter 2 will place manoeuvre warfare theory in context for this dissertation. The framework for manoeuvre warfare theory will be explained in Chapter 3.

³⁷ British Army, *Operations, British Army Doctrine* (Andover: Army Publications, 2010), iii; South African Army College, *Operational Concepts: Staff Officer's Operational Manual, Part VII* (Pretoria: 1 Military Printing Regiment, 1996), 7/6-1.

³⁸ South African Army College, *Operational Concepts*, 7/5-4.

³⁹ Attrition and manoeuvre warfare theory will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

⁴⁰ T.R. Ungleich, 'The Defence of German South West Africa during World War I' (MA thesis, University of Miami, Miami, 1974), 205.

time and again, after which they made their last stand in the northeast of the colony.⁴¹ On the issue of numerical superiority David Killingray feels that it was a central factor in the defeat of the Germans.⁴² Jan Christiaan Smuts junior, the son of General Smuts, claims 'the victory was due to superior tactics as well as overwhelming strength'.⁴³ Did superior numbers and direct attack ensure the victory over the German forces, or was the victory the result of superior tactics and operational strategy? This question is basic to the analysis of the German South West African campaign in this study.

The dissertation proposes that the application of manoeuvre warfare theory resulted in the success of the campaign and that the numerical superiority of the Union Defence Forces was not the most overwhelming factor in the victory. Essentially, it argues that the German South West African campaign is a text book example of manoeuvre warfare theory.

The use of theory in this dissertation is intended to compare historical events within the framework of manoeuvre theory; to determine how the military campaign was conducted; and ultimately, how victory was attained. This analysis is designed to add value to the existing body of military knowledge where the corporate knowledge and understanding of military officers is based on military history.

The study of the German South West African campaign and the military action during the Afrikaner Rebellion allows for the exploration of the first campaign conducted by the Union Defence Forces. The analysis of the campaign as an example of manoeuvre warfare provides the opportunity to overlay contemporary theoretical concepts and frameworks to the study of the German South West African campaign. Furthermore, the research is largely directed at military scholars and students of war to further the knowledge and art of the profession of arms.

In terms of military theory, the topic of the South African campaign in German South West Africa is not well covered. The dissertation therefore aims to analyse the campaign with reference to military theory. It provides an account of the course of events and analysis of the German South West African campaign in Chapters 4 to 8. The results of this analysis add value to the study of the German South West African campaign with reference to its

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁴² D. Killingray, 'The War in Africa', Chapter 7 in H. Strachan, ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 93.

⁴³ J.C. Smuts, *Jan Christian Smuts* (London: Cassell, 1952), 259.

relation to military theory. Chapter 9 includes the final analysis of the campaign and Chapter 10 concludes the dissertation.

The importance of the African campaigns in the First World War remains largely overshadowed by the European theatre of operations. Killingray maintains that the German South West African campaign and other campaigns in Africa, were merely 'sideshows' of the First World War.⁴⁴ Collyer agrees that in general the campaigns in Africa were minor in comparison to the European theatre of war, but feels that the campaign in German South West Africa holds particular interest because it provided the first test of the Union Defence Forces since its formation under the Defence Act in 1912.⁴⁵

In terms of justification of the study of a given topic, John Tosh says that a historian 'is completely justified in allowing current social concerns to affect his or her choice'.⁴⁶ There is a focus on manoeuvre warfare theory in the South African National Defence Force at present. Needless to say, the study of manoeuvre warfare theory in the South African context requires a study of South Africa's past military campaigns. EH Carr states that history is 'an unending dialogue between the past and the present'.⁴⁷ The present determines needs and new analysis of the past. The German South West African campaign thus provides an interesting case study for manoeuvre warfare theory.

The study of military history gives commanders and staff officers as well as other ranks, an understanding of past wars, campaigns and operations. BH Liddell Hart writes that for a soldier there is direct and indirect experience (through study); direct experience may be limited, whereas indirect experience may be deeper and may assist with the mental preparation of soldiers.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Killingray, 'The War in Africa', 92.

⁴⁵ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 1.

⁴⁶ J. Tosh and S. Lang, *The Pursuit of History* (London: Pearson Longman, 2006), 214–218.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, x.

⁴⁸ B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy of the Indirect Approach* (London: Faber & Faber, 1941), 2.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Manoeuvre Warfare Theory

The study of warfare theory encompasses the competing theories of manoeuvre and attrition theory. Neither of these two theories is mutually exclusive and wars are a combination to differing extents of these two approaches.¹ It is argued in this dissertation that manoeuvre warfare theory is an effective and efficient means of analysing and conducting war.

Manoeuvre theory is derived from military history and military strategies which have been employed in past campaigns. This theory of warfare resurfaced as a field of study in the late 1970s after initially receiving much attention from the 1920s until the 1940s.

Colonel John Boyd proposed that a study of warfare should follow what he called the OODA cycle, namely: observation, orientation, decision, and action (also called the OODA loop). Boyd's theories influenced manoeuvre warfare theory in that a rapid decision-making cycle was essential for victory. Boyd based his theories on his experience as a fighter pilot and by conducting interviews with veteran commanders about their war experiences. Boyd also read widely on military history and drew on the experiences and lessons of past campaigns.

Boyd wrote an essay in 1976 entitled 'Destruction and Creation', and gave a slide presentation which he named 'New Conception for Air-to-Air Combat' in which he alluded to some of the aspects which would become fundamental in the conceptualisation of the OODA cycle. He proposed that confusion or entropy affects the ability of commanders to take decisions and thus take action.² The inability to make the correct decision in time, results in the incorrect action being taken which is central to losing a battle or an operation.

Boyd gave further presentations from 1986 until 1996, by which time the OODA cycle theory was fully developed. These presentations promoted his OODA loop theory which further influenced manoeuvre warfare theory.³

¹ J.A. Springman, 'The Rapier or the Club: The Relationship between Attrition and Manoeuvre Warfare' (MSS thesis, United States Army War College, Carlisle, 2006), 1.

² J.R. Boyd, 'Destruction and Creation', Unpublished essay, September 1976.

³ W.S. Angerman, 'Coming Full Circle with Boyd's OODA Loop Ideas: An Analysis of Innovation Diffusion and Evolution' (MSMIS thesis, United States Air Force Institute of Technology, Dayton, 2004), 16.

The 1980s and 1990s saw a range of authors coming to the fore and elaborating on manoeuvre warfare theory. The framework which will be applied in this dissertation is derived largely from the works of William Lind, Richard Simpkin and Robert Leonhard.⁴ The research and findings of these three authors have much in common. Leonhard explains that 'the highest and purest form of manoeuvre warfare is to pre-empt the enemy that is to disarm or neutralise him before the fight'.⁵

Within the framework of manoeuvre warfare theory Simpkin identifies dislocation and pre-emption as possible methods of attaining victory, where dislocation refers to the application of manoeuvre once conflict has broken out; and where pre-emption refers to the use of manoeuvre to prevent the outbreak of combat.⁶

Manoeuvre warfare is linked to a rapid decision-making cycle, lower level command initiative and a decentralised command system. Lind discusses the aspect of decentralisation of military forces and comments that the decision making cycle of a given military force must be done at a pace that is faster than that of the enemy and that this must be done by the respective decentralised forces.⁷ A rapid decision-making cycle relates to pre-emption and dislocation of the enemy.

Leonhard builds on the theory as set out by Lind and Simpkin taking into account the study of warfare on the continuum between attrition and manoeuvre theory. Leonhard describes attrition as the way of defeating an enemy force in war, campaign or battle through destruction of the enemy's mass.⁸

Attrition theory emphasises destroying the enemy in a pitched battle in the hope that the damage done by one's own force on the enemy outweighs the relative attack of the enemy. The South African Army staff officer's reference manual explains that attrition theory is analogous to positional theory and strives to inflict casualties and material losses.⁹ Leonhard describes 'an immovable focus on attrition theory ... aimed at destroying rather than

⁴ R. Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver* (New York: Ballantine, 1994); W.S. Lind, *Manoeuvre Warfare Handbook* (London: Westview Press, 1985); R.E. Simpkin, *Race to the Swift* (London: Brassey's Defence Publishers, 1986).

⁵ Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver*, 19.

⁶ Simpkin, *Race to the Swift*, 140.

⁷ Lind, *Manoeuvre Warfare Handbook*, 6.

⁸ Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver*, 19.

⁹ South African Army College, *Operational Concepts*, 7/3-1.

defeating, at fighting fairly rather than stealing every advantage over the enemy, and at pursuing perfection in method rather than obtaining decisive results'.¹⁰

Attrition differs from manoeuvre theory in terms of its focus on destruction as opposed to the defeat of the enemy through pre-emption, disruption or dislocation. Manoeuvre warfare theory emphasises the importance of movement, envelopment and placement of forces over firepower and destruction which is epitomised in attrition warfare theory. Manoeuvre theory is thus focused on the dislocation or pre-emption of forces as opposed to an overwhelming focus on firepower in pitched battle. The use of superior firepower and technology is directly related to the employment of attrition theory.¹¹

The difference between manoeuvre and attrition theory can be divided into a focus on the human element of war and a focus on the technological aspect of war respectively. The debate on whether the most influential element in warfare is firepower or manoeuvre remains undecided. This dissertation takes the point of view that manoeuvre warfare theory is of central importance in the conduct of war.

Abel Esterhuysen analyses the relation between manoeuvre and attrition theory on the various levels of war (refer to Figure 1)¹² and highlights the point that despite the difference in theoretical underpinnings, all wars include some level of attrition.¹³ There is a definite and continuous relation between attrition and manoeuvre warfare theory in the conduct of war. Manoeuvre theory is an ideal in military theoretical terms which aims at victory in the shortest possible time with minimal loss of life and materiel.

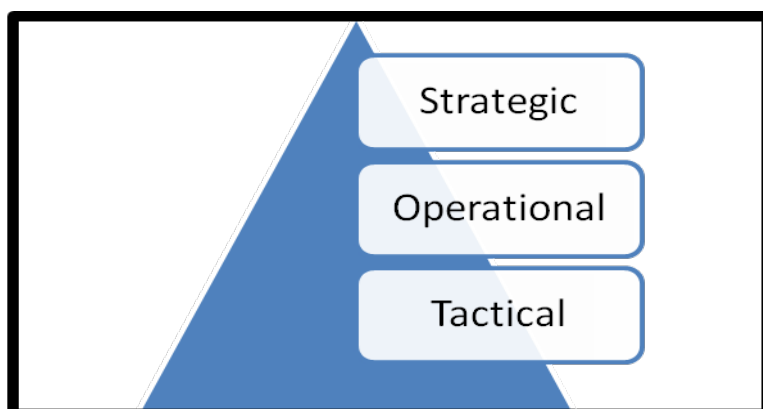


Figure 1: Hierarchy of the levels of war

¹⁰ Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver*, 4.

¹¹ A. Esterhuysen, 'The Theories of Attrition versus Manoeuvre and the Levels of War', *Strategic Review for Southern Africa*, 23, 2 (2001), 86.

¹² The levels of war include the strategic, operational and tactical.

¹³ Esterhuysen, 'The Theories of Attrition versus Manoeuvre', 87.

Liddell Hart served on the Western Front during the First World War and after the war, he wrote extensively on mechanisation and the use of armoured warfare. He formulated what he referred to as the indirect approach. His theory of indirect approach expounds the importance of avoiding direct attack on enemy defensive positions in favour of an enveloping or surprise attack.¹⁴

Bjorn Solberg applies the indirect approach as alluded to by Liddell Hart in his study on the importance of manoeuvre warfare and its application to the Norwegian infantry. Solberg maintains that divergent lines of operation and deep enveloping movements that create a feeling of being trapped, lead to paralysis and psychological dislocation.¹⁵ The indirect approach aims to dislocate the psychological and physical dimensions of the enemy on a continuous basis. Manoeuvre warfare thus attempts to pre-empt or defeat the enemy by disrupting its psychological and physical capability.¹⁶

Modern military theorists have relied on the work of Liddell Hart to explain the relation between military theory and psychology. Manoeuvre warfare incorporates psychology into its framework which includes aspects such as morale, frustration and fear and how these factors influence the outcome of battles and operations.¹⁷

The focus of manoeuvre theory is on the human condition. Liddell Hart was central in introducing the aspects of the human condition into contemporary military theory. He deliberates on the primary, yet incalculable element of war, the human will and how aspects of movement and surprise can dislocate the physical and psychological capability of the enemy, elements that are fundamental to combat cohesion.¹⁸ An attack on the enemy should ideally have two psychological effects, namely: firstly, to destroy the enemy's will to resist and secondly, to destroy the enemy's cohesion.¹⁹

Manoeuvre warfare theory focuses on the psychological impact of making the enemy force lose its morale, which results in the enemy fleeing. Intrinsically coupled with the concepts of

¹⁴ Liddell Hart, *Strategy of the Indirect Approach*.

¹⁵ B.T. Solberg, 'Maneuver Warfare: Consequences for Tactics and Organisation of the Norwegian Infantry' (MMAS thesis, United States Army Command and Staff College, Kansas, 2000), 30, 31.

¹⁶ South African Army College, *Operational Concepts*, 7/5-4.

¹⁷ B. Shalit, *The Psychology of Conflict and Combat* (New York: Praeger, 1988); R. Gal and D.A. Mangelsdorff eds., *Handbook of Military Psychology* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1991); B. Glad ed., *Psychological Dimensions of War* (London: Sage, 1990).

¹⁸ B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (London: Faber & Faber, 1967).

¹⁹ South African Army College, *Operational Concepts*, 7/5-5.

loss of morale and fleeing is the pursuit of the enemy.²⁰ Manoeuvre warfare theory holds that the loss of morale is related to the defeat of the enemy. Furthermore, manoeuvre theory evaluates the human condition in combat as opposed to a strict analysis of troop numbers, capabilities and military equipment. Don Starry, who was a four-star general in the United States Army, comments that the outcome of battles is often decided by factors other than numerical superiority.²¹

There were very few military theorists who addressed the psychology of warfare before Hart. In the Western military tradition one such military theorist was Ardant Du Picq. Du Picq promulgated theories on the study of morale and unit cohesion in combat. He linked the impact of weapons to the morale of the enemy as opposed purely to the destruction of the enemy's military hardware. Du Picq states, 'in studying ancient combats, it can be seen that it was almost always an attack from the flank or rear, a surprise action that won battles, especially against the Romans'.²²

Martin van Creveld reinforces the previous point by commenting that from the time of Napoleon Bonaparte in the late 18th century to Helmuth von Moltke, Alfred von Schlieffen and Liddell Hart in the early 20th century, the object of battle has been to outflank the opponent so as to envelop and encircle the enemy force and ensure that it is cut off from its logistical supplies. This will result in victory in the battle and possibly the campaign as well. The use of this method is tacitly or explicitly understood as the means of gaining victory in a confrontation between conventional military forces – as was the case in Ulm in 1805 (Napoleon and the French army effectively surrounded and cut off the Austrian army forcing it to surrender) and is accepted as a convention of war where the encircled army accepts defeat when cut off.²³

Manoeuvre warfare theory aims to dislocate or pre-empt the enemy by enveloping or cutting him off. The principles of manoeuvre warfare are largely congruent with the principles expressed by Sun Tzu.²⁴ Sun claims that supreme excellence lies not in winning of every

²⁰ Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver*, 112.

²¹ Simpkin, *Race to the Swift*, x.

²² A. du Picq, trs., J.N. Greenly and R.C. Cotton, *Battle Studies*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files-h.htm>, ebook (Accessed 23 January 2012), 55.

²³ M. van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 91.

²⁴ Sun Tzu was a Chinese general and military theorist in ancient times, who introduced prominent concepts such as deception, surprise and the importance of morale to military theory over 2 000 years ago. His treatise on military theory has been translated into English among other languages and is accepted in the Western military tradition.

battle but rather in defeating the enemy without resistance.²⁵ Manoeuvre warfare theory and Sun's theory hold the same central tenet.²⁶ Sun's theory on warfare is expounded by Liddell Hart in his indirect approach, which has similar elements to manoeuvre warfare.²⁷

In order for military history to have a practical purpose, its study should result in the formation of principles and theories. Principles are classified as laws which are based on what has been observed, while theories involve the analysis of history in order to be better equipped to determine how a system should function.²⁸ Manoeuvre has in recent times been adopted as a theory of warfare and a principle of war in the South African National Defence Force. Manoeuvre is defined as, 'a fundamental truth regarding the prosecution of war ... the object is to dispose a force in such a manner as to place the enemy at a relative disadvantage and achieve results that would otherwise be costly in men and materiel'.²⁹

Manoeuvre warfare theory and military theory as a whole, were influenced by the works of the mid-19th century theorists of war such as Carl von Clausewitz and Antoine-Henry Jomini. Clausewitz coined the term centre of gravity as the hub of all power³⁰ and he also commented on the friction of warfare which affects the psychology of the combatants and commanders.³¹ Jomini spoke of lines of advance and attack on key points with the placement of an overwhelming force so as to achieve an objective.³²

The theoretical underpinnings of the indirect approach as postulated by Liddell Hart are hypothetically superimposed on the divergent advances of a military force on a central objective or through divergent advances on successive decisive points en route to the centre of gravity. Liddell Hart referred to attacking along the line of least expectation and the line of least resistance,³³ and this idea can be achieved through the consideration of the lines of advance in operations and the decisive points of the opposing force.³⁴

²⁵ T. Sun, tr., L Giles, *The Art of War*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/132/132.txt>, ebook, Accessed 23 January 2012, 4.

²⁶ Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver*, 28.

²⁷ South African Army College, *Operational Concepts*, 7/3-1.

²⁸ Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver*, 78, 79.

²⁹ South African National Defence Force, 'The Principles of War', *South African Military History Reader* (Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch, 2004), 40.

³⁰ The 'centre of gravity' is a philosophical abstract in military theory which must be analysed and identified by real time commanders in the execution of operational planning. The centre of gravity is the objective of an attack, advance or the positioning of forces.

³¹ C. von Clausewitz, tr., J.J. Graham, *On War*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1946/1946-h/1946-h.htm>, ebook, Accessed 23 January 2012, 119.

³² A.H. Jomini, tr., G.H. Mendell and W.P. Craighill, *The Art of War* (Rockville: Art Manor, 2007).

³³ Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 335.

³⁴ Solberg, 'Maneuver Warfare', 29.

Manoeuvre theory adapted the term 'centre of gravity' and describes it as the critical vulnerability. In its original context, as put forward by Clausewitz, the centre of gravity refers to the hub of power and the concentration of strength of the enemy. Manoeuvre warfare theory adapted this concept to refer to the critical vulnerability, which if compromised leads to the paralysis of the enemy and not just a reduction of the enemy's military capabilities.³⁵

Manoeuvre warfare theory is a theory of military strategy and is included in the military strategic framework.³⁶ The strategic framework is the link between politics, the military and the different levels of war. The levels of war provide the construct that enable an understanding of the conceptual and physical requirements of military activities and theory.³⁷

Thomas Edward Lawrence, or Lawrence of Arabia as he was known, wrote that the purpose of tactics is to achieve strategic ends.³⁸ Strategy aims to achieve political and national objectives through military means. Between the strategic level of war and the tactical level of war there is the operational level of war. The operational level consists of the overall conduct of campaigns whereas the tactical level is specifically concerned with battles.³⁹

Campaigns are fought at the operational level of war which links the strategic objectives to military actions at the tactical level. Paul Montanus links the study of manoeuvre warfare to the Saratoga campaign during the American War of Independence. The Saratoga campaign was analysed in terms of the manoeuvre concepts of movement, placement of forces and seeking of gaps in defensive lines.⁴⁰

This dissertation follows a similar pattern and applies the national character of the Union Defence Force Union Defence Forces and the manner in which the commanders influenced and shaped the campaign with the forces available to them.

³⁵ Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver*, 44.

³⁶ J. Gooch, 'The Use of History in the Development of Contemporary Doctrine', Conference paper at a conference sponsored by the director of development and doctrine at Larkhill, Larkhill, 1996; J. Baylis *et al.*, *Contemporary Strategy* (London: Croom Helm, 1987); Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, M.I. Handel, *Masters of War* (London: Frank Cass, 1992); J.A. Olsen and C.S. Gray eds., *The Practice of Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); C.S. Gray, *War, Peace and International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2007).

³⁷ South African Army College, *Operational Concepts*, 7/2-1.

³⁸ T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1935).

³⁹ Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver*, 9.

⁴⁰ P.D. Montanus, 'The Saratoga Campaign: Maneuver Warfare, the Continental Army, and the Birth of the American Way of War' (MMS thesis, United States Marine Command and Staff College, Quantico, 2001), iii.

The study of manoeuvre warfare theory as a military theory and military strategy are fundamentally interlinked because they aim to explain the nature and application of the military. The study of theory and strategy in history allows for the re-analysis of historical military campaigns and sheds new light on them. Ken Booth comments that there is much to be gained from strategic history.⁴¹

The reasons behind the victory gained by the Union Defence Forces are intrinsically linked to the reasons for the defeat suffered by the German forces in German South West Africa. The causes of victory and defeat are by their nature complex and are often oversimplified for varying reasons – often these stem from an inaccurately applied methodology. The German defeat will be analysed by using the relevant parts of the theories expounded by EA Cohen and J Gooch⁴² as well as that put forward by MI Handel.⁴³ These authors explore the causes of defeat relative to organisational factors as well as tangible and intangible aspects which influence the outcome of battles and campaigns.

Gooch and Cohen have devised a methodology for analysing defeat which requires one to determine the cause of the military failure (from the German perspective) followed by determining the critical lapses or tasks which were not completed and thus led to the defeat. The third step is to do a layered analysis which includes investigating some of the organisational aspects which led to failure.⁴⁴

Handel identifies a formula to determine total military power (refer to Figure 2). This equation is used in the analysis of the German South West African campaign when comparing the Union Defence Forces and the German force.

Total Military Power = Quantity x Materiel Quality x Non-Material Quality
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Figure 2: Formula for total military power⁴⁵

The quantitative elements are the numbers of soldiers and military equipment. Materiel quality refers to whether the equipment used by a given military is of a good standard and

⁴¹ Baylis *et al.*, *Contemporary Strategy*, 55.

⁴² E.A. Cohen and J. Gooch, *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War* (New York: The Free Press, 1990).

⁴³ M.I. Handel, *War Strategy and Intelligence* (London: Frank Cass, 1989).

⁴⁴ Cohen and Gooch, *Military Misfortunes*, 46.

⁴⁵ Handel, *War Strategy and Intelligence*, 95, 96.

non-material quality refers to the intangibles of military forces such as morale, motivation, level of training, doctrine, staff work and organisation.⁴⁶

This dissertation analyses the German South West African campaign from a strategic historical perspective through the lens of manoeuvre warfare theory. The framework for manoeuvre warfare theory for the purposes of this dissertation is outlined in Chapter 3. The main elements of manoeuvre theory will be identified and discussed with reference to the course of events of the German South West African campaign.

German South West African Campaign

The 'Official History of the German South West African Campaign' is a chapter in a collected work, *Union of South Africa and the Great War, 1914–1918: Official History*, and is the first major account of the campaign, principally compiled by Johan Leipoldt. Ian van der Waag comments that there were many other contributing authors and editors of the *Official History* which is the reason why it was published anonymously in 1924.⁴⁷ The chapter on the German South West African campaign gives a descriptive account of the military operations and illuminates the strategic and tactical advantages and disadvantages of the Union Defence Forces during the campaign. The *Official History* is by its nature biased and gives an account from the South African point of view.

John Johnston Collyer who was the chief staff officer during the German South West African campaign recounted the events of the campaign in his book which was published in 1936.⁴⁸ Collyer's book has many similarities to the *Official History*. Collyer stressed the South African national system of tactics,⁴⁹ the command style of Botha, which he claims was uniquely suited for the campaign, as well as the difficulties of not having an efficient staff system to keep the military force well supplied and maintained.

Collyer's book is biased towards South African interest and was edited by a committee appointed by the Union Defence Forces.⁵⁰ The *Official History* and Collyer's account

⁴⁶ Handel, *War Strategy and Intelligence*, 96.

⁴⁷ Anon., *Union of South Africa and the Great War, 1914-1918: Official History* (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1924); I. van der Waag, *The South African Military Yearbook, 1997* (Pretoria: Prestige Publications, 1997), 15.

⁴⁸ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*.

⁴⁹ The commando system as used traditionally by the Afrikaners in South Africa, made extensive use of the horse and rifle as their primary military equipment. The emphasis was on high mobility.

⁵⁰ Van der Waag, *The South African Military Yearbook 1997*, 16.

describe the campaign in a holistic fashion making reference to the strategic, operational and tactical levels of war. The *Official History* and Collyer's *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915* have not yet been surpassed in their description and analysis of the campaign.

Collyer dedicates large portions of his work to the analysis of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the German and South African forces and the strategies and tactics employed by both sides. Whereas the South African force had the numerical superiority, Collyer indicates some of the military advantages which the Germans had over the South Africans, including an undivided command; a conventionally trained, homogeneous force; superior artillery; and good logistics, which included a well-structured rail system.⁵¹

The campaign began with a loss for the Union Defence Forces in September 1914 at the Battle of Sandfontein, which characterises the German military advantages mentioned by Collyer. The Germans managed to concentrate superior forces at Sandfontein which caught the South African forces by surprise. The defeat at Sandfontein is discussed in Collyer's book and is largely attributed to the delay in receiving intelligence on the massing of German troops in and around Sandfontein. There is a growing body of literature on the Battle of Sandfontein and its impact on the Union Defence Forces.⁵²

The Battle of Sandfontein coincided with undertones of rebellion throughout the Union. A number of disgruntled prominent officers of the Union Defence Forces and their followers met with German agents to discuss the possibility of initiating rebellion in the Union of South Africa. The German authorities used the Afrikaner Rebellion as a means of delaying the commencement of the invasion of German South West Africa. The subsequent outbreak of the Afrikaner Rebellion resulted in a brief halt to the operations in German South West Africa because the Union Defence Forces was first used to put down the rebellion. Operations in German South West Africa resumed once the rebellion was effectively quelled.⁵³

⁵¹ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 21.

⁵² R.C. Warwick, 'The Battle of Sandfontein: The Role and Legacy of Major General Sir Henry Timson Lukin', *Scientia Militaria, South African Journal of Military Studies*, 34, 2 (2006); Van der Waag, 'The Battle of Sandfontein, 26 September 1914'. The author thanks Professor (Lieutenant Colonel) Van der Waag who provided keen insight by explaining certain key elements on the formation of the Union Defence Force. Professor Van der Waag further elaborated on the complexities of the military and political spheres which influenced the development of South Africa at the time and the personalities of the main role players in the campaign.

⁵³ P.J. Sampson, *The Capture of De Wet: The South African Rebellion 1914* (London: Edward Arnold, 1915).

Many of the sources used in this dissertation are derived from pro-South African sources and most of them have similarities in their description of events. Prior to the publishing of the *Official History* and Collyer's account of the campaign, many books on the campaign were released. These books provide firsthand accounts and describe the events of the campaign in a rather limited way. They do, however, give insight into the personal experiences of the authors on the different operations in the north and the south of German South West Africa.

The broad description of the campaign centres around the Northern Force which landed amphibiously in Walvis Bay; the Central Force which advanced from Lüderitzbucht after being deployed by sea; and the Southern Force and Eastern Force both of which advanced cross-country via the border between the Union and German South West Africa. The Central, Eastern and Southern forces combined later in the campaign to form the Southern Army.

WW O'Shaughnessy was a Reuter's special war correspondent on the campaign and he captured the story of the campaign in his book which he co-authored with WS Rayner.⁵⁴ The two authors discuss operations in German South West Africa, illuminating issues such as the state of morale among the soldiers – which was high during times of advance and attack – and the force composition of the South African and German forces. Their account does give some insight into the day-to-day experiences of the Northern Force as well as a broad overview of the Union Defence Forces's invasion plans which includes the amphibious landings at Lüderitzbucht and Walvis Bay and the cross-border advance by the Eastern and Central forces. Their account also discusses the novel use of aeroplanes in the campaign.

Later authors covered the aspect of aeroplanes in the German South West African campaign to some extent.⁵⁵ The South African and the German military forces made use of aeroplanes for aerial reconnaissance and also carried out a primitive form of aerial bombardment. The use of aerial reconnaissance was of great importance to the Union Defence Forces during the final advances and envelopments of the German forces.

The northern operation from Walvis Bay eastwards towards Windhoek was led by Botha personally. This advance was the main thrust of the campaign and was characterised by

⁵⁴ W.W. O'Shaughnessy and W.S. Rayner, *How Botha and Smuts Conquered German South West* (London: Simpkin, 1916).

⁵⁵ S. Monick, 'The Third Man: Willy Trück and the German Air Effort in South West Africa in World War I', *Military History Journal*, 5, 3 (1981); J.O.E.O. Mahncke, 'Aircraft Operations in the German Colonies 1911–1916: The Fliegertruppe of the Imperial German Army', *Military History Journal*, 12, 2 (2001).

definite periods of waiting and advances set apart by bursts of high mobility. The first offensive of the Northern Force was taken against the German defensive line between Riet, Pforte and Jakkalsfontein. Mobility and a rapid advance were essential in catching the Germans off guard. The speed of advance gave the Germans little time to finalise their defensive plans.

The focus on mobility and surprise becomes a recurring theme when one explores the firsthand accounts of the campaign. Moore Ritchie was a member of Botha's bodyguard unit, comprised for the most part by the South African Police. Ritchie writes: 'When General Botha treks he treks at express speed. With him the intention is that the essence of strategy shall be surprise.'⁵⁶ Ritchie was involved in the northern operation and alludes to the rapidity of the marches and then the long periods of rest and recuperation.

HF Trew, who was the commander of Botha's bodyguard, describes his experience in the northern operations of the campaign and gives his opinion on Botha's military strategy. Trew points out that Botha emphasised the importance of secrecy of his movements, mobility and the element of surprise.⁵⁷

The rapidity of the northern operations was demonstrated during the advance on the defensive position at Riet in March 1915 which was the first major objective of the northern advance. Botha employed a rapid night march to get into position for the attack on the German defensive position. Botha's bodyguard was closely engaged in the fighting at Riet and they were applied as a reserve force for the fighting detachments.

Trew's account has similarities to Moore's version of the campaign. Many of the authors who published in the early years after the campaign have much overlap in their account of events. The emphasis on mobility and pushing the horses to their limit comes through very strongly. The availability of water is also given great emphasis because the campaign was fundamentally influenced by the geographic location of watering holes.

Trew spent a considerable amount of time with Botha during the campaign and accompanied him until the German surrender. Trew brings forward Botha's knowledge of warfare in his understanding of the power of mobility and envelopment. Botha's use of envelopments became his signature tactic during the campaign and was used to great effect against the Riet defensive line to ensure the German withdrawal. Trew goes on to claim that

⁵⁶ M.E. Ritchie, *With Botha in the Field* (London: Longmans, 1915), 34.

⁵⁷ H.F. Trew, *Botha Treks* (London: Blackie & Son, 1936), 79.

Botha's knowledge of the double envelopment was learnt from his experience during the Boers' confrontations with the Zulu people.⁵⁸

Following the victory at the Riet defensive line, the South African forces had a strong foothold in the north of German South West Africa. The German forces attempted an attack on Trekkoppies in April 1915 to stifle the South African advance.

W Whittal was a British lieutenant commander in command of the Number 1 Royal Armoured Car Squadron deployed from the British Navy. The armoured cars supported the northern operations of the campaign and were effectively used in the action at Trekkoppies.

Whittal describes the battle at Trekkoppies and how the armoured cars helped the Union Defence Forces achieve victory on that particular occasion. In terms of the overall strategic picture the German attack on Trekkoppies had little impact; it coincided with the Union Defence Forces's advance on Karibib and Windhoek from Riet.

Whittal goes on to discuss the general state of morale of the troops as well as the objectives of Botha and the Union Defence Forces's military strategy, the lines of advance and the intent to cut off of the German force. With each South African advance the Germans were pushed further and further back. When the South Africans advanced and captured Karibib which was a strategic railway junction in the north, they effectively removed the German's freedom of movement and ability to mass troops and supplies throughout the colony. Karibib and Windhoek were captured in May 1915.

Whittal held Botha's abilities as a general in very high regard and admired his interpersonal skills which are personified in Whittal's statement that Botha's personal magnetism, charisma and directness was well used to motivate the soldiers in the German South West African campaign.⁵⁹ The soldiers on campaign were often bored and frustrated by the apparent lack of action and the long periods of inactivity between advances. The advances were dependent on resources which were not always readily available.

Underlying the frustrations of regimental life on campaign, the Union Defence Forces also reflected the animosities present in the Union of South Africa. The Union was newly formed and there were still political, social and economic tensions and insecurities in the various provinces and sectors.

⁵⁸ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 75.

⁵⁹ W. Whittal, *With Botha and Smuts in Africa* (London: Cassell, 1917), 27.

Botha's influence was needed in the campaign to calm the tensions in the Union Defence Forces. It had become an organisation that was marred by competing interests and military cultures.⁶⁰ In many ways it reflected the military cultures of conventional military units which were based on the British organisational model and that of the commandos which was based on the Afrikaner method of warfare. However, these differences in approach, military culture and interests did not affect the outcome of operations. There were certainly disagreements and problems in attaining resources and logistics, but the outcome of operations was never compromised by internal tensions.

In his book, HFB Walker discusses the logistical constraints and the ability of the different forces to pull together to cover extensive distances at a rapid pace and achieve their often daunting objectives. Walker's firsthand account of the campaign focuses on his individual experiences as a doctor attached to the Northern Force. Walker also discusses the pressure placed on the medical support to move at a speed which was proportional to that of the advancing forces.⁶¹

The final advance and envelopment occurred in the north because the Germans had effectively retreated to the end of their logistical and railway lines. The Union Defence Forces executed extensive marches with minimal logistical support and was able to surround the German force and compel their surrender in July 1915.

The northern and the southern operations took place simultaneously and formed a coordinated effort to defeat the German forces. The southern operations involved the capture of the southern half of German South West Africa which culminated in the taking of Gibeon.

The operations in the south began with the advance of the Central Force from Lüderitzbucht and the cross-border advance of the Southern and Eastern forces from the Union of South Africa. These three forces amalgamated under the command of Smuts in April 1915.

Several authors such as DE Reitz and PJK Robinson describe their experiences as part of the Southern Force.⁶² The southern operations did not see as much action at the northern

⁶⁰ Van der Waag, 'The Battle of Sandfontein, 26 September 1914', 7.

⁶¹ H.F.B. Walker, *A Doctor's Diary in Damaraland* (London: Edward Arnold, 1917).

⁶² D.E. Reitz, *Trekking On* (London: Travel Book Club, 1947); P.K.J. Robinson, *With Botha's Army* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1916).

operations. Lüderitzbucht was taken unopposed and there were several small skirmishes en route to Aus which was evacuated by the Germans in late March 1915.

Robinson served with the Imperial Light Horse Regiment. He alludes to his experience in the campaign as part of the southern force which included his unit's advance from Lüderitzbucht to Gibeon. Robinson gives the reader an idea of the boredom and frustration experienced by the soldiers on the German South West African campaign.

The Central Force spent an extended period at Lüderitzbucht waiting for supplies and for the commencement of its operations. These inactive periods were alternated by sudden, rapid advances. The firsthand accounts depict this disparity well. There was often very little warning between the boredom of waiting and the sudden switch to full-scale operations from a state of virtual inertia.

The campaign consisted of considerably more movement than pitched battle and Robinson comments: 'We always seemed to be playing on the fringes of war, a sort of appetiser before the dinner that we were never really to taste.'⁶³ The views of Robinson are focused on his military unit and its individual actions. They provide insight into the day-to-day operations of the Southern Force in German South West Africa. The strategic and operational level required the Germans to be pushed out of the south so that they could be effectively surrounded in the north. The final operation in the south was the advance and capture of Gibeon in April 1915. Following the Battle of Gibeon the Southern Force was largely disbanded or redeployed to the north.

The firsthand accounts hold value in that they address the detail of the campaign. These accounts of the southern operations indicate the boredom during the time spent waiting for supplies; the problems in receiving sufficient water; and the desire to engage in battle. These accounts discuss such matters from an individual point of view. They link in well with secondary sources, text books and academic articles which have been published on the First World War with the advantage of hindsight.

Many of the firsthand accounts of the German South West African campaign corroborate the wider issues of the campaign such as the importance of water; the necessity of keeping the mounted soldiers mobile in terms of logistics; and the tactics and strategy employed to induce the German surrender. These primary sources on the individual experiences of the

⁶³ Robinson, *With Botha's Army*, 133.

campaign have considerable value when interwoven with accounts which address the overall strategic and operational situation.⁶⁴

The German South West African campaign provides an interesting case study in terms of the type of problems that it posed for an invading army. In the case of the Union of South Africa the problems were twofold. Firstly, the physical geography in German South West Africa limited the pace and direction of the advance. Secondly, at the time, internal differences were rife in South African society at large and public opinion regarding the participation in the campaign was divided.

The geography of German South West Africa is well suited for defence due to the lack of water resources for an invading military force. This channels a military force into predictable advance routes. The defensive positions which were held by the Germans were thus always related to water resources or topographically well suited defensive locations.

There were vast distances between the locations where the various engagements took place. The campaign was characterised by operational pauses and forward advances which were largely based on the defensive battles put up by the Germans and the availability of water for the advancing South African forces. Van der Waag has published the most recent scholarly article on the campaign and the Battle of Sandfontein and observes that the geography of German South West Africa determined much of the strategic and operational planning for the campaign.⁶⁵

Van der Waag's article gives keen insight into the difficulties facing the Union Defence Forces in terms of the political and cultural schisms present in white South African society at the time. These differences fuelled the Afrikaner Rebellion and resulted in the delay of the campaign while the rebellion was being put down.

Gerald L'ange and Bill Nasson have both written campaign histories.⁶⁶ Nasson describes the military actions during the rebellion and discusses the divisions between Afrikaner and English-oriented South African military cultures at the beginning of the campaign. His account places considerable emphasis on socio-cultural differences in the Union and their historical dimensions. Nasson's account gives an overall perspective on the mood and

⁶⁴ Farwell, *The Great War in Africa 1914–1918*; E. Dane, *British Campaigns in Africa and the Pacific 1914-1918* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1919); Strachan ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of the First World War*; Strachan, *The First World War*.

⁶⁵ Van der Waag, 'The Battle of Sandfontein, 26 September 1914', 3.

⁶⁶ Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme*; L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*.

temperament of South African society at the time but has little new to offer in terms of the military details of the German South West African campaign. He describes in some depth the generally established strategic objectives, military strategy and the transportation difficulties experienced by the Union Defence Forces.⁶⁷

L'ange's account of the campaign was written for the 'South Africans at War' series.⁶⁸ His work, which discusses the landings at Lüderitzbucht, Walvis Bay and the cross-border advances of the South African forces, the general operations, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the South African and German forces.⁶⁹ He takes into consideration many of the regimental histories of the military units involved in the campaign, which adds insight and depth to his account.⁷⁰

Overall there are substantial similarities between L'ange's and Collyer's versions as far as the description of the course of events and the analysis of the campaign are concerned. Similarly, in terms of a complete military history of the campaign, little has been added since the publication of the *Official History* in the 1920s and Collyer's *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915* in the 1930s.

The two most recent accounts of the campaign include one by Tim Couzens, who writes on South Africa's involvement in the First World War, and another by Nasson, who in his most recent book describes the situation in South Africa during the First World War.⁷¹ A strong point of Couzens's book is that it has an excellent selection of photographs from the First World War. Nasson's work has considerable value in a socio-cultural historical context. Both these publications appeared to commemorate the centenary of the First World War and both add value to the historiography of the Great War. However for this dissertation which focuses on the military sphere these two books offer little further insight because they are general in their approach and rely strongly on secondary material.

⁶⁷ Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme*.

⁶⁸ South Africans at War is a series of books detailing the participation of South African soldiers in the First and Second World War and the Korean War. The series is published by Ashanti.

⁶⁹ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*.

⁷⁰ B.G. Simpkins, *Rand Light Infantry* (Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1965); N. Orpen, *The History of the Transvaal Horse Artillery 1904–1974* (Johannesburg: Alex White & Co., 1975); A.C. Martin, *The Durban Light Infantry, Volume 1, 1854 to 1934* (Durban: Hayne & Gibson Ltd, 1969). The regimental histories focus on the tactical level, whereas a campaign history focuses on the operational level of war.

⁷¹ T. Couzens, *The Great Silence* (Johannesburg: Sunday Times, 2014); B. Nasson, *World War 1 and the People of South Africa* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2014).

In terms of the relative strengths of the Union Defence Forces, a critical aspect which is highlighted by Collyer and supported by L'ange is the use in the Union's German South West African campaign of the 'surprise' tactics borrowed from the commandos – mobility and initiative.⁷²

A common thread which runs through all the sources is the importance of mobility in the campaign. Of course mobility was primarily dependent on the availability of logistical support. The mobility, speed and surprise of the Union's mounted forces became an essential characteristic of the campaign and will be analysed below with reference to the requirements of manoeuvre warfare theory.

Collyer alludes to the mobility of the mounted soldiers and a national system of tactics which he labels the 'Boer mounted charge' and explains it as a rapid advance to gain a close firing position from where the commandos would dismount and continue the fight on foot with rifle in hand.⁷³ Van der Waag comments that Collyer had a special interest in the mounted infantry and he named it the 'national military arm of South Africa'.⁷⁴

The logistical and transportation difficulties experienced during the campaign have been stressed in many publications on the German South West African campaign. Overcoming these challenges was central to maintain mobility. H Paterson considers that solving the logistical and transportation difficulties was a key factor in the Union's victory.⁷⁵ Collyer observes that the need for animal and mechanical transport and the effective management of these resources was fundamental to the successful execution of the campaign.⁷⁶

The speed and mobility of the South African forces were dependent on the availability of stores and supplies. Botha's final advance necessitated an operational pause lasting a month and a half in order to stockpile the necessary stores and transport.⁷⁷ The seven letters that Botha wrote to Smuts that have been published highlighted Botha's progress and frustrations during the campaign.⁷⁸ Botha complained about the tense political climate within the Union of South Africa in 1915 as well as the difficulties regarding transport and the

⁷² L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 5.

⁷³ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 13, 14.

⁷⁴ I. Van der Waag, 'Smuts's Generals: Towards a First Portrait of the South African High Command, 1912–1948', *War in History*, 18, 1 (2011), 45.

⁷⁵ H. Paterson, 'First Allied Victory: The South African Campaign in German South-West Africa, 1914–1915', *Military History Journal*, 13, 2 (December 2004).

⁷⁶ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 27.

⁷⁷ Strachan, *The First World War*, 565.

⁷⁸ Hancock and Van Der Poel eds., *Selections from the Smuts Papers*.

shortage of horses he was faced with on the campaign. His military operations were based on the commando's mobility which required horses for operational movement and mules and wagons to keep the soldiers supplied. The horses and mules allowed for penetrating envelopments into German South West Africa which forced the Germans to retreat and eventually surrender.⁷⁹ The dissertation extrapolates from the means and method of the attainment of victory to the relation and influence of manoeuvre warfare theory on the campaign.

The pro-German sources, of which the latest account is authored by Ungleich, claim that the South African numerical superiority was the main reason behind its victory.⁸⁰ However, although they were outnumbered, the Germans also had various military advantages. They were operating on interior railway lines and could supply their forces easily and converge rapidly⁸¹ on an attacking force.⁸² The defensive strategy of the Germans traded ground for time so as to prolong the fight in the hope of a victory in the European theatre of operations.⁸³

The dissertation weaves together the various firsthand accounts and secondary sources to gain an understanding of the course of events which transpired during the German South West African campaign.⁸⁴ These sources are supplemented with primary material which highlights central themes such as the mobility of the mounted soldiers and the rapid pace of operations. Primary material is also used to show the need for logistics, transportation and military equipment in the campaign to facilitate the military operation and manoeuvre warfare.

⁷⁹ Strachan, *The First World War*, 568.

⁸⁰ Ungleich, 'The Defence of German South West Africa during World War I', 52.

⁸¹ The Battle of Sandfontein is a case in point. The German forces managed to converge on Sandfontein and defeat the South African forces who found themselves in an untenable position.

⁸² Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 13, 14.

⁸³ Strachan, *The First World War*, 568.

⁸⁴ Many of the firsthand sources have since been published.

CHAPTER 3: MANOEUVRE WARFARE THEORY

Manoeuvre warfare theory, as a way of conducting warfare, aims to defeat the enemy with the least amount of effort while suffering minimal operational losses. Manoeuvre is regarded as an important means of achieving victory in conflict.¹ It is an approach to warfare that is based on capitalising on the vulnerabilities of human nature.²

Theories of war are essentially an abstract supposition based on the different principles, philosophical ideologies and doctrine relative to different military forces and their respective commanders. Manoeuvre warfare theory delves into the philosophy of war and focuses on the achievement of victory in the fastest and most efficient way.³

The basic components of a war are campaigns, operations and battles. A campaign can be defined as a number of operations which are designed to achieve strategic objectives within a specific theatre. Operations can be defined as coordinated actions such as battles which take place as part of a campaign.⁴ Battles aim at achieving the operational objectives and are normally comprised of a progression of engagements. An engagement is a smaller scale conflict consisting of one or more skirmishes.⁵

The levels of war include the strategic, operational and tactical levels. The respective level of war dictates the type of military planning and action that will take place. The strategic level concerns itself with objectives on a national level authorised by the national command; the operational level pertains to campaigns and is organised around armies and corps; and the tactical level refers to battles and engagements usually with divisions, brigades and battalions.⁶ Manoeuvre warfare is conducted on the different levels of war and is aimed at achieving a rapid victory at a low cost to resources and human life.

Manoeuvre warfare addresses the means of achieving victory and identifies three possible methods, namely: pre-emption, dislocation and disruption. Pre-emption refers to the use of manoeuvre to prevent the outbreak of combat, while dislocation refers to the application of

¹ Solberg, 'Maneuver Warfare', 21.

² British Army, *Operations, British Army Doctrine*, 5-2.

³ Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver*, 61.

⁴ South African Army College, *Operational Concepts*, 7/2-3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 7/2-4.

⁶ Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver*, 6.

manoeuvre once conflict has broken out.⁷ Similarly, disruption is relevant after the conflict has commenced.

Pre-emption is a rejection of established methods to gain victory by attrition or by virtue of superior numbers. It is a decisive approach which epitomises speed and victory is attained with a characteristically low loss of human life. Pre-emption relies on movement and the element of surprise over firepower and calls for a rapid decision making cycle.⁸ Pre-emption denies the enemy freedom of action. The initiative is taken away from the enemy.⁹ This means of achieving victory is based on intuition more than intelligence.¹⁰

Dislocation involves the removal of the enemy's combat strength from the decisive point. It includes avoiding combat where the enemy is stronger and choosing how to position one's forces to ensure the best results. An example of this is the surprise attack by the German forces on Sedan during the Second World War. The Germans opted to go through the Ardennes forest which the Allies did not expect because they thought the terrain was inaccessible to military forces.¹¹ Dislocation is based on a good intelligence network and makes use of surprise, deep penetrating mechanised (or mounted) drives and envelopment to dislocate the physical and psychological spheres of the enemy.¹²

Disruption involves the attack on and destruction of the enemy's fighting capability which will paralyse the enemy force.¹³ Disruption is the third means of achieving victory through manoeuvre warfare and involves defeating the enemy by attacking the enemy's centre of gravity.¹⁴

Clausewitz defines the centre of gravity as 'the hub of all power and movement on which everything depends'.¹⁵ Clausewitz was a product of the *grand armee* era¹⁶ and as such was a proponent of the direct attack on the enemy's massed force. The centre of gravity,

⁷ Simpkin, *Race to the Swift*, 140.

⁸ Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver*, 63, 64.

⁹ British Army, *Operations, British Army Doctrine*, 5-16.

¹⁰ South African Army College, *Operational Concepts*, 7/5-6.

¹¹ Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver*, 67, 68; South African Army College, *Operational Concepts*, 7/5-10.

¹² British Army, *Operations, British Army Doctrine*, 5-16; South African Army College, *Operational Concepts*, 7/5-6.

¹³ South African Army College, *Operational Concepts*, 7/5-6; British Army, *Operations, British Army Doctrine*, 5-17.

¹⁴ Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver*, 73.

¹⁵ Solberg, 'Maneuver Warfare', 26.

¹⁶ This underpins Napoleonic warfare where large armies were concentrated for a decisive pitched battle.

according to Clausewitz should always be the main army of each side who meet in a focused clash with the purpose of achieving a decisive victory.¹⁷ The centre of gravity in terms of manoeuvre warfare can be defined as the enemy's 'critical vulnerability' which is not necessarily the centre of the enemy's strength.¹⁸

The levels of war are intrinsically related to the centre of gravity. The enemy's centre of gravity is its critical vulnerability. By attacking the enemy's centre of gravity one should defeat the enemy. The centre of gravity can be on the strategic, operational or tactical levels of war.

In terms of the operational level of war, where manoeuvre warfare is employed the centre of gravity is often a headquarters, a central place where senior personnel govern, command and direct the forces.¹⁹ The centres of gravity at each level of war are related to the objective of that respective level (refer to Figure 3).²⁰ Lawrence speaks of the confusion between the strategic and tactical levels where some commanders believe it is an end of strategy to commit to battle.²¹

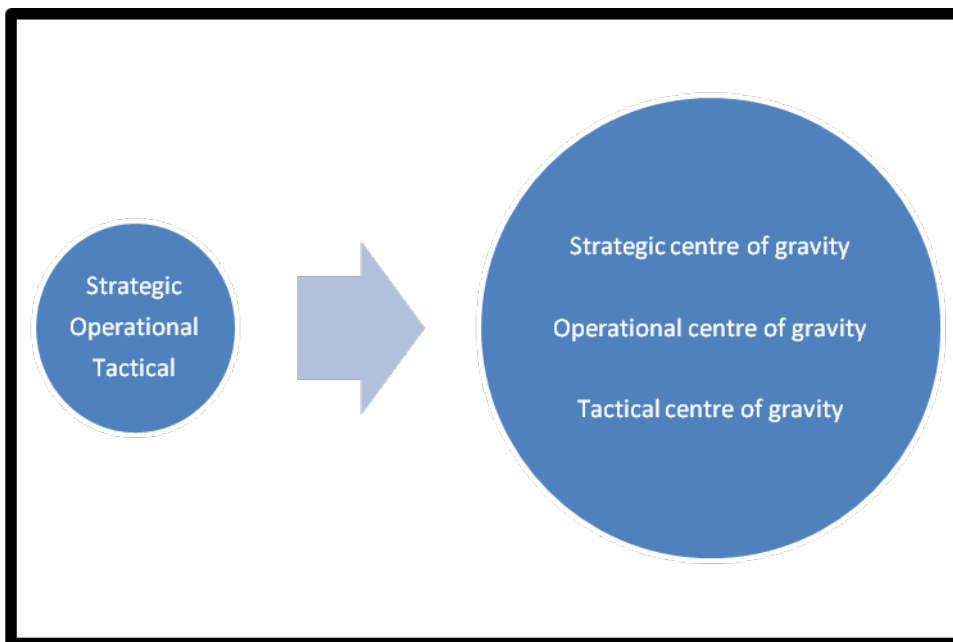


Figure 3: The levels of war and their centres of gravity

¹⁷ Von Clausewitz, tr. Graham, *On War*, 119.

¹⁸ Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver*, 73.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 20–23.

²⁰ South African Army College, *Operational Concepts*, 7/11-2.

²¹ Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, 197.

The confusion alluded to by Lawrence is magnified by the reality that certain strategic objectives do not always have a tactical solution. Von Moltke stated that in the case where tactics dictate the objects of strategy there is a reversal in the traditional role of strategy.²²

The strategic level must determine the strategic objectives. The operational level must determine how to achieve the strategic ends. The strategic level must formulate and develop security policy and military strategic and operational plans. The operational and tactical levels must formulate the approach as well as the campaign, operations and battle concept and then fight the war.²³ Military operations and statecraft pursue a collective aim and are parts of the same whole.²⁴

Military commanders often have the daunting task of identifying operational and strategic objectives and centres of gravity. The commander would then have to direct resources and the focus of the main effort against the enemy's centre of gravity.²⁵ Leonhard states: 'Operational planners must determine how to use the available combat power to achieve the goals of a campaign.'²⁶

The notion of achieving results and attacking the centre of gravity with minimal loss is central to the conceptualisation of manoeuvre theory. This idea is also a fundamental part of Chinese strategic thought which states that the objective should not be at the physical and military centre of gravity but rather at the enemy's moral and stability centre of gravity.²⁷

The military scientific path to the attainment of the centre of gravity involves the realisation of decisive points on the respective lines of operations. Decisive points are defined as positions in time and space which can threaten the centre of gravity. Lines of operations link decisive points and centres of gravity.²⁸

This theoretical application is not always as clear cut as it may appear at first glance. A decisive point may for example be the command and communication centres of a military force which allows for a certain objective to be taken or enveloped. Liddell Hart states that a

²² Gray, *War, Peace and International Relations*, 20.

²³ South African Army College, *Operational Concepts*, 7/1-3.

²⁴ T. Sun, tr. A.L. Sadler, *The Art of War* (Tokyo: Tuttle, 2009), 25.

²⁵ South African Army College, *Operational Concepts*, 7/11-7.

²⁶ Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver*, 10.

²⁷ Sun, tr. Sadler, *The Art of War*, 28.

²⁸ Solberg, 'Maneuver Warfare', 27.

dispersed advance could have a single objective or a number of successive objectives or alternatively a dispersed advance could have simultaneous objectives.²⁹

The methods of defeating the enemy in manoeuvre warfare involve pre-emption, dislocation and disruption which steer away from the brute strength of the enemy (attrition) and instead aim to defeat the enemy through the use of mobility and positioning. Leonhard further describes these terms by stating: 'pre-emption involves ... relying more on speed than on firepower, speed of advance must rob the enemy into retreat ... movement fulfils the purest form of manoeuvre warfare in defeating the enemy without risk of direct-fire engagements.'³⁰

Diametrically opposed to manoeuvre warfare theory and the psychological dimension is attrition warfare theory which focuses on firepower, material difference and the tactical level of war. Attrition and manoeuvre theory are the two basic theories applied to conventional warfare both are directed at defeating the opposing force. Many soldiers on all levels and ranks focus on the tactical level and many military practitioners hope for the end of a given war by way of a 'great battle'.

Attrition focuses on the tactical level and the central purpose is to bring the opposing force to a decisive battle through the massing of forces. Essentially this is warfare in the classic Clausewitzian mould where the ultimate aim of strategy is to involve large forces in fierce confrontation or fixed battle.³¹ The Western Front of the First World War provided a prime example of attrition warfare.³² The operational concepts employed by the Germans in the European theatre in the early stages of the First World War can be largely defined as offensive as opposed to the option of envelopment.³³

It should also perhaps be granted that on the Western Front the option of envelopment may have been exhausted due to the mass concentration of forces. The British and French military forces had to go through the German defensive positions which were extended in length and depth which in turn allowed for no outflanking to take place. The result was an attrition-based operation on the Western Front which resulted in a high mortality rate.³⁴

²⁹ Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 201.

³⁰ Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver*, 64.

³¹ Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 190.

³² Static warfare with an emphasis on firepower.

³³ R. Holmes, *The Oxford Companion to Military History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 675.

³⁴ Gray, *War, Peace and International Relations*, 80, 81.

The central concept behind attrition theory is the breaking of the opponents will by destruction through direct attack. Manoeuvre warfare on the other hand emphasises avoiding the 'enemy's strength in favour of attacking his weakness'.³⁵ Firepower over movement is the focus of attrition theory.

Attrition warfare theory focuses on the material loss of the enemy. It is directed towards the physical dimensions of war and aims to hold ground by inflicting more damage on the enemy than it can inflict in return. Attrition warfare is essentially static and linear in its approach to warfare.³⁶

Manoeuvre warfare extends over the three levels of war.³⁷ The relation between attrition and manoeuvre warfare varies over the different levels. On the strategic level the ends of policy must be chosen because the core aspects of strategy and the means to affect those ends must be identified. If military means are selected to achieve the ends of policy then the operational level must formulate a plan for the execution of military operations so as to achieve the national military objectives.

The operational level takes shape in campaigns and is always faced with the decision of whether to accept battle or not. Should battle be accepted or chosen then military operations are shifted into the realm of tactics. On the tactical level manoeuvre and attrition theories are interwoven where manoeuvre is translated into mobility and attrition into firepower.³⁸ The slower moving attrition element, with reference to its firepower, provides the stability which manoeuvre cannot provide on the tactical level.³⁹

Clausewitz and Liddell Hart define strategy in the same vein, referring to the military force of a state as a means to be used to fulfil its political ends.⁴⁰ The operational level is where the strategic aims are met and it is also the realm where manoeuvre warfare is executed.⁴¹ 'Grand tactics' is an antiquated term that refers to the planning and movement of large forces between battles which is currently referred to as the operational level of war.⁴²

³⁵ Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver*, 14.

³⁶ South African Army College, *Operational Concepts*, 7/3-1.

³⁷ Solberg, 'Maneuver Warfare', 5.

³⁸ Esterhuysen, 'The Theories of Attrition versus Manoeuvre', 91.

³⁹ Simpkin, *Race to the Swift*, 23.

⁴⁰ Holmes, *The Oxford Companion to Military History*, 879.

⁴¹ Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver*, 8.

⁴² Holmes, *The Oxford Companion to Military History*, 895.

Leonhard defines manoeuvre as focusing on the operational level without including tactical battles and states, 'it [manoeuvre] can be defined as the movement towards an objective with the ultimate purpose to gain an advantage over the enemy whether positionally or psychologically'.⁴³ Manoeuvre theory deals with the dual spheres of the psychological and the physical, where the effect of a rapidly advancing force can demoralise an enemy.

Sun comments that 'supreme excellence is not to fight and conquer in all your battles but rather in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting'.⁴⁴ This statement on the aim of strategy is reinforced by Liddell Hart who writes 'the perfection of strategy ... [is] to achieve a decision without any serious fighting'.⁴⁵ Manoeuvre warfare thus aims at the enemy's critical vulnerability, the centre of gravity, and not necessarily at the enemy's strong point. The choice of whether to accept battle or not becomes a decision of great significance.

According to Leonhard, 'one of the operational commander's primary functions during a campaign is to decide whether to accept battle or whether to decline through manoeuvre'.⁴⁶ Sun alludes to what he terms the essentials of victory, which include 'knowing when to fight; knowing how to handle superior and inferior forces [and] high morale in all ranks'. He adds that 'the military capacity should not be interfered with by the sovereign'.⁴⁷

Theoretically the efforts of a military force should be directed against the vulnerable points of the opposing force. Should the military force be directed to fight the strong and defensible positions of the opposing force in a direct confrontation, the likely result would be substantial loss and destruction. The efforts of a military force should rather be directed against the morale and will of the opposing force.⁴⁸ The loss of morale is linked to the loss of ground and the lack of reserves.⁴⁹

Sun was the first strategist who recorded the importance of the psychological and human dimension of warfare.⁵⁰ Du Picq highlighted the psychological sphere in warfare in the West and states that when men feel isolated they require high morale.⁵¹ Friction and uncertainty

⁴³ Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver*, 18.

⁴⁴ Sun, tr. Sadler, *The Art of War*, 5.

⁴⁵ Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 190.

⁴⁶ Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver*, 11.

⁴⁷ Sun, tr. Sadler, *The Art of War*, 6.

⁴⁸ Solberg, 'Maneuver Warfare', 26.

⁴⁹ Von Clausewitz, tr. Graham, *On War*, 120.

⁵⁰ Sun, tr. Sadler, *The Art of War*, 15.

⁵¹ Du Picq, trs. Greenly and Cotton, *Battle Studies*, 22.

are crucial factors which influence the mind of the commander.⁵² Jomini and Clausewitz also understood the importance of the human aspect in war. Jomini maintains that 'the superiority in armament may increase the chances of success in war, however it does not in itself win battles'.⁵³

The previous point regarding the utility of armaments was reinforced by Du Picq who claims that 'weapons are effective only insofar as they influence the morale of the enemy'.⁵⁴ Clausewitz contributed the term 'friction' to the theory of warfare which refers to the human aspects of fear, anxiety, frustration and tiredness and how these factors influence the course of warfare. Clausewitz says that friction is intrinsically related to chance in warfare.⁵⁵

Friction, according to the doctrine propounded by the British Army, is the force which makes the execution of certain actions difficult.⁵⁶ The factors that are fundamentally linked to friction are physical exertion, danger, intelligence and uncertainty.⁵⁷ Friction implies that things generally go wrong and soldiers and people make mistakes which are amplified due to stress and exhaustion.⁵⁸ These factors dwell as much in the physical as in the psychological realm and can be perceived or real. The difference between a real and perceived threat in the mind of the soldier is minimal because the psychological effect is almost identical.⁵⁹ The study of friction forms an essential part of manoeuvre warfare.

The operations of a given army should not have the objective of seeking and committing its forces to battle. The objective is the defeat of the enemy – which may or may not require battle. Defeating an opposing force has a large psychological dimension which includes morale and courage which in turn is affected by surprise and mobility as key aspects of manoeuvre theory.⁶⁰

Morale is defined by the United States Army as 'the mental, emotional and spiritual state of the individual. It is how he feels, [be it] happy hopeful, confident, appreciated, worthless, sad,

⁵² C. Fouche, 'Military Strategy and its Use in Competitive Strategy with Reference to the Nelson Mandela Metropole Automotive Industry' (MBA thesis, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, 2005), 27.

⁵³ G. Parker ed., *The Illustrated History of Warfare: The Triumph of the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 2.

⁵⁴ Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver*, 44.

⁵⁵ Von Clausewitz, tr. Graham, *On War*, 43.

⁵⁶ British Army, *Operations, British Army Doctrine*, 3-2.

⁵⁷ Solberg, 'Maneuver Warfare', 22.

⁵⁸ Gray, *War, Peace and International Relations*, 25.

⁵⁹ Gal and Mangelsdorff eds., *Handbook of Military Psychology*, 511.

⁶⁰ Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver*, 29, 30.

unrecognised or depressed.⁶¹ Morale is recognised as the most important aspect of a fighting force, whereas discipline and training are also regarded as necessities.⁶²

Morale is one of the intangibles of war and is a concept and phenomenon that has been studied in depth by military psychologists and historians. The fundamental function of morale is to provide the soldier with the will to win. Studies in the psychological motivation of individuals and groups towards commitment to battle are intrinsically linked to the different levels of morale within the group and whether the individual and/ or group identifies with the need to commit to battle.⁶³ The strong ties between soldiers, based on shared hardship and common purpose, leads to a will to fight on.

These and other factors such as determination are also intertwined with soldiers having faith in their leadership. When social unity collapses and soldiers' faith in their commanders dwindles then the level and impact of combat stress reactions increase.⁶⁴ The fear that is felt on the battlefield is magnified by isolation.⁶⁵

The movements that comprise manoeuvre as a concept should at all times be a threat to the enemy. Du Picq added in his explanation on the psychology of war that if the enemy felt threatened in its position by a large envelopment then it would instinctively retreat.⁶⁶ When a military force threatens the communication lines of an enemy force, the closer that the cut is made to a base or the enemy force, the greater the psychological impact.⁶⁷

The South African principles of war, at present, include manoeuvre and surprise. Surprise can have a devastating effect on morale and comprises speed, originality, secrecy and deception.⁶⁸ Surprise often results in panic with the target individual or group feeling uncertainty from being entrapped which is accompanied by a feeling that one needs to search for immediate escape.⁶⁹

A feeling of being trapped occurs in the psychological dimension as a result of the physical movements and placement of forces. If the line of least resistance is followed in the physical

⁶¹ Gal and Mangelsdorff eds., *Handbook of Military Psychology*, 454.

⁶² Gray, *War, Peace and International Relations*, 5.

⁶³ Shalit, *The Psychology of Conflict and Combat*, 35.

⁶⁴ Gal and Mangelsdorff eds., *Handbook of Military Psychology*, 513.

⁶⁵ Glad ed., *Psychological Dimensions of War*, 229.

⁶⁶ Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver*, 45.

⁶⁷ Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 199.

⁶⁸ South African National Defence Force, 'The Principles of War', 35.

⁶⁹ Glad ed., *Psychological Dimensions of War*, 229.

sphere, the line of least expectation (surprise) must be followed in the psychological sphere.⁷⁰ Sun states that all warfare to some extent is based on deception and that one should attack the enemy when an attack is least expected.⁷¹

The use of the element of surprise, whether in the operational or strategic context, should penetrate to great depths within the enemy area of operations without offering battle. This will dislocate the enemy forces and psychologically impair their commanders.⁷² In order to execute effective manoeuvre warfare, one must attack the psychological dimension of the adversary by attacking the physical enemy in such a way that surprise and dislocation is achieved. The effect of a lost battle is more psychological than physical and the retreating force will withdraw until they reach a strong defensive position that can be held or reinforced with reserves.⁷³

The effects of retreating and being surrounded may lead to combat stress reactions. Combat stress reactions compromise the effective functioning of the leadership of a military unit based on a drop in morale with the primary causal factor being the fear of death in combat.⁷⁴

Two fundamental elements which are critical to the defeat of a given enemy are its will to resist and its cohesion.⁷⁵ Manoeuvre should be carried out in such a way that the enemy feels overwhelmed by the attack or advance (or the *threat* of the attack or advance). In psychological terms this is related to stress casualties who are more numerous at a low point in morale. Under severe conditions of stress, soldiers feel incapable of fighting even if they are not physically wounded.⁷⁶

Movement and surprise are the elements which are available to destroy the enemy's will to resist. Movement lies in the physical realm and surprise exists in the psychological dimension. The two elements are proportional because movement creates surprise and surprise gives rise to movement.⁷⁷ The effect of movement and surprise is related to the enemy morale.

⁷⁰ Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 194.

⁷¹ Sun, tr. Sadler, *The Art of War*, 3.

⁷² Simpkin, *Race to the Swift*, 30.

⁷³ Von Clausewitz, tr. Graham, *On War*, 133.

⁷⁴ Gal and Mangelsdorff eds., *Handbook of Military Psychology*, 507–511.

⁷⁵ South African Army College, *Operational Concepts*, 7/5-5.

⁷⁶ Gal and Mangelsdorff eds., *Handbook of Military Psychology*, 483, 484.

⁷⁷ Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 189, 190.

Enemy morale is often unrelated to its physical wellbeing and even if a military force experiences no losses it may become panic-stricken and be useless as a fighting force.⁷⁸ In order to attack the psychological wellbeing of the enemy, its will to resist or cohesion should be attacked and compromised. By attacking the will of the enemy one destroys the enemy's belief that it can win.⁷⁹

Within the psychological sphere the importance of personality on warfare is of great significance. Essentially the perception of a competent and motivational commander inspires his forces and assists in the formation of morale. Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery commented, 'if the approach to the human factor is cold and impersonal, then you achieve nothing'.⁸⁰

Many great commanders of the past had similar effects on their soldiers. Napoleon's charisma had a magnetic effect on his soldiers and an equally intimidating impact on his opponents. Similarly, General Erwin Rommel held great sway over his soldiers and equally over his opponents.⁸¹ The charisma of great commanders such as Napoleon and Rommel acts as a force multiplier on the pre-emption and deterrence ability of a force.⁸²

The greater the psychological impact on an opposing force, the fewer resources will be required to defeat it. This psychological effect is achieved by deception and surprise and by the positioning of own forces in the rear of the opposing force.⁸³ The indirect approach should be used for the dislocation of the mental and physical spheres using minimal resources.⁸⁴

Manoeuvre theory is essentially offensive in nature but there may be occasions when a defensive position has to be taken in preparation for the advance and attack to commence.⁸⁵ In terms of manoeuvre warfare the numerical difference is not of vital significance; more important is the impact it has in terms of the effective use of the space available.⁸⁶

⁷⁸ Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver*, 75.

⁷⁹ South African Army College, *Operational Concepts*, 7/5-5, 7/5-6.

⁸⁰ Glad ed., *Psychological Dimensions of War*, 232.

⁸¹ Gray, *War, Peace and International Relations*, 44.

⁸² Simpkin, *Race to the Swift*, 142.

⁸³ South African Army College, *Operational Concepts*, 7/3-2; Solberg, 'Maneuver Warfare', 79–82.

⁸⁴ Solberg, 'Maneuver Warfare', 34.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

The offensive should be aimed at the enemy's effective fighting strength and not merely at the taking and holding of ground. Simpkin states that ground should only be held if it stands for a fixed enemy resource such as a bridge or an important base.⁸⁷ Fixed resources such as bridges and landing strips facilitate the movement and management of logistics.

Logistics are fundamental to modern warfare and determine how large a force can be deployed. Logistics also determine how these forces are to be maintained in terms of rations, ammunition, fuel and other requirements and the flow and rhythm of operations.⁸⁸

An operational pause must be taken at a time when the operation is no longer sustainable. The operational pause along one line of operations should be met with the hastening of the tempo on an alternative line of operations.⁸⁹ Liddell Hart states that dislocation can be produced by forcing an enemy to change front by separating its forces, endangering its supplies and/or cutting off possible routes of retreat.⁹⁰

Sun speaks of the military components necessary to execute manoeuvre warfare which include, 'an "ordinary" force that would pin down the enemy and an "extraordinary" force that would perform a manoeuvre so as to outflank the enemy'.⁹¹ The ordinary force fixes the enemy and the extraordinary force is used to strike.⁹² Jomini maintains that the chances of victory are far greater when there is a direct attack and a flanking manoeuvre.⁹³

Lawrence claims that the only tactic which he found worked effectively were rapid mounted charges at the enemy's rear.⁹⁴ The methods of direct and indirect attack have been used by different commanders across the ages and in different parts of the world to achieve their military objectives. Direct and indirect strategies can result in a multitude of different operational plans.⁹⁵

Boyd's decision cycle or loop is a continuous process of 'observation, orientation, decision and action (OODA)'.⁹⁶ By completing this cycle before the enemy can do so and thus disrupting the enemy's OODA cycle, one gains the initiative. Boyd's theory is largely

⁸⁷ Simpkin, *Race to the Swift*, 22.

⁸⁸ Holmes, *The Oxford Companion to Military History*, 513.

⁸⁹ South African Army College, *Operational Concepts*, 7/12-1.

⁹⁰ Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 193.

⁹¹ Solberg, 'Maneuver Warfare', 32.

⁹² Gooch, 'The Use of History in the Development of Contemporary Doctrine', 13.

⁹³ Jomini, tr., Mendell and Craighill, *The Art of War*, 149.

⁹⁴ Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, 96.

⁹⁵ Sun, tr. Sadler, *The Art of War*, 9.

⁹⁶ Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver*, 51.

psychological and deals with the will and morale of the fighting force.⁹⁷ Essentially, manoeuvre theory aims to disrupt the thought processes of the opposing force.⁹⁸

In order to achieve surprise one must be able to interfere with the OODA cycle of the enemy and retain the initiative at a high tempo.⁹⁹ On the operational level an example of taking the initiative is cutting the enemy's logistical lines through an enveloping advance or attack. Figure 4 is a representation of a direct and enveloping attack on the enemy and the link between the psychological and physical dimensions.

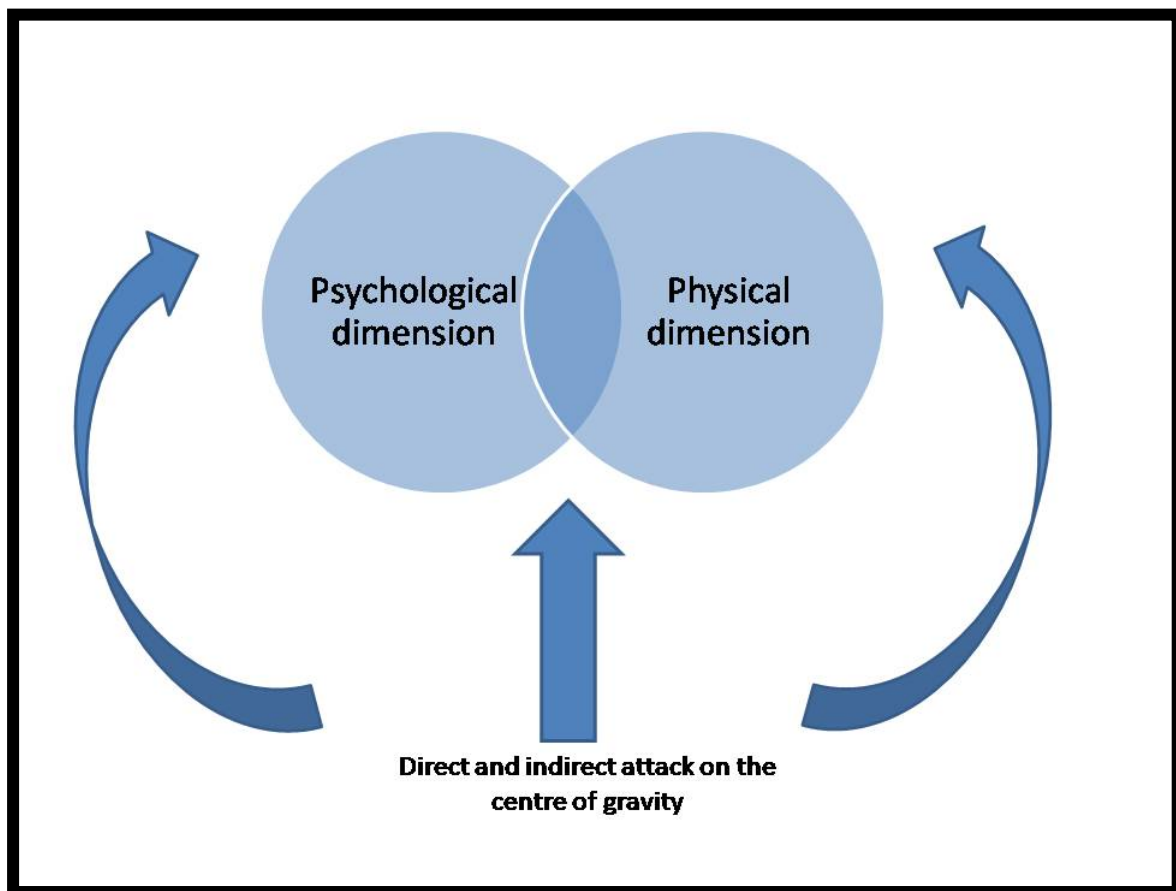


Figure 4: Direct and indirect attack

The side that seizes and maintains the initiative is often the side that wins the battle as opposed to winning by numerical superiority alone.¹⁰⁰ Liddell Hart states that whereas the enemy's outward appearance of numbers and resources indicate strength these factors are dependent on morale, control and supply.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Solberg, 'Maneuver Warfare', 38.

⁹⁸ Esterhuyse, 'The Theories of Attrition versus Manoeuvre', 91.

⁹⁹ Simpkin, *Race to the Swift*, 182.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, x.

¹⁰¹ Liddell Hart, *Strategy of the Indirect Approach*, 4.

In order to attack the cohesion of the enemy one could use tempo, simultaneity or surprise. Tempo is attacking the enemy at a varying rate; one to which the enemy is unable to respond effectively. Simultaneity is related to tempo and aims to attack the enemy from many different routes and angles which overloads the decision making ability (OODA cycle) of the enemy commanders. Surprise creates shock and is based on doing the unexpected where the enemy is not given time to respond.¹⁰²

The aim of manoeuvre warfare is to attempt to gain victory through methods other than pitched battle. The theory of manoeuvre warfare occurs at a high cognitive level and is often misunderstood by those focused on the tactical level. The ultimate role of the commander is to defeat the enemy as opposed to destroying the enemy.¹⁰³ The true aim of strategy 'is not to seek battle but rather to seek a strategic situation so advantageous that if it does not in itself produce the decision, its continuation by a battle is sure to achieve this'.¹⁰⁴

The discussion on the course of events of the campaign will show how the German South West African campaign provided a text-book case of manoeuvre warfare theory. The following sections deal with a description and analysis of the campaign.

¹⁰² South African Army College, *Operational Concepts*, 7/5-7, 7/5-8.

¹⁰³ Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver*, 24–29.

¹⁰⁴ Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 192.

CHAPTER 4: THE GERMAN SOUTH WEST AFRICAN CAMPAIGN AND THE AFRIKANER REBELLION

Overview of the German South West African campaign

From the late 18th century, South Africa's value to Great Britain had been its strategic location at the southernmost tip of Africa which allowed for British naval and commercial ships to rest, recuperate and re-supply. The security of the Union's sea ports was considered a fundamental part of the British Naval strategy.¹ The German South West African campaign was the first involvement of the Union of South Africa in the First World War and was directly related to the control of British sea routes.

The German East Asiatic Squadron, commanded by Vice Admiral Maximilian Graf von Spee, had methodically disrupted the British naval trade and troop movements in the Indian Ocean in the early stages of the Great War.² In order to control the supply of its own forces successfully during the First World War, the British had to neutralise the German naval threat. The harbours in German South West Africa, namely Lüderitzbucht and Swakopmund, were possible refuelling and re-supply points for German naval shipping, and even more so for the raiders of Von Spee's East Asiatic Squadron.

The wireless stations in Lüderitzbucht, Windhoek and Swakopmund were also of strategic concern to the British Empire because they allowed for international communication (via a relay station in Togo) between German warships at sea and Berlin.³ The control of the harbours and wireless stations in German South West Africa became a matter of strategic importance, with Lewis Vernon Harcourt, the secretary for the colonies describing it as 'a great and urgent imperial service'.⁴

The strategic plan for the invasion included amphibious landings at Lüderitzbucht and Walvis Bay. The proposed force at Walvis Bay was to advance via the shortest distance to Windhoek. The strategic plan as determined by Smuts was stifled by the British War Office which decided that the naval vessels could only transport troops to Lüderitzbucht. The

¹ Department of Defence Archives (hereafter DOD Archives), Diverse (hereafter D), Box 8, 37, Report on the military situation in South Africa, 20 August 1910.

² P.G. Halpern, 'The War at Sea', Chapter 8 in H. Strachan ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 109.

³ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 7; Anon., *Official History*, 10; Paterson, 'First Allied Victory', 1; Lentin, *Jan Smuts*, 31.

⁴ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 6.

invasion plan was thus changed and improvised to a less efficient one which Smuts was not entirely satisfied with.⁵

The initial invasion comprised the amphibious landings of the South African forces at Lüderitzbucht and at Port Nolloth. The military force at Port Nolloth landed on 31 August 1914 and advanced across the Orange River into German South West Africa via Raman's Drift and Sandfontein. The amphibious landing at Lüderitzbucht took place on 18 September 1914 and the port city was taken unopposed. Raman's Drift was occupied on 14 September 1914. The wireless station at Swakopmund was also destroyed on 14 September 1914 by naval shelling.⁶

The South African force grouping which took Raman's Drift continued its advance to Sandfontein where it was defeated by a German military force. The defeat at Sandfontein coincided with the outbreak of the Afrikaner Rebellion in the Union. All further invasion efforts were put on hold until the end of the rebellion in late 1914.⁷ The force grouping at Lüderitzbucht remained there until the invasion was resumed.

The destruction of the German East Asiatic Squadron at the Battle of the Falkland Islands on 8 December 1914, gave the British unprecedented superiority at sea in the South Atlantic. In turn, this allowed for freedom of movement in terms of further naval and amphibious assault on German South West Africa.⁸ The Union thus reverted to its initial strategic plan which included a deployment of its forces at Walvis Bay.

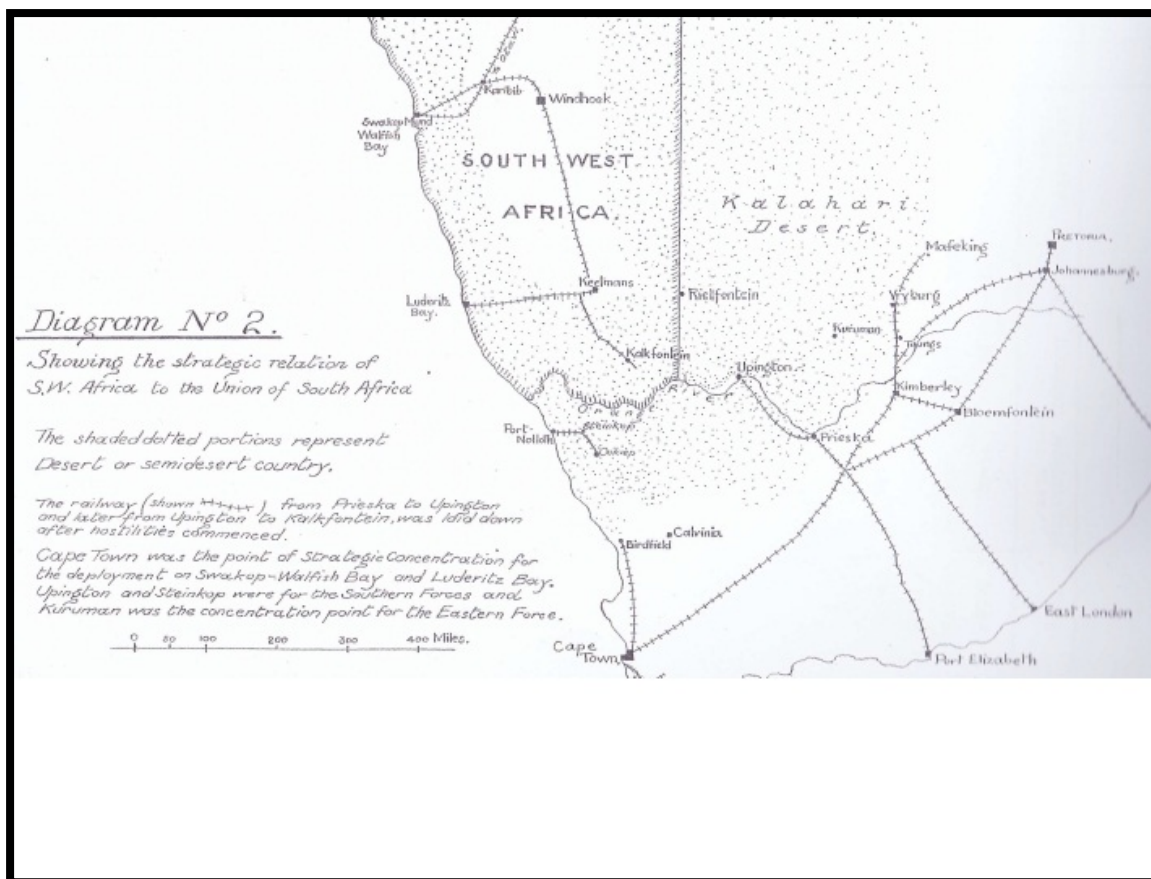
The second amphibious landing was executed and Walvis Bay was taken unopposed on 25 December 1914. There were also two South African force groupings deployed from across the Union and German South West African border in March 1915. Once the Union Defence Forces was deployed, the physical geography of German South West Africa proved a great obstacle to the campaign by hampering the logistical supply of the troops. The terrain in German South West Africa is largely favourable for defence due to its extensive plateau which started at sea level rose to 1060 metres in the interior. The desolate area receives little rainfall and is isolated by a desert belt on the western coast, of between 60 and 160 kilometres wide, that rises to the height of the plateau. At the time, German South West

⁵ Van der Waag, 'The Battle of Sandfontein, 26 September 1914', 7.

⁶ Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme*, 67.

⁷ Van der Waag, 'The Battle of Sandfontein, 26 September 1914', 2.

⁸ Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme*, 1-3; Trew, *Botha Treks*, 63.



Map 2: Terrain and infrastructure of German South West Africa¹²

The Germans had the advantage of operating on interior lines which enabled them to concentrate superior numbers within most of the colony during the advance of the South African forces.¹³ Despite having superior numbers, the Union Defence Forces was unable to advance with its entire force at any one time, hence the Germans had the option of concentrating on the smaller South African advances on different lines of operations.

Von Heydebreck, who was the commander of the German forces in German South West Africa, was a competent officer and he placed his forces strategically in and around Windhoek and Keetmanshoop. He held the central position and used his budding aviation corps to determine the location of the South African forces and where to launch his attacks.¹⁴

¹² DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138 IO, General Botha's Despatch (GOC MC GSW Campaign) 9 July to 28 October 1920, Historical Record of the Campaign in German South West Africa, 4 November 1919.

¹³ Anon., *Official History*, 12, 13; Trew, *Botha Treks*, 94.

¹⁴ Van der Waag, 'The Battle of Sandfontein, 26 September 1914', 4.

The advance routes of the Union Defence Forces were determined by the availability of water. The Germans found an ally in the desert and they exacerbated the general shortage of water supplies by poisoning the water wells with carbolic acid and sheep dip or tossing decomposing animals into the water.¹⁵

The British and German general staffs considered that crossing the Namib Desert was impossible.¹⁶ Botha described German South West Africa as a natural fortress.¹⁷ The Germans also improvised mines and booby traps to impede the Union's advance.

The Battle of Sandfontein

The initial invasion of German South West Africa comprised two force groupings. Lukin landed in Port Nolloth on 31 August 1914 along with an artillery complement of, five mounted regiments, the Witwatersrand Rifles, a section of engineers and an ammunition column.¹⁸ Lukin's advance with 'A' force, the first of the Force groupings, was hindered by 'B' Force commander, Commandant Manie Maritz, who had defected (because he did not identify with British interests) and from that time onwards was in collusion with the Germans.¹⁹

The Germans were aware of the tensions in South Africa.²⁰ Walker discusses the extent of German influence in the Afrikaner Rebellion stating that the Kaiser had met with Beyers (commandant general of the Citizen Force) as early as 1913.²¹ The Germans assisted in fomenting rebellion in South Africa with the express intention of delaying the invasion.²²

The tensions within South Africa were already present at the outbreak of the First World War and the Germans supported Maritz and Beyers to promote rebellion. The *Cape Argus* reported on 3 February 1915 that 'the Rebellion, which the Germans engineered with such characteristic cunning and duplicity, was a scheme upon which they undoubtedly set great score'.²³ The invasion of German South West Africa was halted until the rebellion was put

¹⁵ Whittall, *With Botha and Smuts in Africa*, 137.

¹⁶ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 124.

¹⁷ Hancock and Van der Poel eds., *Selections from the Smuts Papers*, 255.

¹⁸ Paterson, 'First Allied Victory', 1.

¹⁹ Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme*, 43–44; Warwick, 'The Role and Legacy of Major General Sir Henry Timson Lukin', 74.

²⁰ Anon., *Official History*, 9.

²¹ Walker, *A Doctor's Diary in Damaraland*, 158.

²² Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 5; Farwell, *The Great War in Africa 1914–1918*, 75.

²³ R. Segal and R. First eds., *South West Africa, Travesty of Trust: The Expert Papers and Findings of the International Conference on South West Africa* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1967), 8.

down. The first attempt at invading German South West Africa led to the Battle of Sandfontein.

Maritz with the 'B' Force was supposed to have supported Lukin in the cross-border advance through Raman's Drift and Sandfontein. Collyer states that even if everything had gone according to plan and with proper coordination, the advance would have been risky but an advance of either force in isolation would have been akin to failure.²⁴

Lukin was an experienced soldier and officer and led five South African Mounted Regiments, comprised of 1 800 riflemen with artillery support, from Port Nolloth northwards to the Orange River. There was railway transport available from Port Nolloth to Steinkopf, but from there onwards the only means of transportation and logistical supply was donkey and mule drawn wagons.

The distance from Steinkopf to the Orange River was about 97 kilometres which had no natural water supply.²⁵ The Germans knew that the South Africans had to advance along predetermined routes in accordance with the availability of water.²⁶

There was a German force advancing on Raman's Drift from the north while Lukin advanced on Raman's Drift from Steinkopf in the south. Lukin wanted to occupy it before the arrival of the Germans.²⁷ Lukin's plan for advance was to go through Raman's Drift, Warmbad, Kalkfontein and Seeheim.²⁸ The Germans had a blockhouse with negligible personnel at Raman's Drift which was easily taken by the 4th South African Mounted Regiment on 14 September 1914. Map 3 shows the advance route of the South African forces and the Battle of Sandfontein.

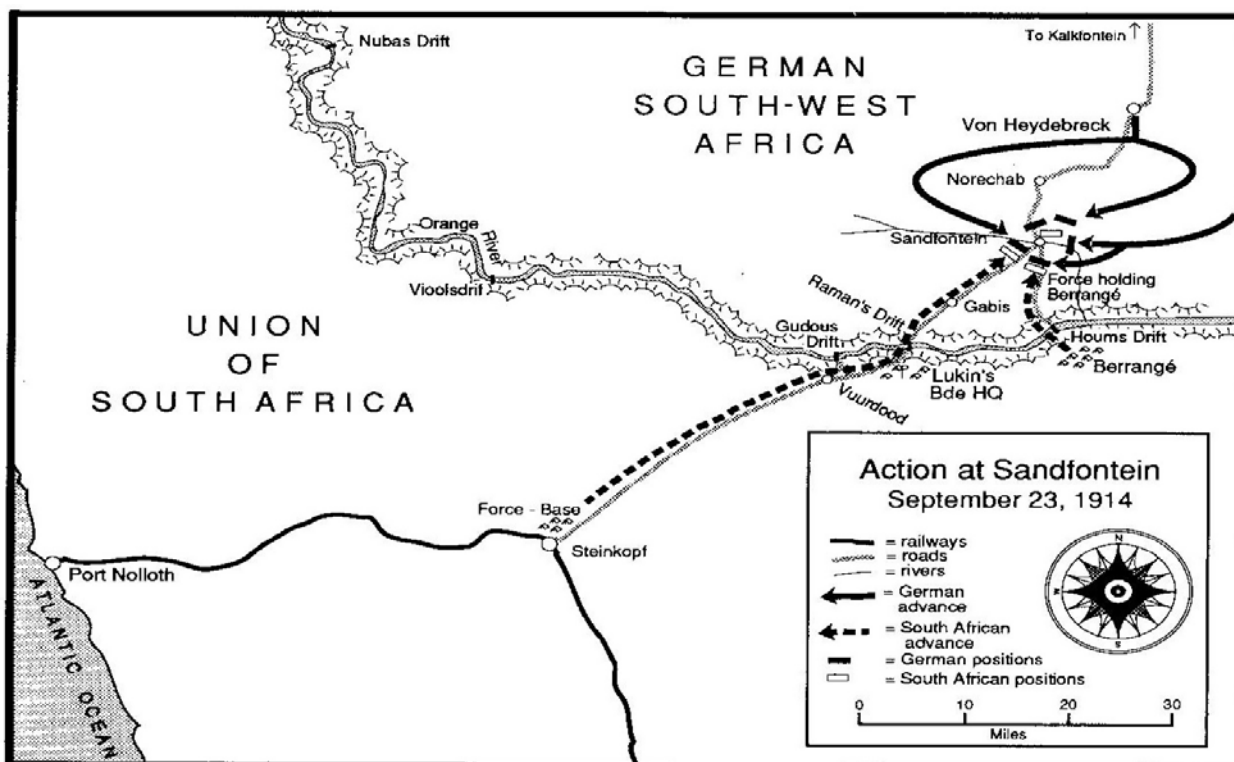
²⁴ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 29.

²⁵ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 19.

²⁶ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 23.

²⁷ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 21.

²⁸ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 31.



Map 3: Battle of Sandfontein²⁹

'C' Force landed at Lüderitzbucht on 18 September shortly after the taking of Raman's Drift by Lukin's advance force. Lukin had sent up an advance detachment comprised of approximately 200 soldiers of the 4th and 5th Regiments of the South African Mounted Rifles which had advanced via Raman's Drift and then subsequently arrived at Sandfontein on 19 September 1914. Captain E Welby was sent up to Sandfontein with a squadron from Raman's Drift in support of the 4th and 5th Regiments of the South African Mounted Rifles.³⁰ Lukin's main force arrived at Raman's Drift on 24 September 1914. Colonel CAL Berrange was part of 'A' Force and was sent to Houm's Drift to the east so as to cover the Union's advance on a wide front.³¹

Defence Headquarters wanted Lukin to move north of the Orange River to deter a possible German attack on the South African forces that had landed at Lüderitzbucht. Lukin was reluctant to send his forces north of the Orange River without having the necessary logistical support. Defence headquarters ordered supplies up to Sandfontein to facilitate the advance

²⁹ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 26.

³⁰ Van der Waag, 'The Battle of Sandfontein, 26 September 1914', 9.

³¹ DOD Archives, Adjutant General 1914 (hereafter AG 14), Box 13, 7, Report on the Battle of Sandfontein 26 September 1914.

on Warmbad.³² This was in line with defence headquarters plan to take pressure off the force that had landed at Lüderitzbucht by requesting Lukin to advance from the south.³³

Von Heydebreck had planned a daring attack on the advancing South Africans. He massed his troops at Sandfontein on interior lines and was hoping to bring any South African invasion plans to a decisive halt.³⁴ Von Heydebreck had to consider the deployments of the Union Defence Forces at Lüderitzbucht as well as those south of the Orange River.

The Germans decided to destroy the railway line running from Lüderitzbucht to the interior to delay the advance of the South Africans deployed at the port town. Von Heydebreck organised a large concentration of German resources for the Battle of Sandfontein, including those under Major D von Rapport, Major H Ritter and Major V Franke,³⁵ who deployed with a column each on Sandfontein. Von Heydebreck commanded the German force personally.³⁶

On 25 September 1914 at 17:00 the intelligence officer at Sandfontein reported that a German detachment was seen in the vicinity of Aurus. Furthermore there was movement of German forces in a southerly direction from Warmbad. On receiving the news, Lukin responded by sending Lieutenant Colonel RC Grant up to reinforce the force at Sandfontein under the command of Welby.³⁷ Grant was sent to support the force at Sandfontein with one section of the Transvaal Horse Artillery, a machinegun section and one squadron of the 1st Regiment of the South African Mounted Rifles.³⁸

The position at Sandfontein was untenable because it was encircled by high ground in the form of the surrounding hills.³⁹ Furthermore the squadron deployed there did not have a secure supply line and its rear was not protected.⁴⁰

³² Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 32.

³³ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Telegraph from General Staff to General Lukin, 23 September 1914; Anon., *Official History*, 14; Simpkins, *Rand Light Infantry*, 17.

³⁴ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 26.

³⁵ Franke later became a lieutenant colonel and commander of the German forces after the accidental death of Von Heydebreck on 2 November 1914. Von Heydebreck was accidentally struck by experimental ammunition during testing and subsequently died of his wounds.

³⁶ Anon., *Official History*, 14.

³⁷ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 78.

³⁸ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, 'A' Force operations during the initial stages of the German South West African campaign, 19 August 1915.

³⁹ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Operations in and around Sandfontein 25, 26 and 27 September 1914, 19 August 1915.

⁴⁰ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 29.

The tactical disposition at Sandfontein was dire.⁴¹ There were hills to the north, northeast and northwest that commanded the position; and the dry riverbed that ran from the southwest to the east gave the attacking force good cover.⁴² The Union Defence Forces detachment at Sandfontein was thus exposed and was positioned in low ground encircled by surrounding high ground which gave the enemy natural cover of advance, protection and various vantage points from which to deploy its forces.⁴³

Grant arrived on the morning of 26 September 1914. Von Heydebreck allowed Grant's relief column to arrive at Sandfontein without opposition.⁴⁴ Von Heydebreck had good intelligence regarding the South African movements which included aerial reconnaissance and other sources, such as Maritz. The German forces concentrated on Sandfontein with approximately 2 000 soldiers, four batteries of artillery and machine guns.⁴⁵

On that same morning of 26 September as Grant arrived, the Germans converged on Sandfontein with a large military force which had been massed in secret. The Germans attacked from the north, south, east and west.⁴⁶

The Germans commenced with an artillery bombardment which began a little after Grants' arrival at 7:25.⁴⁷ Grant deployed his two artillery pieces at the base of the kopje and the infantrymen made a line around the hill using rifle fire to keep the Germans at bay. The Germans bombarded the South African position extensively, shelling the wagons, horses and mules as well as spraying shrapnel over the infantrymen.⁴⁸ Lieutenant FB Adler from the Transvaal Horse Artillery was in command of the guns and at 8:00 he was ordered to open fire on the German column advancing from the southwest.⁴⁹ Artillery fire was heard from Lukin's position in Ramans Drift at 8:00.⁵⁰

The German force had surrounded the South African camp and shelled it from the northwest, northeast and southwest. The German infantry and machinegun sections had

⁴¹ Van der Waag, 'The Battle of Sandfontein, 26 September 1914', 10.

⁴² Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 38.

⁴³ DOD Archives, AG 14, Box 13, 7, Report on the Battle of Sandfontein 26 September 1914.

⁴⁴ Dane, *British Campaigns in Africa and the Pacific, 1914–1918*, 36.

⁴⁵ Van der Waag, 'The Battle of Sandfontein, 26 September 1914', 10.

⁴⁶ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 28.

⁴⁷ Farwell, *The Great War in Africa 1914–1918*, 78.

⁴⁸ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 30-32.

⁴⁹ Orpen, *The History of the Transvaal Horse Artillery 1904–1974*, 17.

⁵⁰ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Operations in and around Sandfontein 25, 26 and 27 September 1914, 19 August 1915.

also encircled the Union's position.⁵¹ The South African artillery countered the German artillery attack from the northeast and then from the northwest.⁵²

The South Africans sent a relief force from Raman's Drift and another from Houm's Drift. However, both were intercepted and pinned down by the well prepared Germans. The Union force that advanced from Raman's Drift was anticipated by the Germans who promptly ambushed them, pinning them down with machinegun fire. The Union force which advanced from Houm's Drift was met by infantrymen with machinegun support and was forced to withdraw.⁵³ The Union's artillery pieces at Sandfontein were destroyed by the German guns at approximately the same time that the relief force from Houm's Drift was checked by the Germans.⁵⁴

The Germans intensified their bombardment of Sandfontein and after ten hours of fighting, Grant raised the white flag. He realised that no military objective could be reached by further resistance because they were cut off and the relief force had not managed to repel the Germans or spring them free. Lukin was in agreement with Grant's decision to surrender on inspecting the battlefield on 27 September 1914.⁵⁵

The Union displayed great strength at arms; they were severely outnumbered and outgunned but managed to hold out for over ten hours during an intense battle. The Union forces at Sandfontein eventually surrendered at 18:00.⁵⁶ The South African casualties were 14 killed and 51 wounded which included Grant, while the German casualties numbered 23 killed, including the death of Von Rapport.⁵⁷

Many sources attribute the defeat at Sandfontein to the treachery of Maritz because he did not advance to support Lukin's cross-border operations.⁵⁸ Collyer assigns a great deal of blame to defence headquarters that ordered Lukin's force to advance. Collyer raises the

⁵¹ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 41.

⁵² Orpen, *The History of the Transvaal Horse Artillery 1904–1974*, 17.

⁵³ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 33.

⁵⁴ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 41.

⁵⁵ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Operations in and around Sandfontein 25, 26 and 27 September 1914, 19 August 1915; L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 34–36.

⁵⁶ Farwell, *The Great War in Africa 1914–1918*, 79.

⁵⁷ Anon., *Official History*, 15. Van der Waag gives the casualties as 16 South African dead or died of wounds and 14 Germans dead: Van der Waag, 'The Battle of Sandfontein, 26 September 1914', 11.

⁵⁸ Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme*, 67; Dane, *British Campaigns in Africa and the Pacific 1914–1918*, 35; J. Meintjes, *General Louis Botha* (London: Cassell & Co., 1970), 233; Paterson, 'First Allied Victory', 2.

point that regardless of whether Maritz supported Lukin or not, the Germans could have massed a larger force than the combined strength of Maritz and Lukin's forces.⁵⁹ In contrast, Warwick apportions most of the blame to Smuts for the undue haste of the Union's advance and for placing political objectives ahead of military considerations and realities.⁶⁰

It appears that there was some negligence on the part of reconnaissance parties and scouts who were sent out. They neither saw nor reported on any German troops in the vicinity of Sandfontein.⁶¹ Another interesting point is that despite receiving intelligence on the movement of German troops to the south, defence headquarters did not inform Lukin of this in any great haste. The information was not telegraphed to Lukin – it was, posted.⁶² As for Smuts, he wanted to reaffirm the political decision to invade German South West Africa with military action on the ground.⁶³ Van der Waag re-evaluates the loss at Sandfontein from a strategic and organisational point of view. His analysis is the most recent and arguably the most balanced approach to the complex study of military victories and defeats.⁶⁴

Analysis of the Battle of Sandfontein with reference to manoeuvre warfare theory

From a South African perspective the Battle of Sandfontein demonstrated an example of static warfare which is more inclined towards attrition warfare theory. The Union Defence Forces column advanced to Sandfontein, which was an untenable defensive position where they had to rely on firepower in response to the German attack.

The Germans made excellent use of mobility. The German forces were operating on internal lines of communications whereas the South Africans were using external lines of communications in terms of the invasion effort. Internal lines of operations theoretically allow a smaller force to concentrate rapidly on an objective, whereas external lines of communications allow for a larger force to surround and overcome its opponent.⁶⁵ The German forces were numerically superior at the Battle of Sandfontein because they mobilised approximately 2 000 soldiers from different parts of German South West Africa while the South African forces only numbered about 300.⁶⁶

⁵⁹ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 47.

⁶⁰ Warwick, 'The Role and Legacy of Major General Sir Henry Timson Lukin', 65.

⁶¹ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 36.

⁶² Farwell, *The Great War in Africa 1914–1918*, 80; L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 21–23.

⁶³ Warwick, 'The Role and Legacy of Major General Sir Henry Timson Lukin', 74.

⁶⁴ Van der Waag, 'The Battle of Sandfontein, 26 September 1914'.

⁶⁵ Solberg, 'Maneuver Warfare', 27, 28.

⁶⁶ Van der Waag, 'The Battle of Sandfontein, 26 September 1914', 11.

The efficiency of internal lines of operations was demonstrated by the Germans at the Battle of Sandfontein; the Union Defence Forces received its baptism of fire in terms of conventional operations. The German forces concentrated on Sandfontein with astonishing speed and surprise which overwhelmed the unsuspecting South African forces.

The speed of the German advance robbed the Union of its military initiative and they were essentially reactive to a completely dominant German attack. The operation was characterised by inefficient South African intelligence and predictable military advances.⁶⁷ Lukin justified his attack on Sandfontein by saying that he wanted to hold the only water supply in the area.⁶⁸

Manoeuvre warfare theory is dependent on good intelligence and a rapid decision making cycle which is intended to gain and keep the initiative. At the Battle of Sandfontein it was the Germans who had good intelligence and a rapid decision making cycle. They had a well planned attack and maintained the initiative by positioning blocking forces south of Sandfontein which stifled the Union's attempts to reinforce its detachments at Sandfontein.

The Union's advance reached its culmination at Sandfontein. The advance of Lukin's entire force was extended from Sandfontein to Raman's Drift, Houm's Drift, Steinkopf and Port Nolloth.⁶⁹ It was advancing to no definable military operational objective while extending its logistical lines. Lukin was unable to effectively support the forces deployed at Sandfontein.⁷⁰ At the tactical level the water supply was an objective, but it did not link up to an operational objective which would support the successful execution of the campaign. Tactical objectives should link up to an achievable operational objective. An advance on any given tactical and operational objectives should have sufficient logistics to keep the troops supplied and mobile.

In extending its advance beyond its capacity, the Union's force made itself susceptible to the rapid concentration of German forces. The Union forces were due for an operational pause in order to regroup, replenish and re-supply before deciding whether or not to advance on Sandfontein.

⁶⁷ Van der Waag, 'The Battle of Sandfontein, 26 September 1914', 8.

⁶⁸ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Operations in and around Sandfontein 25, 26 and 27 September 1914, 19 August 1915.

⁶⁹ Van der Waag, 'The Battle of Sandfontein, 26 September 1914', 10.

⁷⁰ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Operations in and around Sandfontein 25, 26 and 27 September 1914, 19 August 1915.

On the strategic level, the Union required an advance into German South West Africa to show solidarity to the British war effort and the 'urgent imperial service'. On the operational level there was no conceptualisation of a definable decisive point or objective which theoretically should have led to the German centre of gravity. The operational advance was thus directed by a strategic consideration without realistic operational objectives and without sufficient logistical support.

The Union force at Sandfontein had reached its culmination point and was deployed in an untenable tactical position. Manoeuvre warfare is intended to be offensive which is in contrast to the Union's advance on Sandfontein, where a defensive position had to be taken. The Union force at Sandfontein was surrounded and cut off from its supply and communication lines and thus it was compelled to surrender.

The Afrikaner Rebellion

The Afrikaner Rebellion allowed for a brief halt in operations in German South West Africa and forced the Union Defence Forces to become engaged in quelling the rebellion inside the Union. British intelligence had been aware that the Germans were considering fomenting rebellion in South Africa since 1908.⁷¹ The Germans were counting on the rebellion to distract the Union government to give them a military advantage in terms of time, and to weaken the unity of the Union Defence Forces.⁷²

Reitz, who was a veteran of the South African War and an ardent supporter of Smuts, stated that the political situation in the Union had gone from bad to worse because half the population were not on speaking terms.⁷³ The South African entrance into the First World War became the trigger cause of the Afrikaner Rebellion. However, there were also other factors which contributed to the rebellion, including poverty, social pressures, political issues and economic interests.⁷⁴

Maritz had signed a treaty with the Germans and took refuge with his fellow defectors in German South West Africa after refusing to support the Union's advance on Sandfontein in late September 1914. Lieutenant Colonel CR De Wet, who was a commandant in the South

⁷¹ DOD Archives, D, Box 8, 37, Instructions from Headquarters, 20 August 1910.

⁷² Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 5.

⁷³ Reitz, *Trekking On*, 48.

⁷⁴ Van der Waag, 'The Battle of Sandfontein, 26 September 1914', 7; S. Swart, 'The "Five Shilling Rebellion": Rural White Male Anxiety and the 1914 Boer Rebellion', *South African Historical Journal*, 56, 1 (2006), 90.

African War, became one of the rebel leaders in the Orange Free State.⁷⁵ Beyers resigned his commission on 15 September 1914 along with Major J Kemp and these two former officers of the Union Defence Forces and their supporters were prominent figures in the Afrikaner Rebellion.⁷⁶ Beyers took the lead in the Transvaal. The Union Defence Forces's military operations to put down the rebellion were thus directed at the forces of Beyers, Kemp, Maritz and De Wet. The rebel leaders became the centre of gravity.

On 12 October 1914, Smuts declared martial law in support of the suppression of the rebellion.⁷⁷ Botha declined the British offer of assistance and for the most part used Afrikaners⁷⁸ when he took to the field with 32 000 troops.⁷⁹ His motivation for this decision was to minimise the simmering tension between English speakers and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans.

Smuts was deeply involved in the organisation of putting down the Afrikaner Rebellion. There were 15 military districts which reported to defence headquarters. Smuts used these military districts to gain intelligence on the formation and movement of the different rebel groupings.

Botha and Smuts decided to concentrate their forces in and around Pretoria and to deploy on internal lines to the areas where they were most required.⁸⁰ The strategy of the Union Defence Forces entailed rapid movement from a central position to rebel strongholds via internal lines, using trains (and motorcars to some extent) for operational movement (over large distances) and horses for tactical movement (over shorter distances related to battle). The Union faced a threat from Maritz in German South West Africa; Beyers in the Transvaal; Kemp in the Northern Cape; and De Wet in the Orange Free State.

The Durban Light Infantry was sent to the Northern Cape as reinforcements which served as a buffer force in the event of a German attack. Commandant Coen Brits was appointed as the commander of the entire area of the Northern Cape.⁸¹

⁷⁵ Reitz, *Trekking On*, 50.

⁷⁶ Van der Waag, 'The Battle of Sandfontein, 26 September 1914', 9.

⁷⁷ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 56; Ritchie states that the proclamation of martial law was on 22 October 1914: Ritchie, *With Botha in the Field*, 4.

⁷⁸ Meintjes, *General Louis Botha*, 239.

⁷⁹ Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme*, 43–45.

⁸⁰ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 29.

⁸¹ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 53.

The Germans ordered Maritz to attack Upington, while Union Defence headquarters instructed Brits to check Maritz's advances. Maritz was defeated at Keimoes on 22 October 1914 and then again at Kakamas. He then withdrew to German South West Africa after being wounded in the knee. The force under Maritz comprised an estimated 1 000 rebels.⁸²

The Union Defence Forces received word on 25 October 1914 that Beyers was marching on Rustenburg with approximately 4 000 rebels. A Mr J Watt reported the incident and his report was forwarded to defence headquarters.⁸³ Botha and his bodyguard were subsequently deployed to Rustenburg in pursuit of Beyers.

Before Botha took to the field, he sent a personal message to his wife Annie: 'I have said goodbye to you in many difficult circumstances, but never on such a painful occasion as this. God give me strength to do my duty.'⁸⁴ Botha's bodyguard entrained in Pretoria on 26 October with horses, saddles and all the necessary equipment. Botha and his bodyguard detrained on 27 October 1914 in Rustenburg with his commando. Botha deployed a commando to Kommissie Drift after receiving an intelligence report confirming the whereabouts of Beyers. Botha's troops then marched through Olifantsnek where they engaged Beyers' force⁸⁵ and scattered the rebels.⁸⁶ Beyers and the remnants of his force were pursued to the Vaal River where the majority of the rebels surrendered. Rather than face defeat, Beyers fled.⁸⁷ With the rebel force effectively dispersed, Botha returned to Pretoria to focus on the uprising in the Free State.⁸⁸

In the time just prior to the scattering of Beyers' force, he was in negotiations with the government for his surrender and that of his rebels. Smuts allowed Beyers to be in contact with De Wet via telegraph but refused that messengers be allowed through Union lines.⁸⁹ No decisive result was achieved by the negotiations. Beyers was on the run for three weeks after the dispersal of his forces and met an unfortunate end on 8 December by drowning in the Vaal River while pursued by Union forces.⁹⁰

⁸² L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 57; Anon., *Official History*, 15.

⁸³ DOD Archives, Adjutant General 1914–1921 (hereafter AG 1914–1921), Box 8, Rebellion, Report by post office official at Millvale, 25 October 1914.

⁸⁴ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 29.

⁸⁵ Ritchie, *With Botha in the Field*, 4; Trew, *Botha Treks*, 29.

⁸⁶ Anon., *Official History*, 16, 23; Meintjes, *General Louis Botha*, 241; Trew, *Botha Treks*, 29.

⁸⁷ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 59, 60.

⁸⁸ Ritchie, *With Botha in the Field*, 5; Trew, *Botha Treks*, 30.

⁸⁹ DOD Archives, AG 1914–1921, Box 8, Rebellion, Secret telegraph between Pretoria headquarters and Mr Conradie at Prieska post office, 20 October 1914.

⁹⁰ Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme*, 46.

Beyers was a significant threat as were Kemp and De Wet. To deal with the threat from Kemp, Colonel JJ Alberts was despatched to Treurfontein where Kemp had been active. Alberts arrived in Treurfontein on 29 October and sent out a reconnaissance team which made contact with a group of Kemp's rebels. The rebels captured the reconnaissance group after luring them in with white flags.⁹¹

The main body of the Union forces under the command of Alberts managed to engage Kemp's force and captured 240 rebels – the bulk of Kemp's commando.⁹² The Union forces reported 13 rebels killed and 36 injured in the action at Treurfontein.⁹³ However, Kemp managed to escape and Smuts then proceeded with mopping up operations. He sent Alberts on a wide front from Treurfontein to Wolmaranstad where he received the support of commandos loyal to the Union.⁹⁴ Kemp eventually managed to cross the German South West African border where he joined Maritz and other defectors.

In total, the Union forces took approximately 400 prisoners in their operations against Beyers and Kemp.⁹⁵ Kemp headed for German South West Africa with some 800 rebels. The strength of the force with Maritz was estimated at about 1 000 rebels.

The Afrikaner Rebellion gained popularity in the Orange Free State under De Wet and it was of great importance for the government to quash it rapidly. Botha had planned a meeting in Vereeniging to assemble the required commandos who were going to advance on the Orange Free State. In this province the rebels numbered approximately 5 000. Botha took personal command of the Union force against De Wet.⁹⁶ Botha departed from Pretoria on 9 November with his personal bodyguard and arrived in Winburg on 11 November 1914, shortly after De Wet and his followers had left the town.⁹⁷

Botha was en route to telegraph Smuts when he received a telephone call at the local post office, where he learnt that De Wet was at Mushroom Valley. The caller was being held captive at the farm in Mushroom Valley.⁹⁸ Ritchie claims that the Union force arrived in

⁹¹ DOD Archives, AG 1914–1921, Box 8, Armoured Trains, Colonel Alberts report to General Smuts after the action at Treurfontein, 19 October 1914.

⁹² Anon., *Official History*, 16.

⁹³ DOD Archives, AG 1914–1921, Box 8, Armoured Trains, Colonel Alberts report to General Smuts after the action at Treurfontein, 19 October 1914.

⁹⁴ DOD Archives, AG 1914–1921, Box 8, Armoured Trains, Smuts telegraph to Colonel Alberts, 22 November 1914.

⁹⁵ Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme*, 46.

⁹⁶ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 66.

⁹⁷ Ritchie, *With Botha in the Field*, 6.

⁹⁸ Meintjes, *General Louis Botha*, 242; Trew, *Botha Treks*, 29.

Winburg two hours after De Wet had left and found the inhabitants in a state of panic. De Wet and his followers had informed them that the government was on the verge of being toppled and that Germany had defeated Britain.⁹⁹

Botha's scouts had already mentioned that De Wet might move to Mushroom Valley, so Botha's force headed in a south-easterly direction to meet the men under Botha's foe and former comrade.¹⁰⁰ Botha planned the encirclement of Mushroom Valley with his trusted commanders MW Myburgh, Lukin, Brits and Colonel G Brand. Brits and Lukin were cooperating on Botha's right flank.¹⁰¹ The entire force marched through the night and at dawn the artillery opened fire on De Wet's forces – they scattered in disarray at the sound of the first shell exploding.¹⁰²

Myburgh attacked through the centre while Brand enveloped the rebels to the right.¹⁰³ De Wet's forces were caught unawares in the morning and they almost instantly broke into retreat. Brits was in command of the cut off force that was positioned to intercept the retreating rebels. Reitz was one of the subordinate officers under Brits and he maintains that they were unable to cut off the fleeing rebels.¹⁰⁴ While the fighting ensued, Trew was trying to keep Botha away from the action to protect him from a stray bullet.¹⁰⁵

Lukin was also deployed in support of the cut off force but was unable to intercept the rebels as they fled through the Koraanberg.¹⁰⁶ Lukin was not in position at the pivotal point when the rebels passed by in full flight.¹⁰⁷ Nor did the heliographer relay the message to Lukin as instructed by Botha.¹⁰⁸ After the battle, Botha inspected the battlefield with deep sorrow and commented, 'you English will never understand how hard this is for me'.¹⁰⁹

De Wet managed to escape although the confrontation ended with 22 rebels dead and 3 000 captured and the rebellion in the Orange Free State was for the most part neutralised.¹¹⁰ De Wet made his escape with the speed and cunning that made him such a worthy adversary

⁹⁹ Ritchie, *With Botha in the Field*, 7, 8.

¹⁰⁰ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 66, 67.

¹⁰¹ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 31.

¹⁰² Ritchie, *With Botha in the Field*, 9.

¹⁰³ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 32.

¹⁰⁴ Reitz, *Trekking On*, 60.

¹⁰⁵ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 32.

¹⁰⁶ Sampson, *The Capture of De Wet*, 172.

¹⁰⁷ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 32.

¹⁰⁸ E.W. Nortier, 'Major General Sir Henry Timson Lukin (1860–1925): The Making of a South African Hero' (M Mil, Military Academy Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, 2005), 23.

¹⁰⁹ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 32.

¹¹⁰ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 68.

against the British in the South African War. He had skilfully eluded capture fourteen years earlier in a similar fashion at Surrender Hill in the Brandwater Basin where General Prinsloo had surrendered.

Botha and his men then trekked to Clocolan where they entrained on 18 November and headed for Kimberley via Bloemfontein.¹¹¹ There were several commandos that subsequently surrendered after the Battle of Mushroom Valley which included groupings of 100 up to 2 000.¹¹²

Botha and his bodyguard returned to Kroonstad on 29 November to finalise the required mopping up operations of the remnants of the Afrikaner Rebellion. Botha met with Smuts on 30 November at Kroonstad from where Botha and his men moved to Bethlehem.¹¹³ De Wet was captured by Brits on 1 December 1914 while the rebel leader was en route to German South West Africa. Brits, who had exchanged horse for motorcar in his cross-country chase, eventually caught up with De Wet in Bechuanaland at the dry riverbed of the Molopo River.¹¹⁴

Reitz commented wryly on this somewhat unconventional capture of De Wet: 'When I heard how the obstinate old guerrilla leader had been run to earth with the help of these mechanical contrivances I was almost sorry, for it spelt the end of our picturesque South African commando system.'¹¹⁵

The remaining rebel commandos surrendered on 10 December 1914 at Loskop in the Orange Free State.¹¹⁶ By December 1914, the rebellion was withering away and the only rebels who posed a threat were those under Maritz and Kemp who were still at large in German South West Africa.

The Afrikaner Rebellion in the Transvaal ground to a halt with the death of Beyers. There was sporadic resistance throughout the Union which was gradually snuffed out. Jopie Fourie was one of the few hardliner rebels in the Transvaal who remained at large. Smuts called Trew in to assist Colonel Pretorius with the attack on Fourie's commando that was encamped at Roodekoppies. Fourie's commando later moved from Roodekoppies and

¹¹¹ Ritchie, *With Botha in the Field*, 10.

¹¹² Sampson, *The Capture of De Wet*, 180.

¹¹³ Ritchie, *With Botha in the Field*, 13.

¹¹⁴ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 69; Anon., *Official History*, 22.

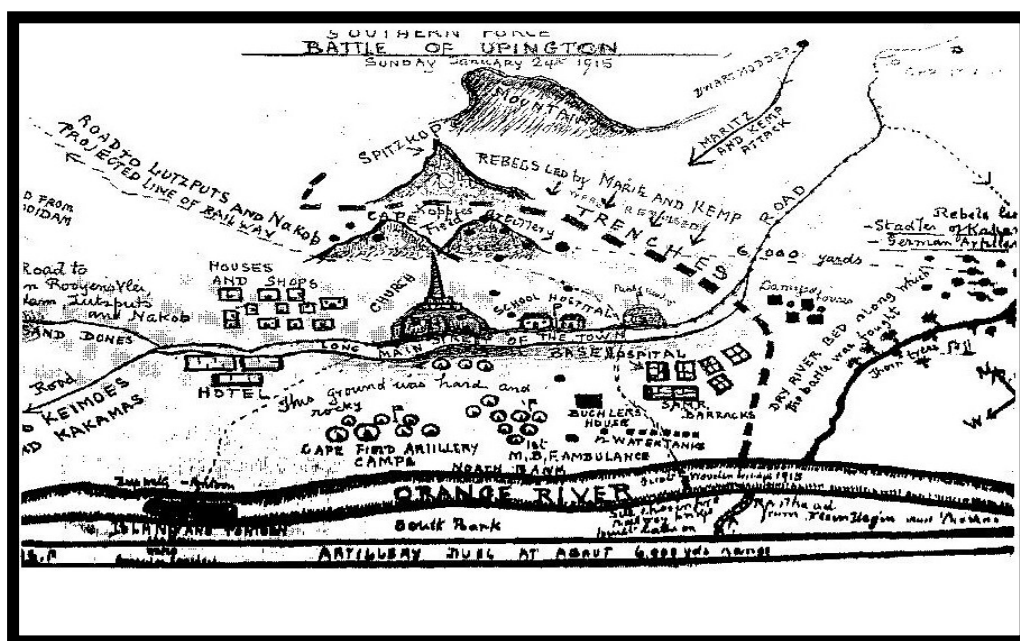
¹¹⁵ Reitz, *Trekking On*, 63.

¹¹⁶ Sampson, *The Capture of De Wet*, 220.

camped at Nootgedacht farm. Here, at 16:30 on 16 December 1914, Trew and Pretorius defeated Fourie's commando with a double envelopment attack. After some resistance the rebels surrendered.¹¹⁷ Fourie was later served with the death penalty because he did not resign his commission in the Union Defence Forces before defecting to the rebels.¹¹⁸

Maritz's attack on Upington in January 1915 can be regarded as the final phase of the Afrikaner Rebellion. Von Heydebreck ordered Maritz to attack Upington and offered him German military support to do so.¹¹⁹

The rebels assaulted Upington directly with an extended artillery barrage from both flanks and rifle fire. However, Maritz and Kemp were unable to enter the town despite their desperate attempts, which even included a mounted charge.¹²⁰ The attack on the town of Upington (refer to Map 4) on 24 January 1915 lasted six hours and Colonel JL Van Deventer,¹²¹ who was in command, ensured a decisive victory for the Union.¹²²



Map 4: Illustration of the engagement at Upington¹²³

¹¹⁷ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 44-48; Ritchie, *With Botha in the Field*, 16-19.

¹¹⁸ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 64, 65.

¹¹⁹ I. Goldblatt, *History of German South West Africa* (Cape Town: Juta, 1971), 203.

¹²⁰ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 75-80; Dane, *British Campaigns in Africa and the Pacific 1914-1918*, 44, 45.

¹²¹ Van Deventer went on to become a lieutenant general and was later knighted for his exploits in German East Africa.

¹²² Anon., *Official History*, 52.

¹²³ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 80.

According to Lord S Buxton, the governor general of South Africa, the rebels had no clear campaign plan, no staff work, no cooperation and no definite objectives.¹²⁴ Following the failed attempt at Upington the rebels based in German South West Africa surrendered on 30 January 1915. Smuts gave the official figures of the rebellion as 130 government soldiers killed and 275 wounded; and 190 rebels killed and 400 wounded.¹²⁵ The total number of rebels who were captured and surrendered is indicated in Table 1.

Province	Captured	Surrendered	Total
Orange Free State	3 138	3 985	7 123
Transvaal	2 350	648	2 998
Cape	398	192	590
Totals	5 886	4 825	10 711

Table 1: Rebels captured and surrendered¹²⁶

Analysis of the Afrikaner Rebellion with reference to manoeuvre warfare theory

The headquarters of the Union Defence Forces had the advantage of efficient intelligence gathering and processing during the Afrikaner Rebellion. This gave the Union forces access to information that made a rapid decision making cycle possible; they could then make maximum use of mobility and ensure surprise.

The Union made use of internal lines of operations to combat the military threat of the Afrikaner Rebellion. It was essential for the Union Defence Forces to use railways, armoured trains and motorcars for internal operational movement of forces within the Union's borders. In addition horses were used for tactical movement against the rebels.

The armoured trains were protected with armoured plating and guns were often added for firepower. The armoured trains were equipped with a 12 pounder, a machinegun section and a searchlight.¹²⁷ The horses were entrained with saddles and bridles which had the dual purpose of saving space and allowing for quick reaction time.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Buxton, *General Botha*, 66.

¹²⁵ Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme*, 48–50.

¹²⁶ DOD Archives, D, Box 1, Treason trials, Rebels captured and surrendered.

¹²⁷ DOD Archives, AG 1914–1921, Box 8, Armoured Trains, Telegram from Defence Staff to Captain Wallace Officer Commanding No. 1 Armoured Train, 22 November 1914.

¹²⁸ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 30.

Mobility on the operational and tactical level is essential for manoeuvre warfare.¹²⁹ Van Deventer attributes his success in his operations against the rebels to the rapidity with which he deployed and positioned his commandos; this forced the rebels to surrender.¹³⁰

Furthermore, the Union Defence Forces was able to defeat the rebel forces because of their superior operational and tactical mobility and their rapid decision making cycle which in turn ensured surprise. The Union Defence Forces gained and maintained the initiative throughout the military operations against the rebels.

It is also relevant that the rebellion provided the Union Defence Forces – especially the commandos – with the means to rehearse their drills and tactics. The rebels unwittingly gave the Union Defence Forces valuable training in the execution of operational and tactical movements and in the review of their battle drills before commencing with the invasion of German South West Africa.

The Union raised 33 308 mounted troops for the rebellion and the German South West African campaign and 15 397 non-mounted troops.¹³¹ The rebellion gave the Union Defence Forces insight into its deficiencies as far as supplies were concerned and the Union Defence Forces subsequently acquired 20 000 Portuguese Mauser rifles and 10 000 000 rounds of ammunition.¹³²

After the Battle of Sandfontein and the Afrikaner Rebellion, the Union Defence Forces was solidified under a unified leadership structure. The re-invasion followed four axes of advance which resembled the initial strategic concept envisioned by Smuts.¹³³

¹²⁹ Solberg, 'Maneuver Warfare', 136.

¹³⁰ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 154.

¹³¹ DOD Archives, AG 1914–1921, Box 150, Strengths, List of all Union Defence Forces on active duty, 23 November 1914.

¹³² Buxton, *General Botha*, 102.

¹³³ Van der Waag, 'The Battle of Sandfontein, 26 September 1914', 15.

CHAPTER 5: THE NORTHERN OFFENSIVE UNTIL 31 MARCH 1915

The Union forces took Walvis Bay on 25 December 1914 without a shot fired in anger, and Swakopmund followed in January 1915. Colonel PCB Skinner led the initial invasion of Walvis Bay which was unopposed by the Germans except for sporadic skirmishing and some booby traps left behind.¹ Botha subsequently arrived in Walvis Bay in February 1915 and took over command of the Northern Force with the clear intention of advancing eastwards towards Windhoek. Botha, as prime minister of the Union was appointed as commander-in-chief of the expeditionary force by special commission, Section 81 of the Defence Act of 1912.²

The amphibious landings in Walvis Bay and Lüderitzbucht meant that the Germans had a wide front to defend.³ Walvis Bay and Swakopmund were also extended forward bases to be supplied by the Union via naval support.

Botha had a large number of troops at his disposal in the north, including the 1st Mounted Brigade under command of Brits with approximately 2 200 soldiers; the 2nd Mounted Brigade with approximately 2 500 soldiers under the command of Alberts; and two infantry brigades under the respective commands of Skinner and Colonel JS Wylie. Furthermore, Botha had two unabridged infantry battalions, one mounted regiment, one battery and one section of heavy artillery.⁴

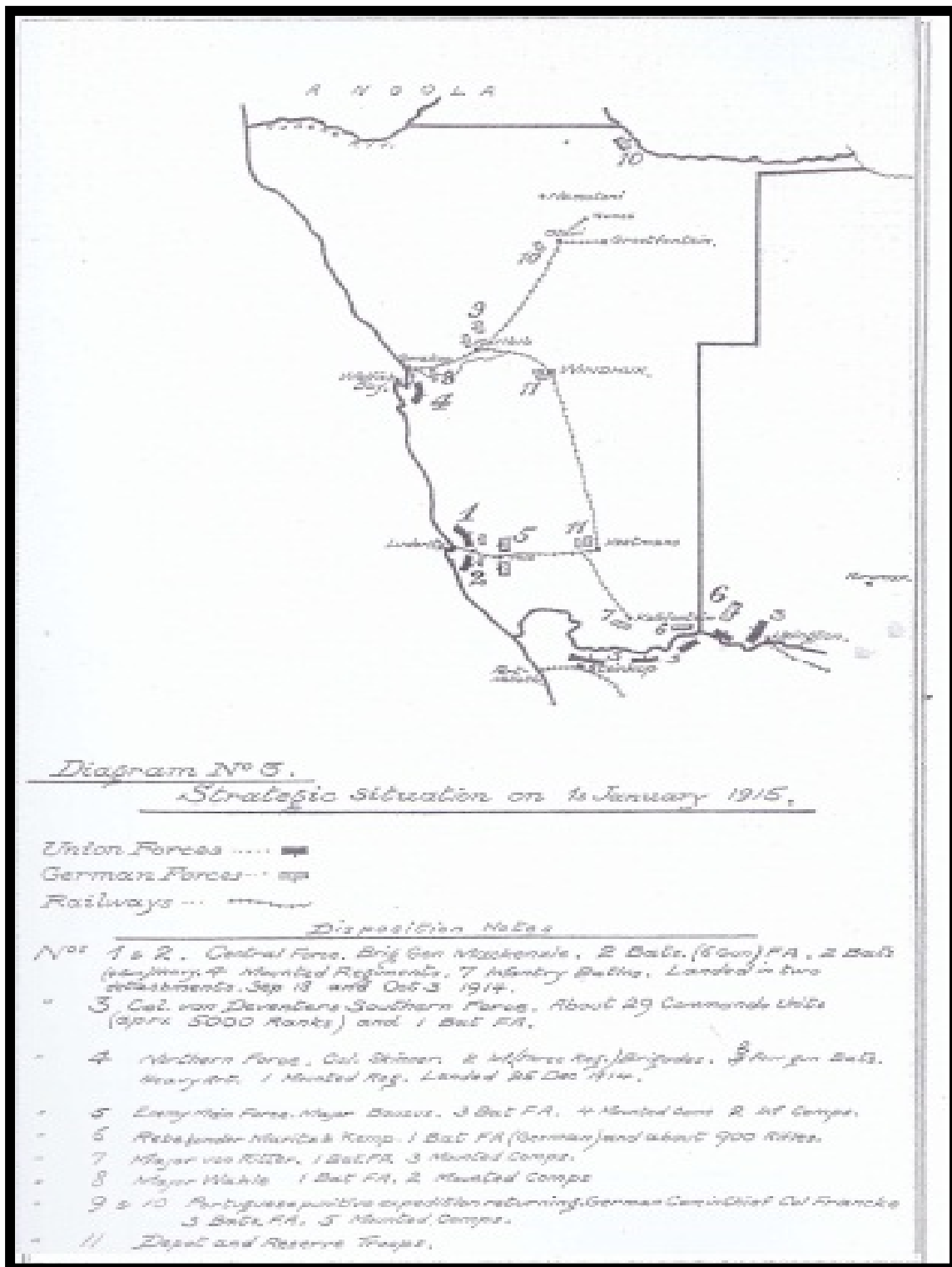
The main thrust of the Union Defence Forces's strategy took place in the northern region of German South West Africa. The advance of the Northern Army was directed at Windhoek and at the headquarters of the *Schutztruppe*. Map 5 demonstrates the strategic situation in German South West Africa on 4 January 1915.

¹ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 138, 139.

² DOD Archives, AG 1914–1921, Box 8, G5/305/9199, Commander-in-chief, Government notice for the next issue of the *Union Gazette*, 18 October 1914.

³ Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme*, 69, 70.

⁴ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 55.

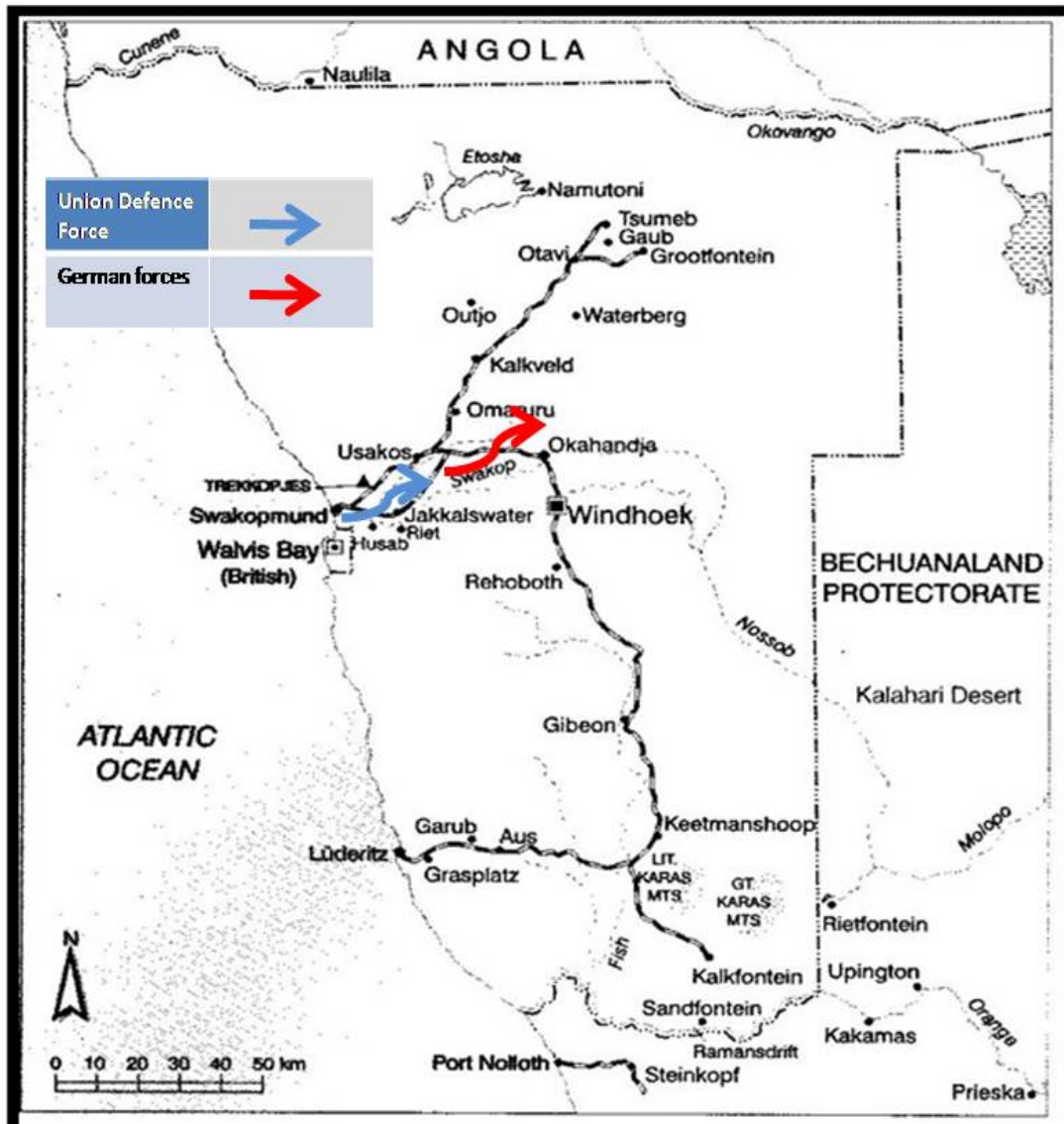


Map 5: Strategic situation on 4 January 1915⁵

Botha's plan was to take Windhoek by capturing a number of intermediate German positions en route. The first objectives on the advance included Nonidas and Goanikontes which were

⁵ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138 IO, General Botha's Despatch (GOC MC GSW Campaign) 9 July to 28 October 1920, Historical Record of the Campaign in German South West Africa, 4 November 1919.

followed by the positions of Usakos and Husab. The first substantial defence offered by the German forces were the engagements at Riet, Pforte, and Jakkalsfontein.⁶ Map 6 indicates the direction of the Northern Army's advance. .



Map 6: Advance of the Northern Army in German South West Africa⁷

The Union advanced on Nonidas on 23 February.⁸ This attack was in the form of a double envelopment. The Germans retreated and poisoned the wells while making their

⁶ While Map 6 and Map 7 both use the name Jakkalswater (in Map 7 the spelling is Jakalswater) in the text of this dissertation Jakkalsfontein is used instead, which is the name used in some of the secondary material as well as the Department of Defence Archives where archival sources on the campaign were consulted.

⁷ Base image for the map was taken from Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme*, 62. The base image was then modified to represent the commencement of operations in the north of German South West Africa.

⁸ Ritchie, *With Botha in the Field*, 32.

withdrawal.⁹ Goanikontes was one of the subsequent German positions to fall to the South African advance. The Germans commented that they were astonished at the extraordinary mobility of the South Africans.¹⁰

Botha wrote to Smuts on 27 February after the capture of Nonidas and discussed the operational needs of the campaign. Botha replied that the horses needed fresh water and the soldiers required compasses for night navigation. The Germans had managed to escape from Nonidas because the Union cut off force commanded by Alberts had lost its way on the night of the operation.¹¹

Usakos was the next German position to be taken on the advance. The advance of Botha's forces has since been subjected to keen debate. There were two broad options: advancing along the railway or along the dry riverbed of the Swakop River. Advancing without the railway would require many more wagons as well as oxen and mules and yet Botha eventually decided to use the Swakop riverbed for his advance. In doing so he sacrificed logistics for mobility and convention for boldness. He also displayed his faith in the abilities and robustness of the commandos by choosing the Swakop River for the primary advance.¹² The construction of the railway continued and became essential for the re-supply of the troops in the later stages of the campaign.

The South African forces advanced from waterhole to waterhole along the Swakop riverbed.¹³ There were also reports which indicated that the terrain at Riet may have had good grazing for the horses.¹⁴

The most fundamental consideration during the campaign was the shortage of water. Botha could only move according to the availability of this essential resource and his forces could only advance from water point to water point. The defensive line from Riet, Pforte and to Jakkalsfontein was the next logical step on the advance to Windhoek and it was also a water source. Ritchie says that 'Botha's principle task was to take an army right across the Namib Desert and to do that he had to capture every water-hole and keep it'.¹⁵

⁹ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 91, 92.

¹⁰ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 175.

¹¹ Hancock and Van der Poel eds., *Selections from the Smuts Papers*, 242.

¹² Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 59.

¹³ Meintjes, *General Louis Botha*, 261.

¹⁴ Paterson, 'First Allied Victory', 5.

¹⁵ Ritchie, *With Botha in the Field*, 33.

Botha expected the Germans would be in and around the Riet, Pforte, and Jakkalsfontein area. The Union had intercepted information to the effect that the Germans were in a strong position at Riet and that they had artillery support and a competent commander. Botha's reaction was: 'I shall outmanoeuvre them with flank movements'.¹⁶

The expeditionary force was ready to advance by mid-March 1915. Botha had taken all the transport and supplies from the Northern Army and by 16 March they had five and a half days supplies for the advance on the Germans at Riet.¹⁷

The commander-in-chief left Swakopmund at 14:30 on 18 March 1915 reaching Goanikontes by 23:00 that same day. Botha and his bodyguard then advanced to Husab where they arrived on 19 March 1915. When Botha marched he moved with great haste and as a result there were no luxuries for his staff. They were treated the same as the rest of the men.¹⁸

On 19 March 1915, Botha moved from Husab and then proceeded with staged operations on the Riet, Pforte, Jakkalsfontein defensive line.¹⁹ The 1st and 2nd Mounted Brigades were used for the attack. Husab was the launching base from where the advance to battle commenced. The German's held a strong defensive position from Riet, Pforte and to Jakkalsfontein, which extended for 48 kilometres.²⁰

The Germans made optimum use of the terrain and high ground and deployed 2 000 soldiers and four artillery pieces. The Langer Heinrich hills on the eastern bank of the river provided a strong defensive position for the Germans.²¹ Furthermore, they occupied the Husaberg, Pforteberg and Geisberg hills to the north of the river.²²

The German position was well fortified and supplied between the various sections of the defensive line to Jakkalsfontein, where the German reserve was placed. The German position was particularly strong to the east and had rocky outcrops which were largely impregnable.²³ The German right flank was on the Pforteberg mountain range and their left flank was on the Langer Heinrich hills.²⁴

¹⁶ Hancock and Van der Poel eds., *Selections from the Smuts Papers*, 243.

¹⁷ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 62.

¹⁸ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 95, 96.

¹⁹ Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme*, 70.

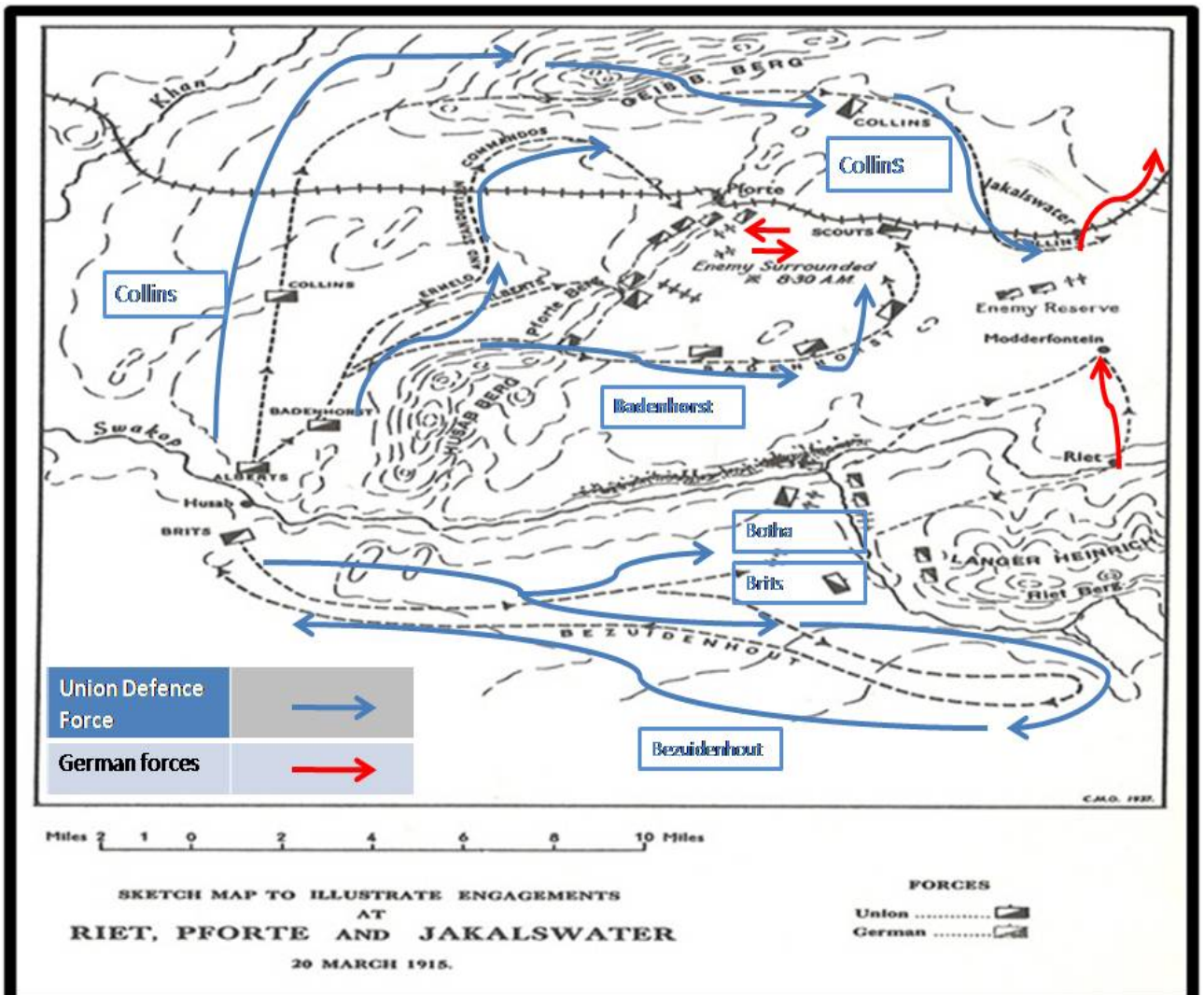
²⁰ Meintjes, *General Louis Botha*, 261.

²¹ Paterson, 'First Allied Victory', 5.

²² L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 181.

²³ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 67.

²⁴ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 96.



Map 7: The engagements at Riet, Pforte and Jakalswater²⁵

During the night advance from Husab to Riet, in order to promote secrecy and surprise Botha did not allow smoking because the glow of cigarettes could be seen for a considerable distance at night. Furthermore Brits' force advanced in parallel columns so as to prevent raising excessive dust.²⁶ Botha was renowned for his night marches.²⁷

The secretive advance on Riet was to be followed by an outflanking and enveloping attack on the defensive line (refer to Map 7). Botha wanted to attack and outflank the forces at Riet,

²⁵ Base image for the map was taken from Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 65. The base image was then modified to represent the engagements at the Riet, Pforte and Jakkalsfontein.

²⁶ Meintjes, *General Louis Botha*, 261, 262; Trew, *Botha Treks*, 97.

²⁷ Ritchie, *With Botha in the Field*, 8.

Pforte and Jakkalsfontein simultaneously so as to prevent the German forces from reinforcing a particular front.²⁸

The advance on Riet began at 19:00 on 19 March 1915 and proceeded through the night. Alberts was ordered to envelop the Pforteberg range from the north and Brits would attack the German position at Langer Heinrich. In the early hours of the morning of 20 March Brits' scouts made contact with the German position. The initial contact was followed by the South African artillery engaging the German positions at Riet.²⁹ The Transvaal Horse Artillery arrived at Riet at approximately 6:00 and provided accurate fire on the German position.³⁰ The artillery range was approximately 2.5 kilometres but the Germans struggled to bring their guns to bear.³¹ Major SS Taylor of the Transvaal Horse Artillery was cited by the brigade commander and received a mention (as a military decoration) for his actions at Riet.³²

Brits and his force attacked the German emplacements in the Langer Heinrich hills. They met stiff German resistance because their position was skilfully placed to cover direct attack. The Potchefstroom commando under the command of Brits made slow progress and managed to take a ridge en route to the German emplacements.³³

Commandant Bezuidenhout was sent to envelop the German position at Rietfontein. The map that Bezuidenhout used to navigate his route over a mountain pass turned out to be inaccurate. This topographical error proved disastrous and led to the failure of his attempted envelopment of the German position.³⁴ Furthermore, on his return, Bezuidenhout made the mistake of not informing Brits or Botha or any of the other command staff that his envelopment had failed. Maps were issued to Van Deventer and Brits from the topographical branch before the military operations in German South West Africa commenced.³⁵ The gap

²⁸ Walker, *A Doctor's Diary in Damaraland*, 42.

²⁹ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 97–102; Ritchie, *With Botha in the Field*, 34, 35.

³⁰ Orpen, *The History of the Transvaal Horse Artillery 1904–1974*, 25.

³¹ Ritchie, *With Botha in the Field*, 35.

³² DOD Archives, World War 1 German South West Africa (hereafter WW1 GSWA), Box 23a, Citations, German South West Africa, Northern Army 1st Mounted Brigade Transvaal Horse Artillery, 17 February 1918.

³³ DOD Archives, WW1 GSWA, Box 23a, Citations, German South West Africa, Northern Army 1st Mounted Brigade Potchefstroom 'B' Commando, 17 February 1918.

³⁴ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 184; Anon., *Official History*, 40. There is another, different account. Walker states that Bezuidenhout was able to follow a route that led to Salem: Walker, *A Doctor's Diary in Damaraland*, 43.

³⁵ DOD Archives, AG 1914–1921, Box 162, G219/310/9199, Letter from the Defence Topographical Section to Commando Staff Office, 26 January 1915.

in the mountains through which Bezuidenhout was supposed to advance simply did not exist.

While the battle ensued, Trew requested that Botha withdraw to a safe position, which Botha refused to do because he felt that withdrawal might have a negative influence on the morale of the troops.³⁶

Brits then sent a grouping of 300 reserve troops to envelop the position at Riet but this met with little success due to the ruggedness of the terrain.³⁷ The grouping was supposed to envelop the German left flank on the Langer Heinrich hills but failed to do so. The clash at Riet was essentially a deadlock, the day ending with an attrition-like artillery shelling of alternate positions. The Germans were in a strong position at Riet and it was not feasible to attack directly through the Langer Heinrich hills.

Brits was waiting for Bezuidenhout to turn the German position which did not happen due to erroneous terrain intelligence. The artillery duel continued³⁸ and the attack remained relatively stationary.³⁹ Botha's chief fear was not getting water at Riet because this would have completely disabled his fighting force. By 18:30 on 20 March, the fighting died down considerably which gave the soldiers and horses a chance to rest and get adequate water supplies.⁴⁰ The Union forces eventually found water by digging in the Swakop riverbed. Many of the Union forces had to move to Gawieb to get sufficient water and Botha and his bodyguard moved two kilometres away along the road from Riet to Husab where they encamped for the night.⁴¹ The Germans withdrew under the cover of night as a result of the action at Pforte.⁴²

Alberts was having a much more successful day around Pforte. He sent the Standerton and Ermelo commandos to engage the Germans directly at Pforte while he sent Swarts' scouts and two other commandos through the gap between Hussabberg and Pforteberg. The commandos hurried through under artillery fire from the Germans. The move was done in rapid fashion and enabled the railway between Pforte and Jakkalsfontein to be cut, thereby

³⁶ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 103.

³⁷ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 67; Anon., *Official History*, 41.

³⁸ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 105.

³⁹ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 68.

⁴⁰ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 105–109.

⁴¹ Ritchie, *With Botha in the Field*, 36.

⁴² L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 185.

isolating the forward German detachments.⁴³ The envelopment cut the German communications to the west of Jakkalsfontein.⁴⁴

Alberts captured the entire force at Pforteberg,⁴⁵ including 260 soldiers, all their weaponry, two guns and two Maxim machineguns.⁴⁶ The success of the manoeuvre was attributed to the swiftness of the commandos.⁴⁷ The German mounted troops tried to intercept them but did not manage to do so because the commandos covered almost 13 kilometres in 30 minutes.⁴⁸

While the battle at Riet ensued, the commando wing of Commandant Collins' force was successfully engaging the German forces at Jakkalsfontein. Collins' men pursued the fleeing Germans but they responded with strong and direct artillery fire on the commandos, forcing them to withdraw leaving 43 soldiers as prisoners of war.⁴⁹ These men had their horses shot down and were thus left stranded.

The German commander at Pforte said that the South Africans came at them from all sides, especially from behind and that they were firing from the saddle.⁵⁰ The action at Pforte culminated in an artillery duel. Captain JF Wolmarans commander of the 4th Permanent Battery of the South African Mounted Rifles was commended for his actions at Pforte and was cited for the Distinguished Service Order medal.⁵¹ The Germans eventually surrendered at 15:00 on 20 March 1915 because their lines of retreat and communications were cut. The total loss for the South African forces was 13 dead, 41 wounded and 43 prisoners of war. German losses amounted to 16 dead, 21 wounded and 264 prisoners of war.⁵²

⁴³ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 186.

⁴⁴ Paterson, 'First Allied Victory', 5.

⁴⁵ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 114.

⁴⁶ DOD Archives, WW1 GSWA, Box 23a, Citations, German South West Africa, Northern Army 2nd Mounted Brigade Staff, 17 February 1918.

⁴⁷ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 70.

⁴⁸ Anon., *Official History*, 42.

⁴⁹ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 72.

⁵⁰ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 117.

⁵¹ DOD Archives, WW1 GSWA, Box 23a, Citations, German South West Africa, Northern Army 2nd Mounted Brigade 4th Permanent Battery SAMR, 17 February 1918.

⁵² L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 188. There are differing accounts of the number of casualties in Collyer and in the *Official History*. Ritchie also gives a different number: Ritchie, *With Botha in the Field*, 39.

Following the occupation of Riet, important documents were found which stated that for the most part the Germans were concentrated in the north of the colony. Information was also found on plans for German minefields and the intention to poison water wells.⁵³

A German commander told Trew that he was surprised at how fast the South Africans could advance. The Germans had calculated that it should have taken another day to set up a forward supply base at Husab and that it was unimaginable that the Union would press forward without lines of communication and only limited supplies.⁵⁴ The tactical surprise was crucial to the South African victory and can also be regarded as a German intelligence failure.

There were good water wells at Riet and it became a forward supply depot for the South African forces from which further advances would be launched.⁵⁵ These water wells were left intact by the Germans – but not for a lack of trying. The German engineer section that was sent to destroy the wells following their retreat from Riet was shot down by two commando scouts.⁵⁶

At this stage the commandos and the rest of the forces did not have the logistical requirements to pursue the Germans.⁵⁷ The horses of the South African commandos were exhausted (refer to Figure 5) and thus the victory at Riet, Pforte and Jakkalsfontein could not be exploited by pursuing the Germans any further.⁵⁸

⁵³ Martin, *The Durban Light Infantry*, 171.

⁵⁴ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 115.

⁵⁵ Ritchie, *With Botha in the Field*, 39.

⁵⁶ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 113.

⁵⁷ Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme*, 70, 71.

⁵⁸ Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme*, 71; Paterson, 'First Allied Victory', 6.

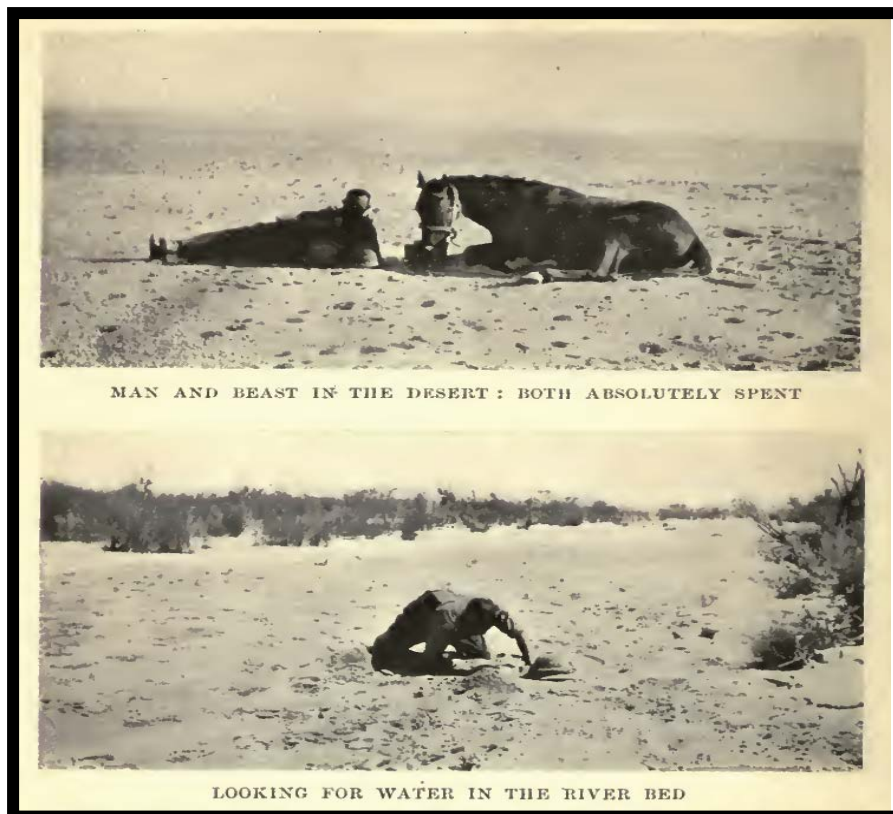


Figure 5: Horse and soldier exhausted in the desert⁵⁹

The Germans' secret code was found at Pforte which assisted the South African forces in deciphering encoded German messages.⁶⁰ This proved a crucial find because it allowed the South African forces to decrypt German messages about the movement of their forces.

After the victory at Riet, Pforte and Jakkalsfontein on 20 March until the end of April 1915 there was very little activity in the northern part of German South West Africa. Botha and the South African forces waited for supplies that were necessary for the advance on Windhoek.

Analysis of the northern operations until the Battle of the Riet, Pforte and Jakkalsfontein with regard to manoeuvre warfare theory

Botha was the commander-in-chief of South Africa's expeditionary force in German South West Africa as well as prime minister of the Union. Because of his unique position he had a clear idea of what was needed on the different levels of war. He understood the needs of the campaign on the strategic, operational and tactical levels. Botha had alluded to the strategic importance of the campaign when he addressed parliament to appeal for approval of the

⁵⁹ Ritchie, *With Botha in the Field*, 31.

⁶⁰ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 114.

campaign.⁶¹ The strategic objectives of the Union were linked to British war aims. The Union, as a British dominion, thus pursued the strategic objectives as outlined by Britain's war effort.

There was a merging of the strategic and operational levels of war. Botha (prime minister) and Smuts (minister of defence and acting prime minister while Botha was on campaign) were in political control and also in military command of the Union. Thus the operational and strategic levels of war were amalgamated. Their respective objectives at these levels aimed at the German centre of gravity which was the *Schutztruppe* headquarters. If this was neutralised, control of the colony and the defeat of the German forces would ensue. Military strategy was thus a means to attain political ends and not merely for military objectives. The political ends included the imperial objectives dictated by the British war strategy which would be achieved by defeating the German military force.

Sun argues that politicians should not command soldiers because this leads to confusion.⁶² He claims that soldiers are tentative when politicians command the military. However, in the case of the German South West Africa campaign Botha was an exception; he was well suited to command the military force because of his previous experience and abilities.

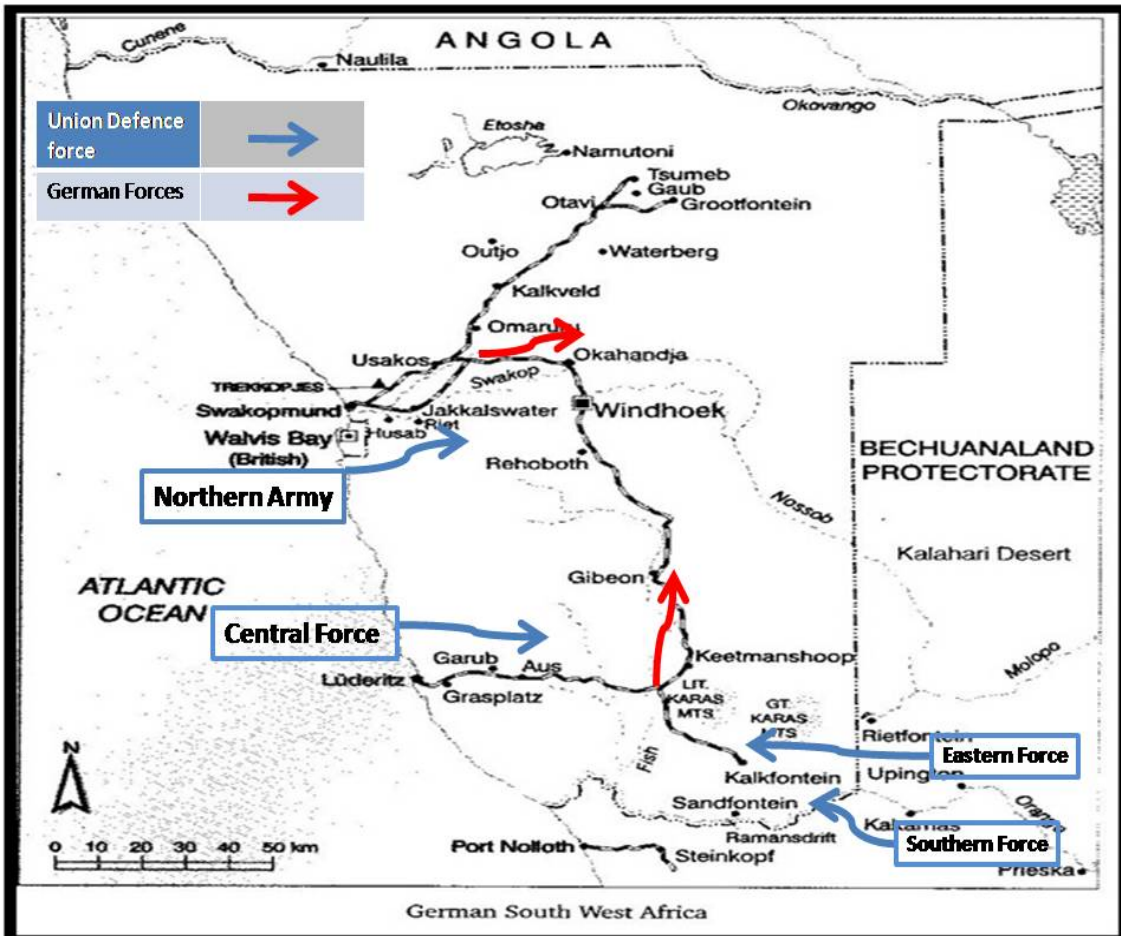
Botha did not focus on the tactical level; instead he kept his aim firmly fixed on the operational objectives of the campaign. Botha and Smuts through their dual roles as political and military leaders centralised the strategic and operational levels, thereby uniting the intentions and efforts of the Union's forces. Botha wanted the campaign to be concluded as rapidly as possible because of the political pressures in the Union at the time. According to Sun a country never benefits from extended war, because of the loss of soldiers' morale and the financial expense of military operations.⁶³

The Union Defence Forces advanced on four divergent axes. By advancing on separate routes it weakened the German forces and prevented them from linking up and operating their internal lines effectively. Map 8 is a representation of the divergent lines of advance.

⁶¹ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 14.

⁶² Sun, tr. Sadler, *The Art of War*, 6.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 4.

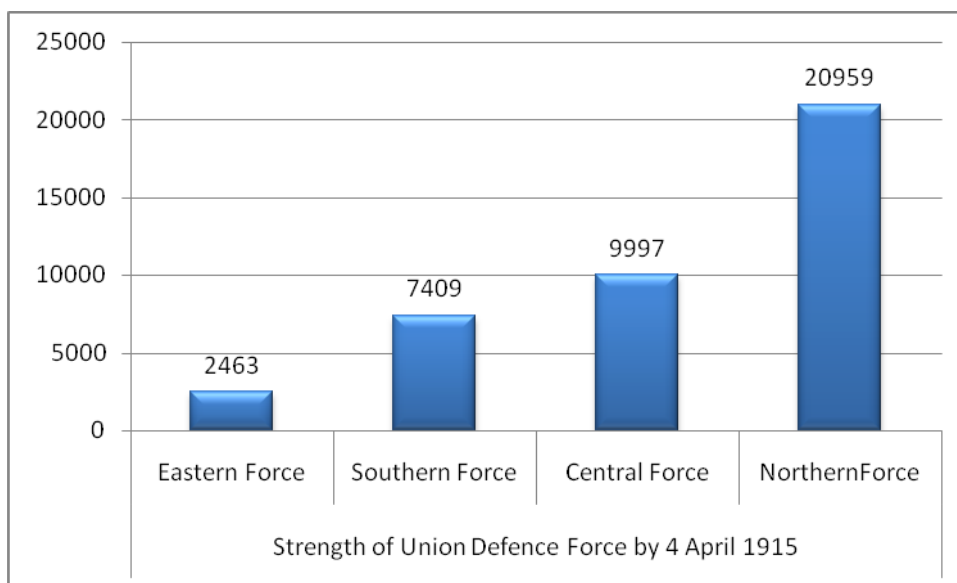


Map 8: Union Defence Forces axes of advance⁶⁴

Graph 1 demonstrates the strength of the different forces on their respective axes of advance. The numerical superiority of the Union forces allowed for the deployment of troops and materiel on four divergent axes.

⁶⁴

Base image for the map was taken from Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme*, 62. The base image was then modified to represent the Union Defence Force's axes of advance in German South West Africa.



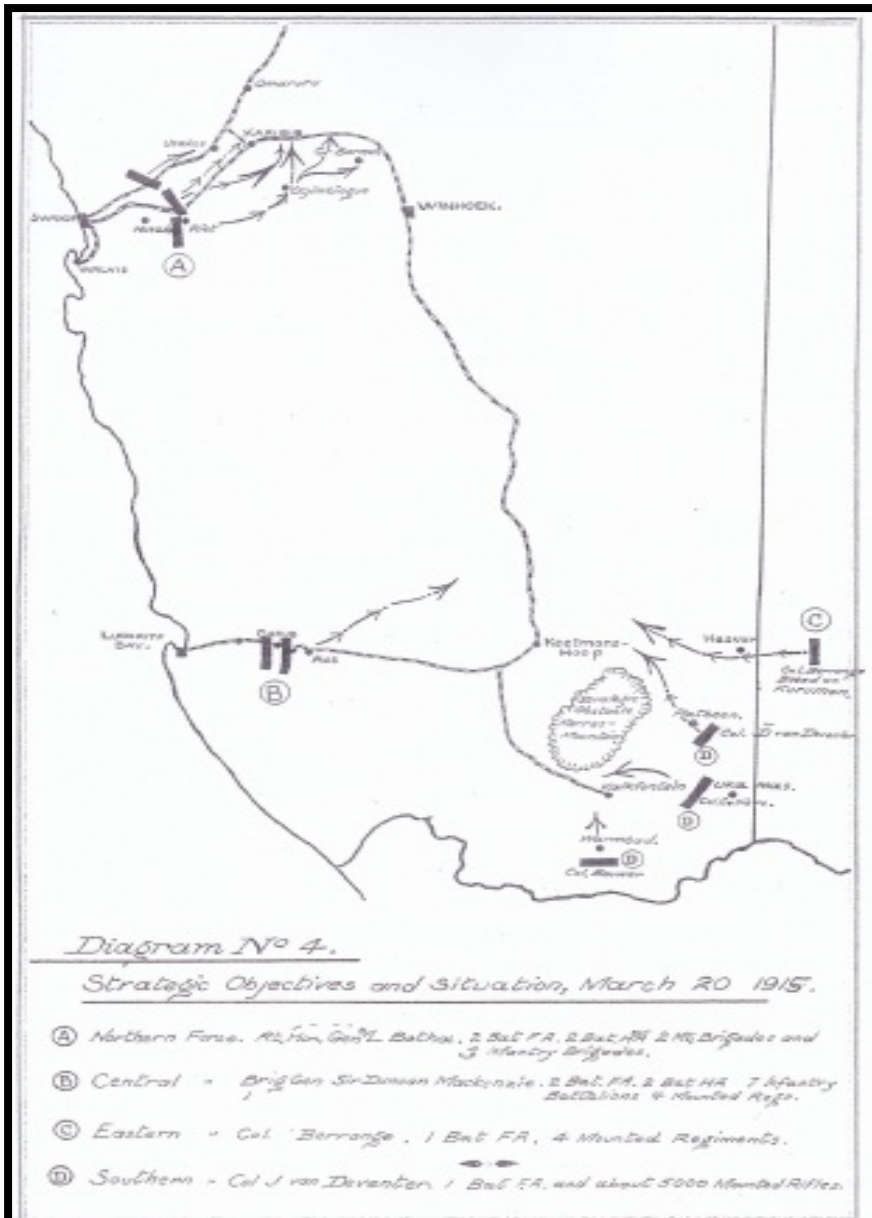
Graph 1: Strength of the Eastern, Southern, Central and Northern forces (including forces in field and en route to the theatre of operations)⁶⁵

The events at Riet, if taken in isolation, could be regarded as attrition based. The envelopments at Pforte however qualify the battle throughout the entire defensive line as congruent with the principles of manoeuvre warfare. The battle at Riet and Pforte began as a direct attack on Riet. The terrain prevented the turning of the German left flank and thus the engagement resulted in a stalemate. The terrain at Pforte lent itself to extensive movements and the mobility of the commandos.⁶⁶

The Union Defence Forces's attack on the German forces at Pforte and Jakkalsfontein can be regarded as an envelopment of the German forces at Riet. The German forces at Riet were thus cut off and had they stayed in position they would have been surrounded. As a result of this envelopment, the forces at Riet withdrew.

Botha allowed his forces to operate on their own initiative in a decentralised fashion. They knew what the objective was and they used their initiative in realising it. The forces that enveloped the position of Pforte and Jakkalsfontein robbed the German forces at Riet of the initiative and forced them to retreat. Map 9 shows the strategic situation in German South West Africa on 20 March 1915.

⁶⁵ DOD Archives, AG 1914–1921, Box 150, Strengths, General Summary, 4 April 1915.
⁶⁶ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 74.



Map 9: Strategic situation on 20 March 1915⁶⁷

After the defeat of the Germans at Riet, Pforte and Jakkalsfontein, the Union Defence Forces did not have the logistical requirements to pursue the Germans. This led to an operational pause to build up enough stock to continue operations in the north of German South West Africa.

⁶⁷

DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138 IO, General Botha's Despatch (GOC MC GSW Campaign) 9 July to 28 October 1920, Historical Record of the Campaign in German South West Africa, 4 November 1919.

CHAPTER 6 THE SOUTHERN ARMY: CENTRAL, EASTERN AND SOUTHERN FORCES

The Southern Army was a combination of 'C' Force (which later became the Central Force) and the Southern and Eastern forces. The aim of the Southern Army was to capture Kalkfontein, Aus, Keetmanshoop and Gibeon to nullify the German force's ability to concentrate its forces in the south of the colony.

The force at Lüderitzbucht, originally 'C' Force, landed on the night of 18 September 1914 and was led by Colonel PS Beves. Expecting to receive resistance from the Germans, Beves deployed a small force to envelop the German port and cut its railway line to force a retreat.¹ Despite the South African force's plans, Lüderitzbucht was taken unopposed when the Germans withdrew.

Beves' force comprised the 1st Transvaal Scottish, the Witwatersrand Rifles, one squadron of the Imperial Light Horse, and 7 guns from the 7th Citizen Force Battery.² Its total strength was approximately 1 824 soldiers.³ 'C' Force took the German post at Grasplatz on 26 September without much incident. The Germans had withdrawn from the vicinity of the coast towards Aus and had destroyed the railway piecemeal during their retreat as a means to slow down the South African advance. It was later discovered that the Germans were concentrating their efforts on Sandfontein.

General D Mackenzie took command of the force at Lüderitzbucht in October 1914, after which it became known as the Central Force. The Union forces took Tschaukaib on 8 November 1914 and then in mid-December attempted to take Garub where they were repulsed by the Germans who put up a stout defence. Mackenzie's force then returned to Tschaukaib.⁴ The Union planned to capture Aus, Keetmanshoop and Gibeon.

The strength of Mackenzie's force on 22 December was 2 183 mounted men and 5 754 infantrymen.⁵ The Southern Force was opposed by the German force commander, Major Ritter, who had a battery of artillery and four mounted regiments. He also had the support of

¹ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 91, 92.

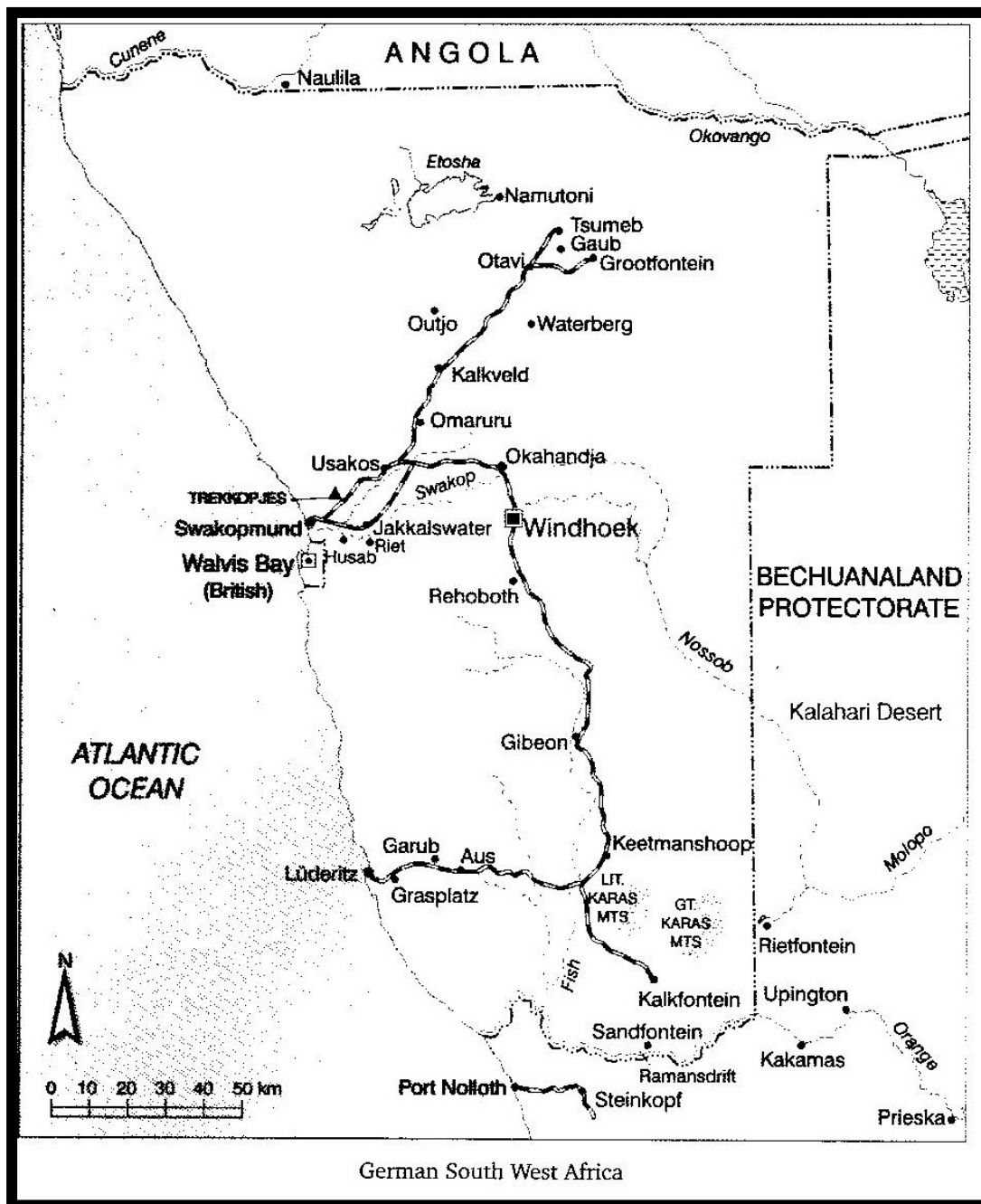
² *Ibid.*, 94.

³ Van der Waag, 'The Battle of Sandfontein, 26 September 1914', 9.

⁴ Paterson, 'First Allied Victory', 2; Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme*, 68.

⁵ DOD Archives, AG 1914–1921, Box 150, Strengths, Strength return of the Central Force, 22 December 1914.

Maritz with approximately 800 rebels.⁶ The German force was estimated at about 1 000 soldiers.

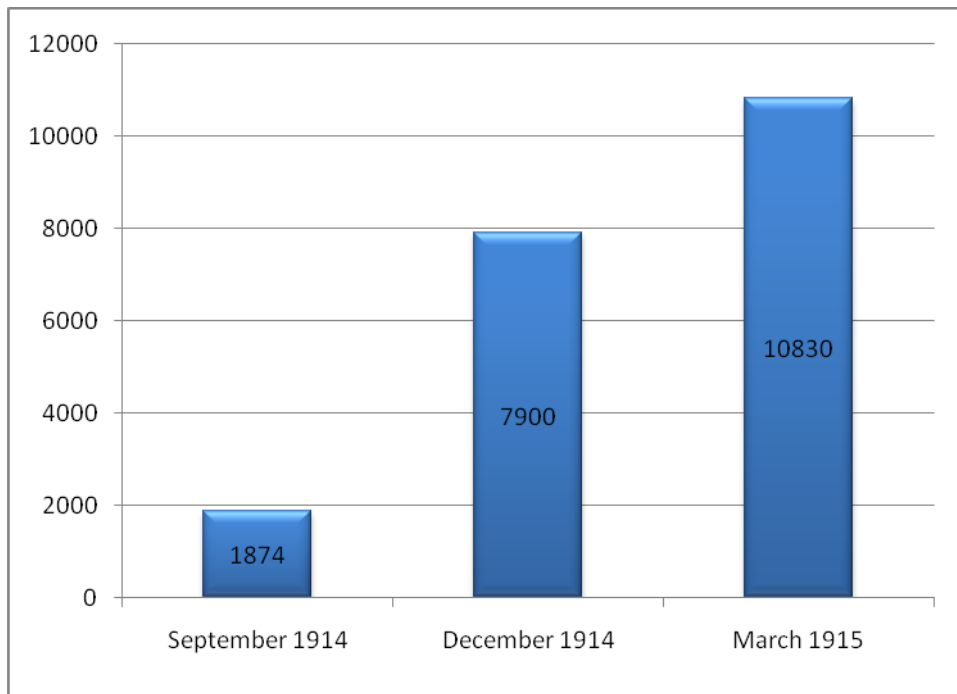


Map 10: German South West Africa⁷

Mackenzie's force numbered 10 830 on 24 March 1915 of whom 3 842 were mounted soldiers and 5 777 were infantrymen.⁸ Mackenzie had two field batteries of artillery, along

⁶ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914-1915*, 80.
⁷ Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme*, 62.

with two mounted brigades. A third brigade was sent in early March 1915 as were seven infantry battalions and two batteries of heavy artillery.⁹ Graph 2 demonstrates the increase in troops of the Central Force from September 1914 until March 1915.



Graph 2: Central Force increase in troops (including the forces in the field and 1 815 soldiers en route in March 1915)¹⁰

The Southern and Eastern forces that deployed from Upington and Kakamas were commanded by Van Deventer (Southern Force) and Colonel CAL Berrange (Eastern Force) respectively. Berrange had four mounted regiments and one section of heavy artillery under his charge, while Van Deventer had one battery of heavy artillery and 29 commandos. Van Deventer's force had a numerical strength of 6 958 men, of whom 6 176 were mounted soldiers.¹¹

⁸ DOD Archives, AG 1914–1921, Box 150, Strengths, General Summary Central Force, 24 March 1915.

⁹ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914-1915*, 55.

¹⁰ Bar graph compiled from: Van Der Waag, 'The battle of Sandfontein, 26 September 1914', 9; DOD Archives, AG 1914 – 1921, Box 150, Strength of the Central Force, 22 December 1914; DOD Archives, AG 1914–1921, Box 150, Strengths, General Summary Central Force, 24 March 1915.

¹¹ DOD Archives, AG 1914–1921, Box 150, Strengths, General Summary, Southern Force, 4 April 1915.

Berrange's force comprised mounted riflemen to the strength of 1 992 men.¹² Both forces were supported by a small section of artillery and their rendezvous point was Keetmanshoop.¹³ The Southern and Eastern forces formed part of the invasion force that would cross the German South West African border and link up with the Central Force, thus forming part of the Southern Army. Smuts assumed overall command of the Southern Army in April 1915.

Berrange moved from Kakamas to Kuruman and then travelled 403 kilometres from Kuruman to the German South West African border, crossing in March 1915. An advanced logistical system was put in place with advanced water points established by motor vehicles to facilitate the movement of the mounted men.¹⁴ The mechanical transport section of the Eastern Force kept the advanced troops supplied with water and equipment by driving vast distances from the Union to the front lines. They were exposed to substantial risk because the extended communication lines they had to drive through were generally unprotected and were susceptible to German ambushes.¹⁵

Berrange advanced from Kuruman and forced the Germans to abandon Kiries West on 16 March 1915. Furthermore one of Berrange's sections took Rietfontein on 19 March 1915 with only a minor skirmish.¹⁶ The Eastern Force used the Kalahari Horse as its scouts for forward reconnaissance. They did excellent work and were highly commended for their speed, scouting and ability to conduct efficient mobile warfare.¹⁷

Van Deventer marched from Upington in late February 1915. His first objectives as he headed into German South West Africa were Schuit Drift and Nakob. The advance of the mounted forces across the Kalahari ensured that the fording points on the Orange River were occupied.¹⁸

The mounted troops under Van Deventer, who had captured Schuit Drift, numbered 1 364 men. There were also ten artillerymen and 154 administrative staff. The administrative staff

¹² DOD Archives, AG 1914–1921, Box 150, Strengths, General Summary, Eastern Force 14 April 1915.

¹³ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 142.

¹⁴ Anon., *Official History*, 57; DOD Archives, WW1 GSWA, Box 20, Report, Berrange's report on the operations of the Eastern Force, 15 May 1915.

¹⁵ DOD Archives, WW1 GSWA, Box 23a, Citations, German South West Africa, Southern Army Eastern Force Mechanical Transport, 17 February 1918.

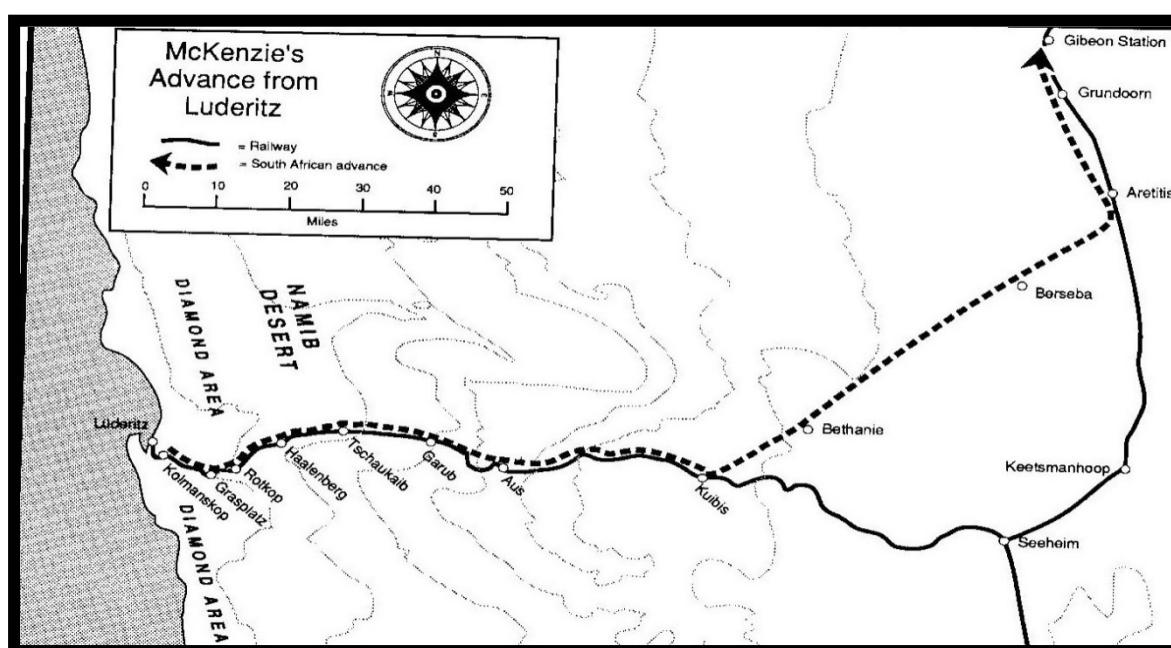
¹⁶ Anon., *Official History*, 81.

¹⁷ DOD Archives, WW1 GSWA, Box 23a, Citations, German South West Africa, Southern Army Eastern Force Kalahari Horse, 17 February 1918.

¹⁸ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 153.

included an army post office, field cashier, an engineering section, pioneers, a telegraph corps, and also staff to deal with transport, remounts, ordinance, sanitation and supplies.¹⁹ Van Deventer took Nakob with little resistance on 26 February 1915.²⁰ Van Deventer's force advanced at a rapid pace and one of his detachments took Nabas on 8 March 1915. The German commander at Nabas retreated after resisting for half a day and leaving all his supplies and transport behind. Van Deventer's brother, Colonel D van Deventer, took Platbeen on 27 March and the German commander retreated, leaving behind fourteen prisoners of war.²¹

While the central force pushed forward, Botha went to see Mackenzie on 29 March 1915 to discuss the necessity of his advance on Aus (refer to Map 11). The Germans subsequently evacuated Aus on 31 March 1915²² so the South African forces took Aus unopposed. The *Official History* states that Aus was evacuated due to strategic pressure within German South West Africa.²³



Map 11: Mackenzie's advance²⁴

Van Deventer took Kalkfontein on 5 April 1915. The Germans had assumed a strong position in the Karas Mountains outside Kalkfontein, but Van Deventer deployed a double

¹⁹ DOD Archives, AG 1914–1921, Box 150, Strengths, Southern Force at Steinkopf, 23 February 1915.

²⁰ Dane, *British Campaigns in Africa and the Pacific 1914–1918*, 50.

²¹ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 52–54.

²² *Ibid.*, 79.

²³ Anon., *Official History*, 47.

²⁴ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 206.

envelopment that forced them to retreat. After putting up a brief fight the Germans withdrew to Keetmanshoop.²⁵

Kalkfontein was an important military base for the Germans and it was also a railway junction which allowed the South Africans access to the German railway systems that joined the major towns in German South West Africa and thus provided the Union with improved operational mobility.

The number of men under Berrange and Van Deventer totalled 8 950 on 14 April 1915. All the fighting soldiers were mounted and totalled 7 506, while the remainder were administrative and supporting personnel.²⁶

On 16 April 1915 Smuts took over the command of the entire Union force at Kalkfontein, with Berrange and Van Deventer's forces linking up. Mackenzie's command was superseded by that of Smuts. Smuts remained in command until the capture of Gibeon.

Analysis of the operations of the Southern, Eastern and Central forces with reference to manoeuvre warfare theory

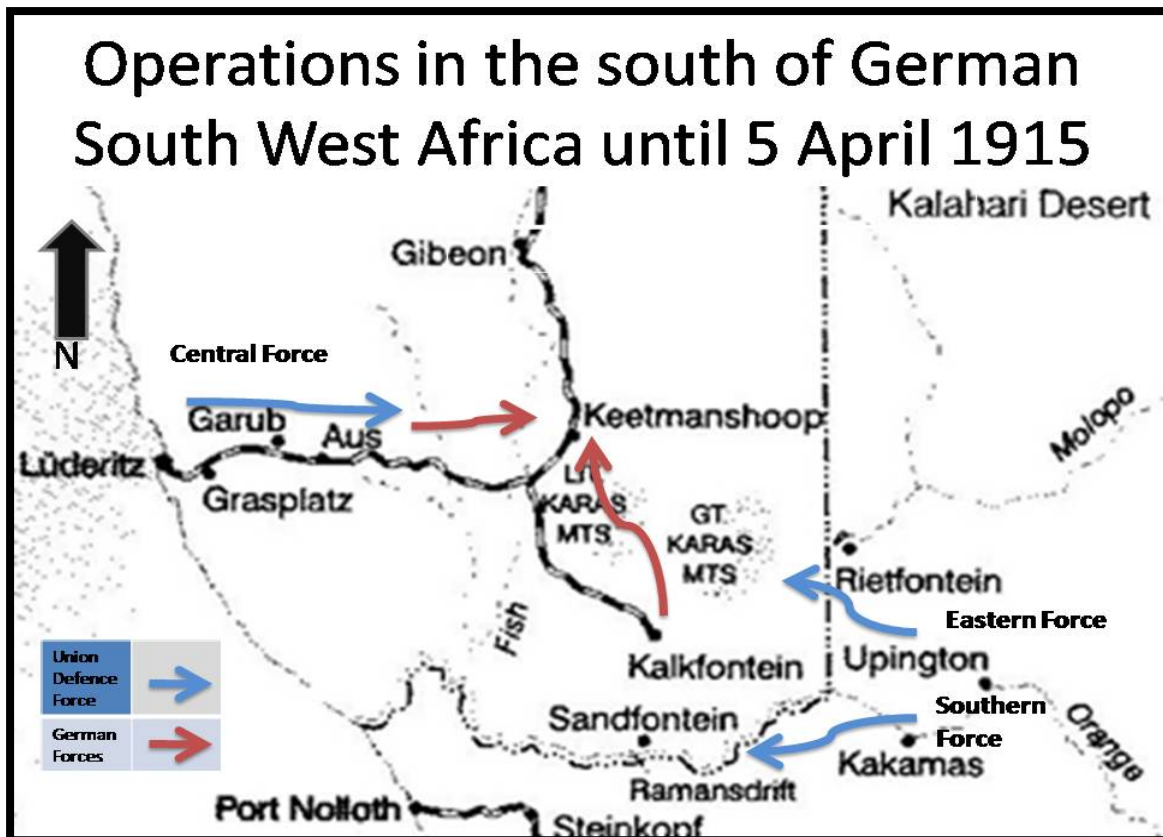
The divergent advances of the Central, Southern and Eastern forces in the south of German South West Africa show characteristics of manoeuvre warfare. These diverging advances robbed the German forces of all initiative.

The German force had previously demonstrated its prowess by using internal lines to concentrate a large military force on Sandfontein. The option of using internal lines in the south was nullified for the Germans by the Union Defence Forces's various advances along divergent axes. Had the Germans considered concentrating their forces on one of the Union's advancing groupings, they would have risked being enveloped and cut off by one of the Union's other advancing forces.

The German force therefore had little option in terms of seeking out and defeating the Union Defence Forces piecemeal. Map 12 shows the various lines of advance of the Central, Southern and Eastern forces. The German response to the advancing Union forces was to withdraw from Aus and Kalkfontein to Keetmanshoop.

²⁵ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 151–154.

²⁶ DOD Archives, AG 1914–1921, Box 150, Strengths, General Summary, 14 April 1915.

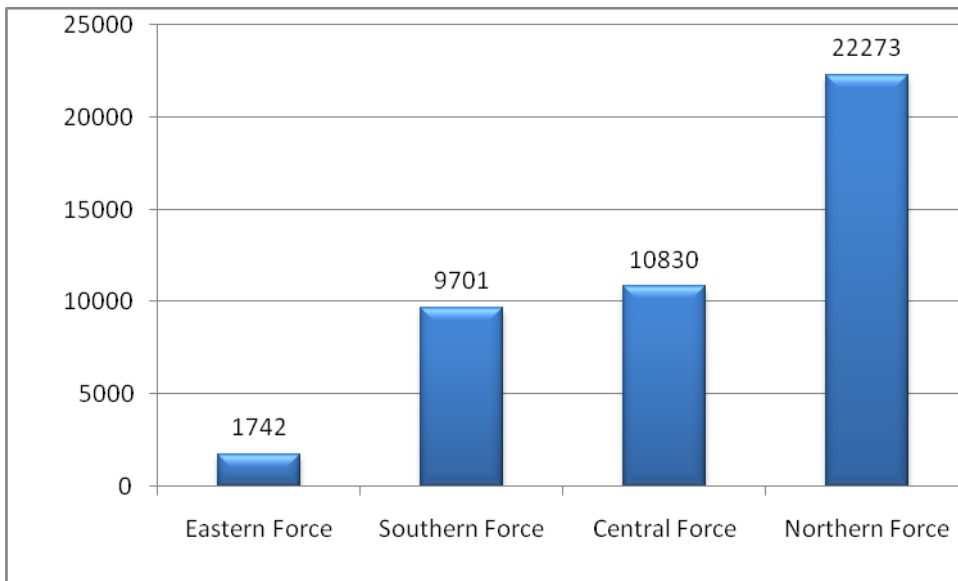


Map 12: Divergent advance of the Union Defence Forces in the south of German South West Africa²⁷

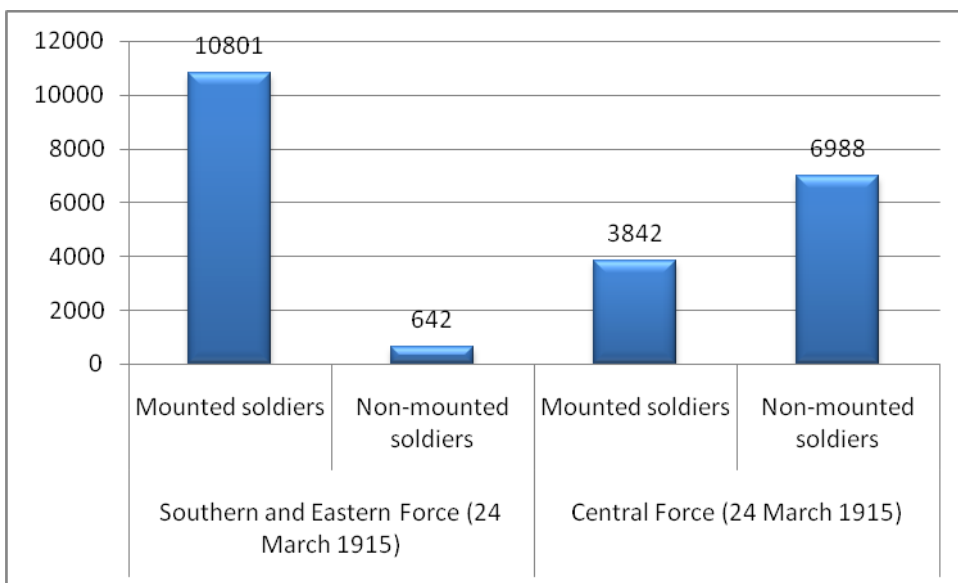
In addition to the difficulties the Union forces posed by advancing along different axes, the German forces were also heavily outnumbered in the south. They had approximately 1 000 soldiers in the south of the colony. Graph 3 demonstrates the numerical superiority of the South African forces.

The Central Force was relatively inactive in the capture of Aus. The Germans withdrew from Aus due to the overall operational situation in the south of the colony. Their position at Aus was untenable because they faced the possibility of being enveloped and cut off by the Southern and Eastern forces. Graph 4 indicates the disparity between mounted and non-mounted soldiers as part of the Southern, Eastern and Central forces. The mounted soldiers provided a high degree of mobility.

²⁷ Base image for the map was taken from Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme*, 62. The base image was then modified to represent the operations in the south of German South West Africa.



Graph 3: Strength of the Southern Army (Central, Southern and Eastern forces) by March 1915 (inclusive of the forces in the field and 5 895 soldiers en route)²⁸



Graph 4: Comparison between mounted and non-mounted soldiers in the Central and Southern and Eastern forces (inclusive of the forces in the field and en route)²⁹

The above graphs include 1 815 mounted soldiers (destined to join the Central Force) and 4 080 mounted soldiers (for the Southern Force) who were still mobilising for the operation.³⁰ The Southern and Eastern forces were highly mobile due to the large number of mounted

²⁸ Bar graph compiled from DOD Archives, AG 1914–1921, Box 150, Strengths, General Summary Central Force, 24 March 1915.

²⁹ DOD Archives, AG 1914–1921, Box 150, Strengths, General Summary Central Force, 24 March 1915.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

soldiers. Their high mobility and rapid advance were inversely proportional to the cautious approach of the Central Force. Their rapid advance gave the Germans less time to consider defence alternatives. The rapid and divergent advances of the South African forces ensured that the initiative stayed with the Union Defence Forces.

CHAPTER 7 THE CONTINUATION OF OPERATIONS IN THE SOUTH OF GERMAN SOUTH WEST AFRICA

The Union forces in the south took Kalkfontein on 5 April 1915, which allowed the South African railway line in Prieska to be joined to the one in Kalkfontein.¹ The German forces thus evacuated Aus and Kalkfontein and retreated to Kabus and Keetmanhoop.

Berrange and Van Deventer arranged for a cut-off force to envelop the German position north of Keetmanshoop on 19 April 1915. Kabus was subsequently taken on 20 April 1915 with the cooperation of Van Deventer and Berrange's forces. On the same day the German forces retreated from Kabus and Keetmanshoop to Gibeon.²

Mackenzie's force advanced from Aus on 14 April in pursuit of the Germans and arrived in Gibeon less than two weeks later.³ The 8th and 9th Mounted Brigades with a section of the 12th Permanent Battery of the South African Mounted Rifles took Berseba just south of Gibeon on 22 April along with 20 German prisoners.⁴ The German force which retreated from Berseba united with the main German force in Gibeon. Smuts wrote to Botha from Aus to inform him that the Germans were retreating at a rapid pace and he doubted whether they would be able to catch up to them.⁵

On 26 April 1915 as the South African force approached Gibeon they tapped the telegraph line at Grundorns which the German force had left uncut. The Union Defence Forces received valuable information in the form of the German plan for the evacuation of Gibeon.⁶ The Germans were planning to retreat northwards by train.

The German evacuation was planned for that particular evening, 26 April 1915. Captain HO von Kleist was the officer in charge of the German retreat. Mackenzie immediately put plans in place to cut off the German retreat by placing a force behind Gibeon to blow up the

¹ Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme*, 72.

² DOD Archives, WW1 GSWA, Box 20, Report, Berrange's report on the operations of the Eastern Force, 15 May 1915.

³ Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme*, 72.

⁴ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Operations of the Central Force from 15 to 27 April 1915 including the action at Gibeon station, 15 May 1915; Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 88; Paterson, 'First Allied Victory', 3.

⁵ Hancock and Van der Poel eds., *Selections from the Smuts Papers*, 272.

⁶ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Operations of the Central Force from 15 to 27 April 1915 including the action at Gibeon station, 15 May 1915.

railway line.⁷ Lieutenant Colonel JR Royston, affectionately known as Galloping Jack, was sent with one regiment of the 8th Mounted Brigade, supplemented by a grouping of the 9th Mounted Brigade, to cut off the German retreat behind Gibeon. A scouting party and engineer section was also sent to destroy the railway north of Gibeon. Royston received orders to go wide around to the east of the German position and then close in so as to place his force astride the German line of retreat.⁸

Galloping Jack had placed his forces in the open and as a result they were easily discovered and defeated by the Germans who enfiladed their position with machinegun fire. The position was poorly selected in terms of its ability to provide cover and defence from enfilade fire.⁹ The total losses were 24 killed and 48 wounded.¹⁰ Although Royston managed to retreat, 70 of his soldiers were captured by the Germans.¹¹

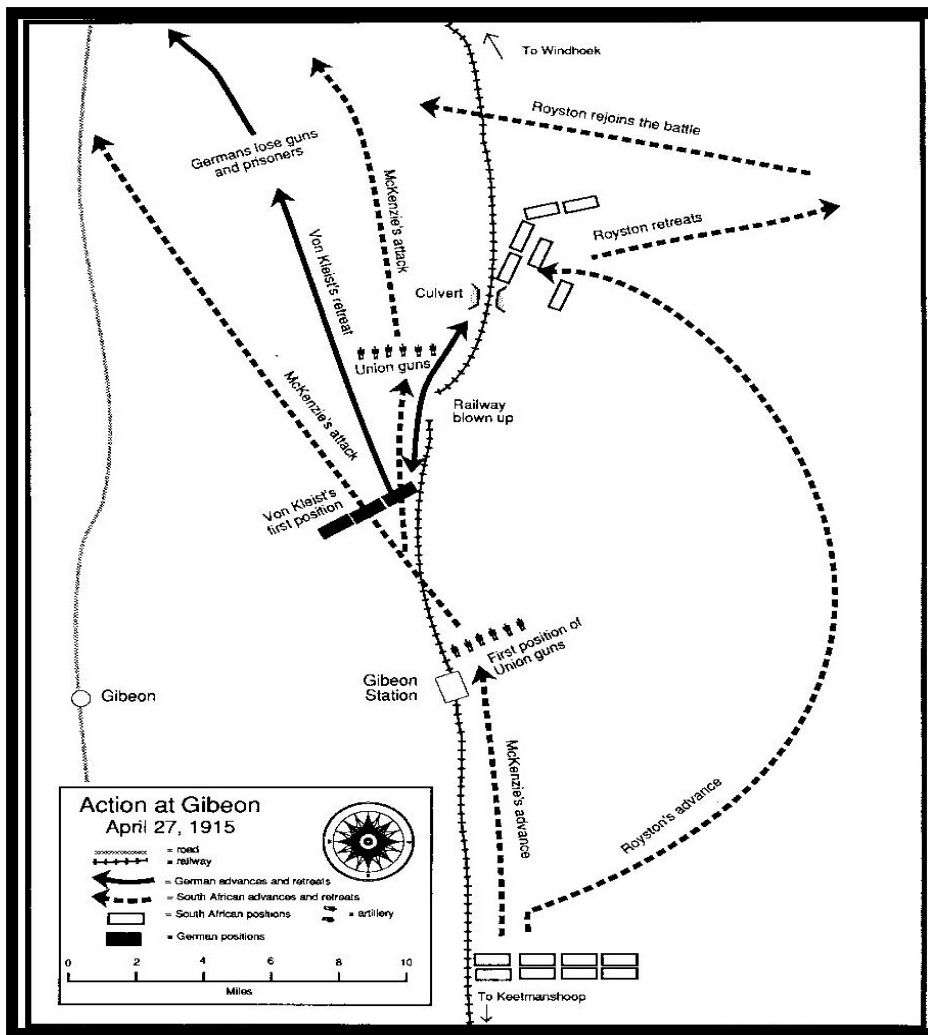
⁷ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Operations of the Central Force from 15 to 27 April 1915 including the action at Gibeon station, 15 May 1915; L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 212; Paterson, 'First Allied Victory', 3.

⁸ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Operations of the Central Force from 15 to 27 April 1915 including the action at Gibeon station, 15 May 1915; Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 89.

⁹ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Operations of the Central Force from 15 to 27 April 1915 including the action at Gibeon station, 15 May 1915; Paterson, 'First Allied Victory', 3.

¹⁰ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 217. Refer to page 92 for the German losses.

¹¹ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Operations of the Central Force from 15 to 27 April 1915 including the action at Gibeon station, 15 May 1915.



Map 13: The advance on Gibeon¹²

The German victory was short lived because Mackenzie launched a frontal attack with a double envelopment on the morning of 27 April 1915 which sent the Germans into full retreat (refer to Map 13). Galloping Jack's prisoners of war were recovered in the running fight which ensued.¹³ The cavalrymen and commandos were in hot pursuit and Von Kleist left a rearguard to cover his withdrawal. After their rapid advance from Aus the South African force's horses were exhausted. The Union forces had covered 320 kilometres in 12 days to converge on the German forces at Gibeon.¹⁴

¹² L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 216.

¹³ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Operations of the Central Force from 15 to 27 April 1915 including the action at Gibeon station, 15 May 1915.

¹⁴ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 91, 92.

This was a great feat of mobility. A German soldier who had fought at Gibeon commented that the South African soldiers were the bravest and worst equipped soldiers and that given the choice he would prefer to fight any other troops rather than the South Africans.¹⁵

Collyer maintains that the German withdrawal from Gibeon was not related to the actions of Mackenzie's force. Instead, in his view it was the result of the overall strategic situation.¹⁶ The final tallies for the Battle of Gibeon, including the losses suffered by Galloping Jack's regiment, were 27 killed and 61 wounded. Royston's prisoners of war were recovered. The Germans had 11 dead, 30 wounded and 188 taken as prisoners of war.¹⁷

Analysis of the operations in the south of German South West Africa until the Battle of Gibeon, with reference to manoeuvre warfare

The Eastern and Southern forces captured Kalkfontein which resulted in the retreat of the German forces stationed there. The capture of Kalkfontein communicated sufficient threat of envelopment to the German forces at Aus and they withdrew to Keetmanshoop. This town was subsequently taken and the Germans retreated to Gibeon. The Union Defence Forces attempted to cut off the German force at Gibeon but after giving battle the German force escaped.

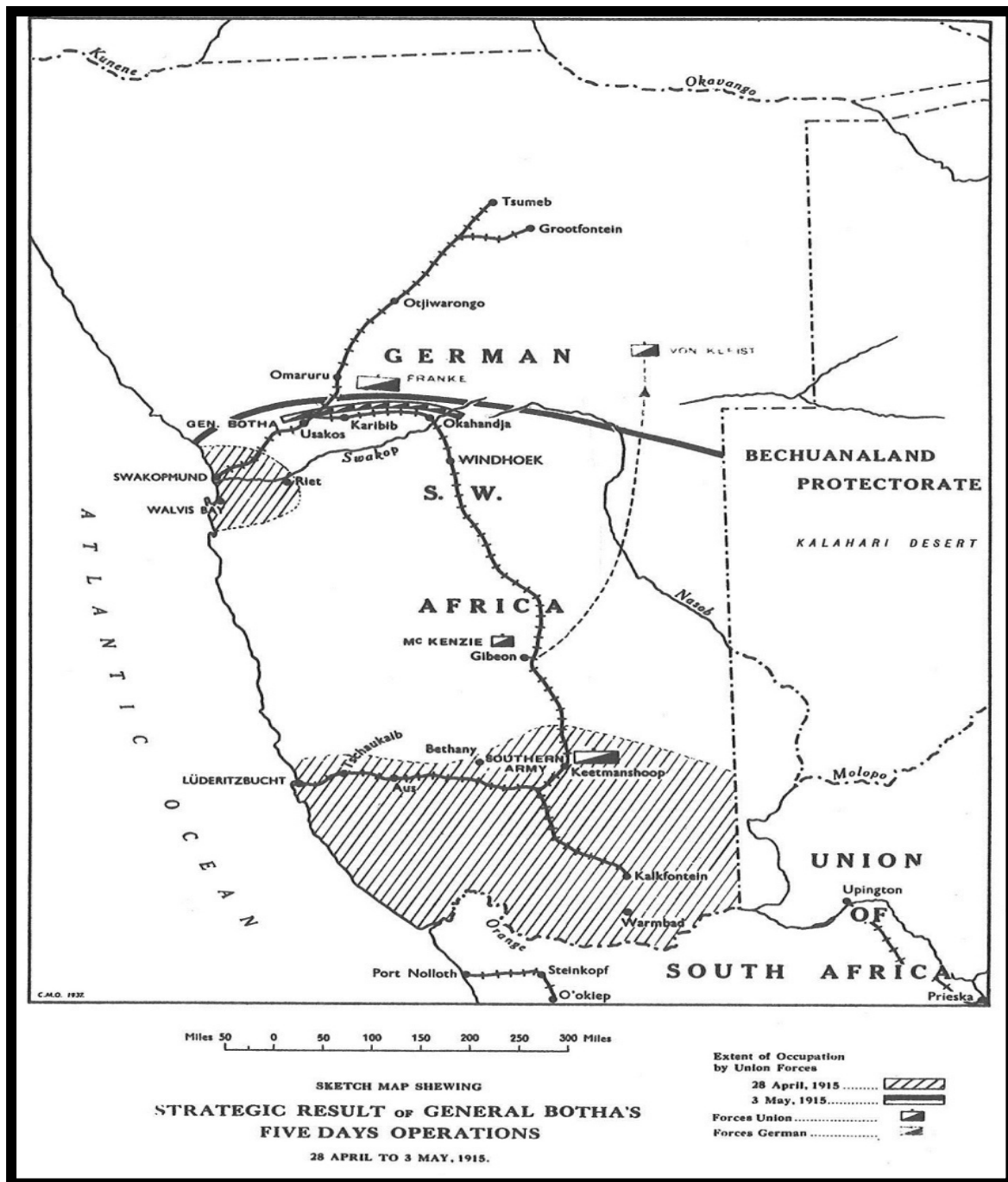
The German retreat in the south was a result of the overall operational situation in German South West Africa. Botha's advance and capture of the Riet, Pforte, Jakkalsfontein defensive line in the north made the Germans aware of the mobility of the South African forces. The South African threat in the north was very prominent and the Germans chose to abandon their defence in the south in favour of a northerly defence.

Map 14 shows the results of operations in German South West Africa until 3 May 1915. The entire southern area of German South West Africa was under the control of the Union Defence Forces at this stage although operations in the north continued until late April 1915.

¹⁵ Walker, *A Doctor's Diary in Damaraland*, 175.

¹⁶ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 92.

¹⁷ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Operations of the Central Force from 15 to 27 April 1915 including the action at Gibeon station, 15 May 1915.



Map 14: Result of the South African actions up to 3 May 1915¹⁸

The *Schutztruppe* headquarters only deployed a force of approximately 800 men in the south.¹⁹ This was mere token resistance. The German defensive strategy was to withdraw

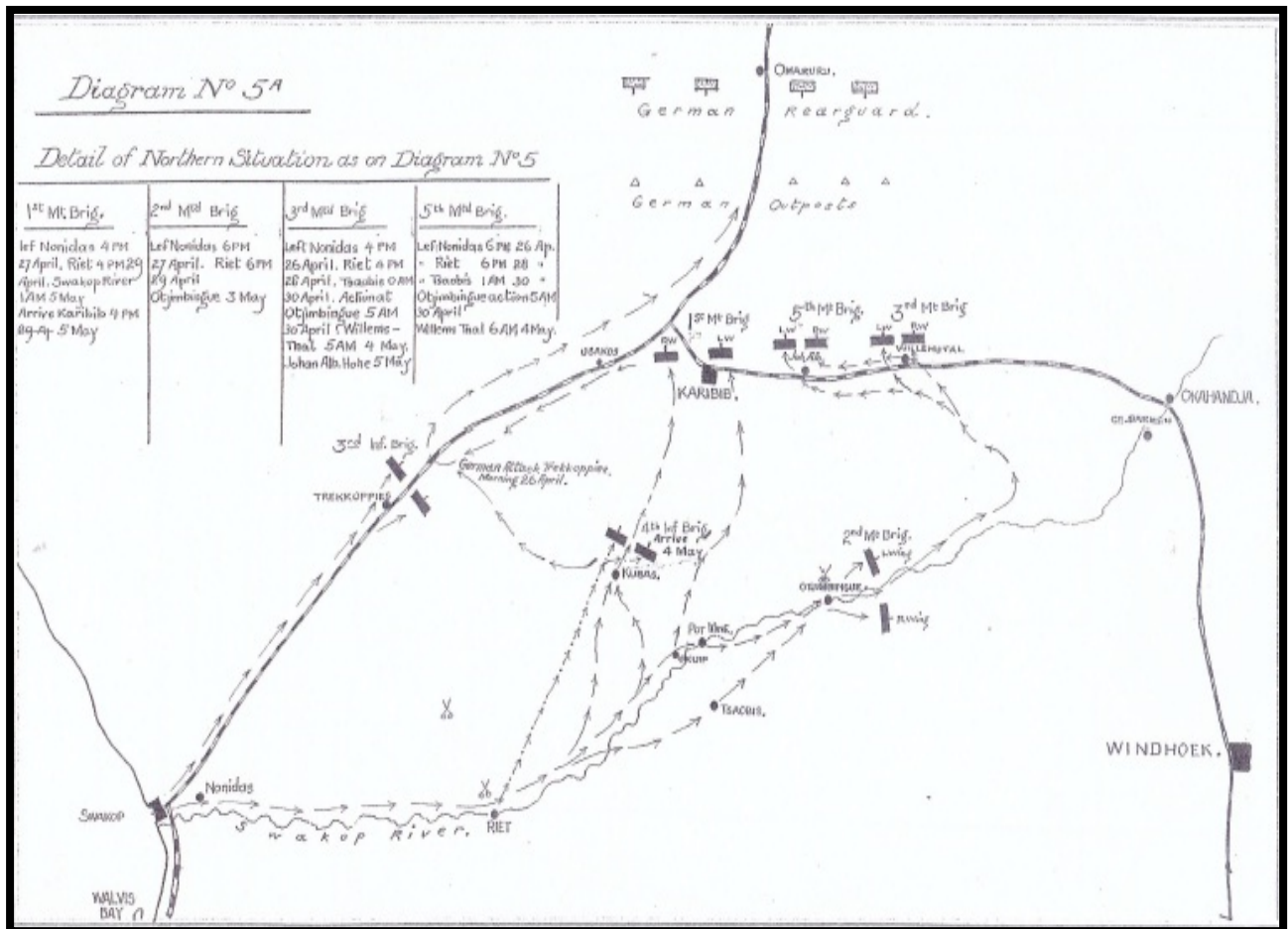
¹⁸

Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, opposite 105.

¹⁹

DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Operations of the Central Force from 15 to 27 April 1915 including the action at Gibeon station, 15 May 1915.

until a suitable time and place where they could deliver a decisive blow to the South African forces.²⁰ Map 15 indicates the strategic situation in the north of the colony on 6 May 1915.



Map 15: Strategic situation in the north of German South West Africa on 6 May 1915²¹

When analysing the final operations in the south in the light of the competing theories of attrition and manoeuvre, a superficial view might lead one to argue that it was the superiority in numbers alone that led to the German retreat. The final battle did not take place in the south of German South West Africa but was planned for the north where the German forces had more resources. The defensive posture of the German forces; the Union Defence Forces's divergent advances on three axes in the south; and the Union's advance in the north, all played a role in the retreat of the German forces to Gibeon and then further north to Windhoek.

²⁰ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Translation of an appeal by Lieutenant Colonel Franke, the commander-in-chief of the Protectorate, 28 June 1915.

²¹ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138 IO, General Botha's Despatch (GOC MC GSW Campaign) 9 July to 28 October 1920, Historical Record of the Campaign in German South West Africa, 4 November 1919.

However, the value of superior numbers should not be completely negated. The quantitative value of a military force must be evaluated in relation to and interaction with qualitative factors such as the doctrine, organisational qualities, values as well as strategy and tactics of the opposing forces.

CHAPTER 8: THE FINAL ENVELOPMENT

The fall of Gibeon and the retreat of the German forces signalled the advance of the Northern Army on Karibib and Windhoek on 26 April 1915. The German forces in the south were retreating in a northerly direction towards Karibib following their defeat at Gibeon. Botha attempted to intercept them with a rapid advance on Karibib before they could amalgamate with their forces in the north. Karibib was the railway junction which connected the south of German South West Africa to the north.

The same date, 26 April 1915, was also significant because it marked the day that the Germans attempted to capture Trekkoppies, a railway post in the northern region of German South West Africa that was part of the Union Defence Forces's northerly lines of communication. The Germans attacked the Union Defence Forces position at Trekkoppies with infantry and artillery.¹ The German attack was intended to delay the general advance of the South African forces but they put up a stout defence and managed to repulse the attack.

The defence of Trekkoppies took place while Botha was busy planning his advance on Windhoek, the capital of German South West Africa. An intelligence report came in that confirmed that the Germans were concentrated in the north of the country in and around Karibib.² Karibib was an intermediate objective en route to capture Windhoek.³ The advance on Karibib was also intended to stop the northern and southern German forces from amalgamating.⁴ Botha planned a cross country advance to capture Karibib and Windhoek which required wagons and mules for the transportation of the logistical needs of the soldiers.

The Union forces were in dire need of logistics to complete the campaign. Botha had sufficient stores to supply his commandos for five days on the advance. He appealed to parliament to make funds available for mules and wagons and his request was duly approved in April 1915 when parliament agreed to fund the provision of 300 wagons and mules for the advance on Windhoek.⁵

The logistical support of the mounted units was thereby increased from 59 ammunition wagons, 110 wagons and 51 water carts on 1 March 1915, to 86 ammunition wagons, 376

¹ Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme*, 74; Paterson, 'First Allied Victory', 6.

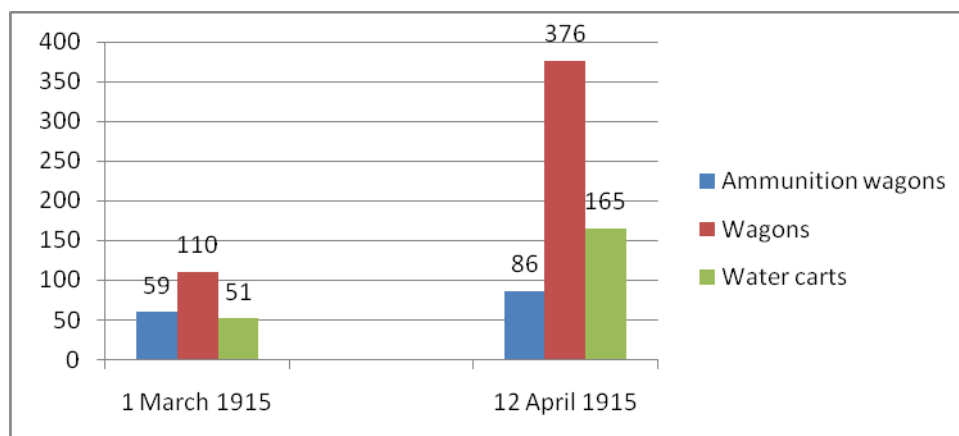
² Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 95.

³ Anon., *Official History*, 29.

⁴ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 121.

⁵ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 244.

wagons and 165 water carts on 12 April 1915 (refer to Graph 5).⁶ Walker notes in his diary that in April 1915 the transport officer was sending out 737 088kg of supplies per week to the forward troops at Riet.⁷



Graph 5: Increase in Union Defence Forces logistical support⁸

Botha made use of Brits and Myburgh to take charge of the two groupings that he deployed to take Karibib and Windhoek.⁹ Despite the best efforts of the Union Defence Forces, the German forces managed to unite and retreat north-eastwards.

Karibib was taken with little incident and Botha accepted its formal surrender on 6 May 1915. The official surrender of Windhoek was received by Botha on 12 May 1915 which also achieved the strategic objective of capturing its wireless station which the Germans had dissembled on their own initiative.¹⁰

The Germans retreated from Windhoek to Tsumeb which was also the location of their last remaining wireless station. Botha then built up forces and logistics for six weeks from mid-May until mid-June in preparation for the final advance.¹¹ Furthermore the Union Aviation Corps arrived in German South West Africa on 1 May 1915 and the first aeroplane was sent from Walvis Bay to Karibib on 26 May 1915.¹²

⁶ DOD Archives, AG 1914–1921, Box 182, Mounted Strengths, Field state, 12 April 1915.

⁷ Walker, *A Doctor's Diary in Damaraland*, 56.

⁸ DOD Archives, AG 1914–1921, Box 182, Mounted Strengths, Field state, 12 April 1915.

⁹ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 244;

¹⁰ Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme*, 74; Anon., *Official History*, 40; Meintjes, *General Louis Botha*, 264; Whittall, *With Botha and Smuts in Africa*, 62; Paterson, 'First Allied Victory', 6.

¹¹ Anon., *Official History*, 32.

¹² DOD Archives, World War 1 War Diaries (hereafter WW1 WD), Box 2, Air/1/1247/204/7/4, Historical record of No 26 (SA) Squadron and South Africa Aviation Corps and Historical record of the South Africa unit of the Royal Flying Corps; DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138,

The date of the final advance was calculated in terms of how fast the engineers could rebuild the railway.¹³ Between 5 and 14 May 1915 the South African forces were seriously hampered by a lack of rations and supplies.¹⁴ The logistical planning involved the reconstruction of the railway which was completely rebuilt from Swakopmund to Karibib by 15 May 1915.¹⁵ Botha refused to embark on the final offensive until the railway and supply situation was completely resolved.¹⁶

The Union Defence Forces managed to get 20 000 animals from the Union government with two to three days supplies for the final advance.¹⁷ In June 1915 the government also provided more wagons for the final advance, part of an allocation of 432 wagons to the respective deploying forces.¹⁸

The plan for the final envelopment involved Lukin and Beves advancing along the railway with Brits and the 1st Mounted Brigade enveloping Etosha Pan and taking Namutoni. Myburgh, with the 2nd Mounted Brigade was to take Grootfontein and Manie Botha, with the 3rd Mounted Brigade, was instructed to advance parallel to the railway to offer support to both enveloping forces.¹⁹ Map 16 shows the final envelopments in German South West Africa.

13 Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch number 4 by General Botha covering the period 15 May to 18 July 1915.
Whittall, *With Botha and Smuts in Africa*, 86.

14 Paterson, 'First Allied Victory', 6.

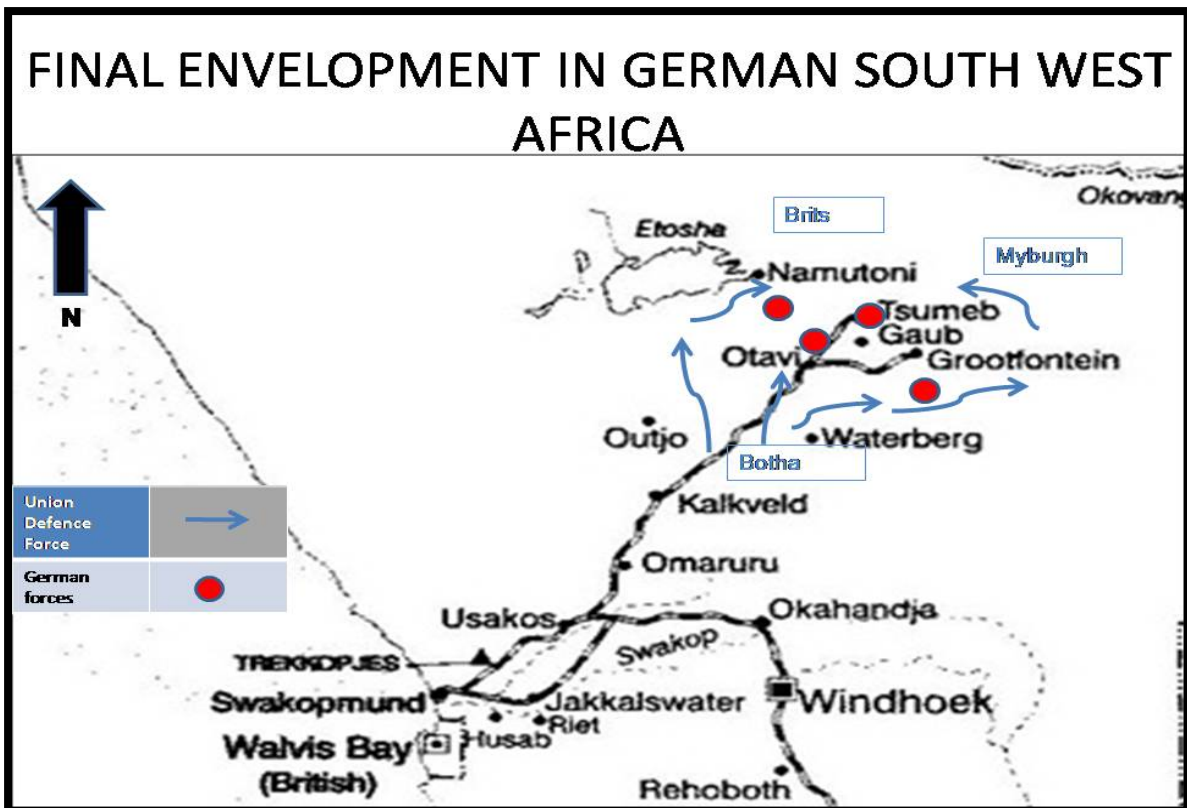
15 L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 147.

16 DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch number 4 by General Botha covering the period 15 May to 18 July 1915; Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 114.

17 Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme*, 74.

18 DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch number 4 by General Botha covering the period 15 May to 18 July 1915.

19 DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch number 4 by General Botha covering the period 15 May to 18 July 1915; L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 264.



Map 16: The final envelopment in German South West Africa²⁰

The Union's forces were also re-organised to protect the lines of communication. The left wing of the 3rd Mounted Brigade was deployed to Windhoek for the purpose of protecting Botha's lines of communication during the final advance.²¹

The final offensive against the last German position was made by 5 250 mounted men and 4 750 infantrymen with 32 artillery weapons pitted against 4 750 German soldiers in well defended positions with superior firepower in terms of artillery and machineguns.²² Botha wrote to Smuts on 15 June 1915, stating that the chances of early success on the campaign were dependent on whether the Germans decided to fight or retreat. Botha also explained that there were reports coming in of the Germans being in well fortified positions at Kalkveld, but he added that the Germans had previously evacuated well prepared positions without fighting.²³

²⁰ Base image for the map was taken from Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme*, 62. The base image was then modified to represent final envelopment in German South West Africa.

²¹ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch number 4 by General Botha covering the period 15 May to 18 July 1915.

²² L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 287.

²³ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch number 4 by General Botha covering the period 15 May to 18 July 1915.

The advance started on 18 June 1915.²⁴ Collyer did well to organise the watering of the columns on the advance. He had the quality and quantity of the water tested on the routes of advance. He then staggered the Union's advance which allowed sections of the advancing columns to be watered piecemeal.²⁵ The Union forces were relatively well supplied, although for only a short duration, which allowed for the temporary use of their full mobility.²⁶

The infantry reached Karibib and the commandos were deployed in a semicircle from Karibib to Windhoek. Lukin's 6th Mounted Brigade was deployed at Usakos; Brits and the 1st Mounted Brigade were deployed at Klein Aus; the 1st Infantry Brigade under Beves was at Erongo; Manie Botha was at Hohe with the 5th Mounted Brigade; and Myburgh held positions between Wilhelmstal and Okassise with a wing each of the 2nd and 3rd Mounted Brigades.²⁷

Brits and Myburgh's forces were sent to cut off the retreat of the Germans by committing to extensive movements and independent actions. Myburgh went via Waterberg to Tsumeb to cut off the possibility of a north-easterly retreat and Brits was sent with his commando to Etosha Pan to the north of Namutoni which prevented a German retreat northwards. In other words, the planned envelopments of the German forces were intended to prevent them from retiring further northwards.²⁸ Meanwhile Lukin moved forward with the infantry at snail's pace with the Germans systematically retreating.²⁹

The headquarters of the Union Defence Forces and the motorcars were at the rear of the convoy and the cars were used to rush between the mounted columns to ensure communication. The idea of the broad turning movement by Brits was attractive to Botha because it also allowed for the prisoners at Namutoni³⁰ to be set free.³¹

²⁴ Meintjes, *General Louis Botha*, 267; Whittal, *With Botha and Smuts in Africa*, 95; Paterson gives the date for the start of the advance as 20 June 1915: Paterson, 'First Allied Victory', 7.

²⁵ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch number 4 by General Botha covering the period 15 May to 18 July 1915; Trew, *Botha Treks*, 154.

²⁶ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 125.

²⁷ Paterson, 'First Allied Victory', 7.

²⁸ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch number 4 by General Botha covering the period 15 May to 18 July 1915.

²⁹ Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme*, 75.

³⁰ These prisoners of war include the South Africans captured at the battles of Sandfontein and the engagements at the Riet, Pforte, Jakkalsfontein amongst others.

³¹ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch number 4 by General Botha covering the period 15 May to 18 July 1915; Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 124.

Brits took Omaruru on 19 June 1915.³² The advance moved from Omaruru to Kalkfeld where it was thought that the Germans would put up a defensive battle. The Union central column then advanced to Otjiwarongo.³³ Whittall advanced from Etiro to Omaruru by 21 June 1915 and then on to Epako on 22 June 1915, where the German fortified positions were found abandoned.³⁴

Lukin was in command of the assault on Kalkveld and the brigade bivouacked in Okosongora and departed on the morning of 24 June 1914.³⁵ Reconnaissance was carried out by the budding Union Aviation Corps but their feedback was unclear regarding the deployment of the German forces at Kalkfeld and Botha assumed that the Germans were still in position.³⁶ Botha was reportedly quite impressed by the value of aeroplanes in warfare and mentioned that every support should be given to developing the use of aviation in combat.³⁷ Manie Botha captured Kalkveld unopposed on 24 June 1915.³⁸

While Botha moved up country in pursuit of the Germans, Mackenzie had arrived at Rehoboth from the south and by 25 June many of his sick soldiers had been admitted to the field hospital in Windhoek.³⁹ The north-south railway between Karibib and Keetmanshoop was also operational and assisted the Union Defence Forces with an extra 200 tonnage of supply per day.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, the Germans were preparing a string of defensive positions spanning Otavi and Tsumeb. Ritter was deployed at Otavifontein with ten machineguns and three artillery pieces and Von Kleist was positioned between Otavi and Grootfontein to protect the eastern flank of the German position.⁴¹

³² Ritchie, *With Botha in the Field*, 55. Whittall gives the date as 20 June: Whittall, *With Botha and Smuts in Africa*, 104.

³³ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 188.

³⁴ Whittall, *With Botha and Smuts in Africa*, 114, 121.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 128.

³⁶ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch number 4 by General Botha covering the period 15 May to 18 July 1915.

³⁷ Ritchie, *With Botha in the Field*, 56.

³⁸ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch number 4 by General Botha covering the period 15 May to 18 July 1915.

³⁹ Walker, *A Doctor's Diary in Damaraland*, 170.

⁴⁰ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch number 4 by General Botha covering the period 15 May to 18 July 1915.

⁴¹ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 288.

The Germans had a strong defensive line and the terrain was well suited for ambushes with areas of dense bush and also open plains.⁴² The scouts in the vanguard and the flank guard minimised the threat of ambush on the Union's main force.⁴³ The terrain in the hinterland had changed from the sandy soil found on the coast and in the Namib Desert to a low bushveld type of terrain. The South African soldiers were more accustomed to this type of terrain.⁴⁴

During the final envelopments Botha understood the probability that he would lose contact with Myburgh.⁴⁵ The Union forces were advancing over a front of 95 kilometres which was extensive.⁴⁶ Myburgh deployed from Wilhelmstal in a wide envelopment to take Grootfontein. Botha allowed Myburgh out on his own initiative because he trusted the instincts of Myburgh, who understood that a rapid and sustained pursuit of the enemy was required. Furthermore, Myburgh understood the plan and the intent of his commander-and-chief.⁴⁷

Whittal deployed with his armoured cars to Okanjande and then on to Otjiwarongo which was approximately 48 kilometres from Kalkveld.⁴⁸ The Union's advance reached Otjiwarongo on 26 June 1915.⁴⁹

Lukin and Myburgh, with their infantry and mounted brigades respectively, deployed to Omarassa from Otjiwarongo on 27 June 1915.⁵⁰ Botha advanced with the main force and ordered a halt to the advance at Omarassa because part of the Union's force was lagging behind. Botha wanted to consolidate his forces to ensure an effective march on Otavi which was 64 kilometres from Omarassa. The forced march on Otavi commenced on the night of 30 June.⁵¹

⁴² DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch number 4 by General Botha covering the period 15 May to 18 July 1915.

⁴³ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 153.

⁴⁴ Ritchie, *With Botha in the Field*, 56.

⁴⁵ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch number 4 by General Botha covering the period 15 May to 18 July 1915; Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914-1915*, 133.

⁴⁶ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 153.

⁴⁷ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch number 4 by General Botha covering the period 15 May to 18 July 1915; L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 290.

⁴⁸ Whittal, *With Botha and Smuts in Africa*, 146.

⁴⁹ Ritchie, *With Botha in the Field*, 57.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁵¹ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 291; Whittal, *With Botha and Smuts in Africa*, 147.

An intelligence report came in which unequivocally confirmed the German presence in the north in and around Otavi and Otavifontein, so Botha and the Union forces rode throughout the night of 30 June and early hours of 1 July 1915.⁵²

On 1 July 1915 the main force of the Union's advance managed to secure Otavi. Brits was en route to Namutoni whereas Myburgh was heading towards the north of Grootfontein.⁵³ Botha advised Brits to take an ambulance with him but Brits refused, arguing 'if I take an ambulance the men will see it and imagine themselves sick and soon it will be full'.⁵⁴ Each brigade was organised to be self sufficient in terms of an ambulance with medical personnel and was divided into a left and right wing which in turn corresponded with the two wings of the mounted brigade.⁵⁵ Botha complained that the medical services struggled to keep up with the pace of the commandos.⁵⁶

Franke ordered Ritter to hold out at Otavifontein for at least a week to allow for time to prepare the defences at Tsumeb. The Union forces swooped upon the German defences at Otavifontein on 1 July 1915.⁵⁷ The Germans retreated from Osib to the Elefantenberg with the Union Defence Forces in pursuit. The Germans put up a brief fight in their retreat towards the Otaviberg and Elefantenberg Mountains.⁵⁸

Manie Botha advanced towards the German position at Otavifontein while Lukin was deployed to the eastern flank of the Elefantenberg range.⁵⁹ Furthermore, Lieutenant Colonel SW Pijper was ordered to attack the western flank of the German position.⁶⁰ The Germans had 3 372 soldiers with 36 artillery pieces and 22 machineguns at Otavifontein which was not effectively brought to bear on the Union's 5th and 6th Mounted Brigades.⁶¹ Ritter

⁵² DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch number 4 by General Botha covering the period 15 May to 18 July 1915; Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914-1915*, 137.

⁵³ Anon., *Official History*, 34.

⁵⁴ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 159.

⁵⁵ Walker, *A Doctor's Diary in Damaraland*, 4.

⁵⁶ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch number 4 by General Botha covering the period 15 May to 18 July 1915.

⁵⁷ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 292; Anon., *Official History*, 40.

⁵⁸ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914-1915*, 138.

⁵⁹ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch number 4 by General Botha covering the period 15 May to 18 July 1915; Ritchie, *With Botha in the Field*, 59.

⁶⁰ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch number 4 by General Botha covering the period 15 May to 18 July 1915; L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 295.

⁶¹ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914-1915*, 141. Botha gives the strength of the Germans as 900 with 6 artillery pieces: DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch no. 4 by Botha, for

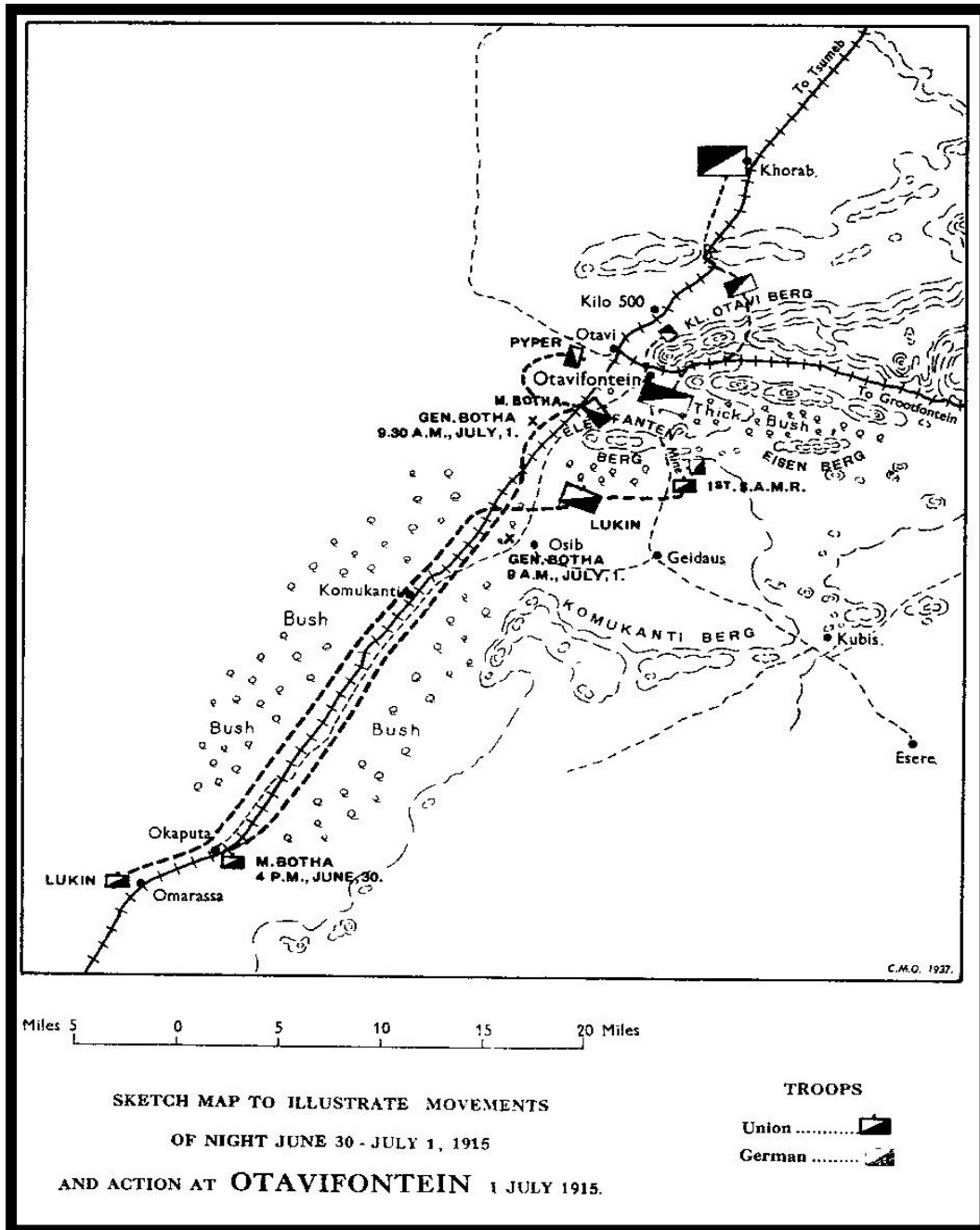
withdrew following the Union's artillery bombardment, however the South African horses were in no state for a rapid pursuit given that they had marched throughout the night to arrive at Otavifontein and give battle. The Germans executed a fighting withdrawal to Grootfontein.⁶²

Manie Botha pushed forward through bushy and rugged terrain forcing the German commander to withdraw. The German chief-of-staff claimed that had they had the luxury of an extra hour to prepare they would have destroyed the Union forces.⁶³ Map 17 indicates the action at Otavifontein.

period 15 May to 18 July 1915. Collyer may have been referring to a larger force that the Germans could have concentrated using internal lines.

⁶² L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 296.

⁶³ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914-1915*, 140; Anon., *Official History*, 47.



Map 17: Action at Otavifontein⁶⁴

Manie Botha ensured surprise by rushing the German position.⁶⁵ The casualties for the engagement at Otavifontein were ten Germans killed, 25 wounded and 41 taken prisoner,⁶⁶ while seven South Africans were wounded and four killed.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914-1915*, opposite 137.

⁶⁵ Anon., *Official History*, 46.

⁶⁶ Whittal, *With Botha and Smuts in Africa*, 147.

⁶⁷ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch number 4 by General Botha covering the period 15 May to 18 July 1915.

While the Germans were moving to Grootfontein, the men of the South African infantry were advancing on foot towards Otavifontein. They covered more than 480 kilometres of which the last 128 kilometres took only four days. This was a very significant feat and Franke, on hearing about this mass movement of infantrymen, commented that it must have been by train.⁶⁸ The distance was in fact not covered by train but by forced march. It is difficult to understand the hardship and suffering of the men who were required to undertake the very tough forced marches through German South West Africa. Table 2 shows some of the best times for forced marches during the campaign.

Best Forced Marches					
		From	To	distance (Km)	time (hours)
Northern Army	Left wing 2nd Mounted Brigade	Husab	Jakkalswater (and back)	122	22
	5th Mounted Brigade	Okaputa	Kilo 500	70	18
	6th Mounted Brigade	Omarassa	Elefantsnek	58	15
	3rd and 5 th Mounted Brigades	Riet	Otjimbingue	112	37
Central Force	7th, 8th and 9th Mounted Brigades	Berseba	Gibeon	112	72
Southern Force	Van Deventer's Column	Neu Khais	Kabus	193	144

Table 2: Best forced marches⁶⁹

The force under Brits moved on Outjo and was en route to Namutoni towards the end of June 1915, while Myburgh was heading for Grootfontein. The wide envelopments were designed to cut off the German retreat and encircle the German position.⁷⁰ The Germans had at this stage moved to Khorab where the final stand took place.⁷¹ Map 18 indicates the final advance and the positions of the South African and German forces.

Myburgh departed on 18 June and moved via Okasisse and Wilhelmstahl, arriving at the Waterberg plateau on 26 June 1915. Then on 29 June 1915, Myburgh moved to Otajewita, on to Omboamgomde and then to Esere, which he reached on 2 July 1915. During this

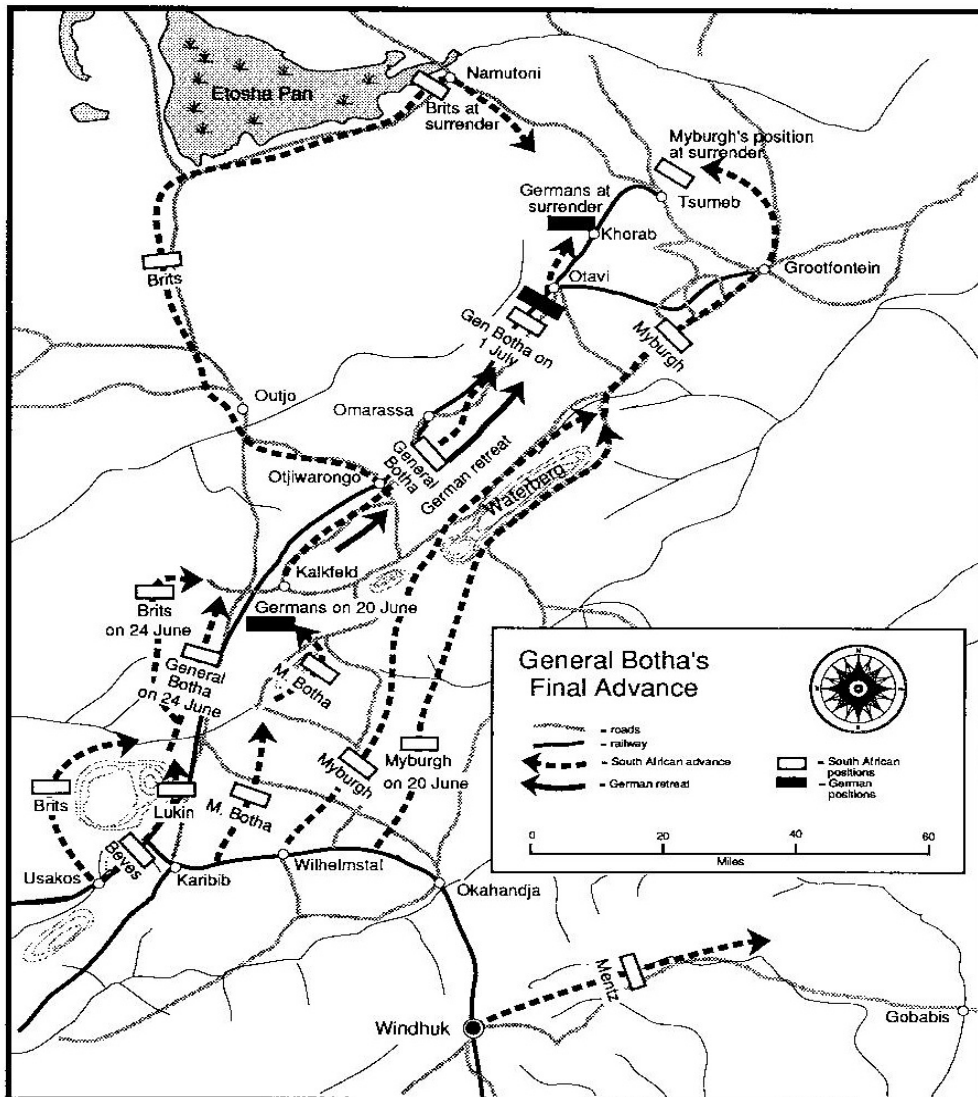
⁶⁸ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 298; Whittal, *With Botha and Smuts in Africa*, 149.

⁶⁹ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138 IO, General Botha's Despatch (GOC MC GSW Campaign) 9 July to 28 October 1920, Historical Record of the Campaign in German South West Africa, 4 November 1919.

⁷⁰ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch number 4 by General Botha covering the period 15 May to 18 July 1915.

⁷¹ Anon., *Official History*, 46.

extensive march there were times when the troops and horses were without water for up to two days.⁷²



Map 18: The final advance⁷³

Franke had issued a written order (which was found afterwards at Otavifontein) saying unequivocally that the time had come for the Germans to give battle. The German commander made the point that the defensive strategy followed thus far meant that the German fighting force was still intact; it now had to put up a stout defence at the correct time and place.⁷⁴

⁷² Whittal, *With Botha and Smuts in Africa*, 150, 151.

⁷³ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 283.

⁷⁴ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Translation of an appeal by Lieutenant Colonel Franke, the commander-in-chief of the Protectorate, 28 June 1915; Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 143.

Franke understood the dire position of the German forces. Von Kleist who was protecting the German eastern flank saw and reported the commando's swift movement in the direction of Grootfontein. Furthermore, Franke knew that a South African detachment was also advancing from the west. With knowledge of the broad South African envelopment, he realised only too well that the German position was dire. However, Dr Theodore Seitz, the German governor of German South West Africa, was demanding a tactical victory – despite Franke's stated opinion that if it came to a battle the Germans would be annihilated.⁷⁵

While the South African envelopment was being executed the Germans sought a meeting with Botha to discuss terms of surrender. An armistice was arranged but Botha specifically excluded the movements of Brits and Myburgh.⁷⁶

The South African forces received intelligence that the Germans were entrenched at Gaub and the right wing of the 3rd Brigade was tasked to envelop the enemy's rear to the west and the 2nd Brigade to the enemy's rear on the east.⁷⁷ Myburgh defeated the German force at Gaub on 2 July 1915 and then moved to Tsumeb.⁷⁸

The Union Defence Forces encountered a German force numbering approximately 500 on 4 July 1915, on the advance to Tsumeb. The German force was subsequently forced to withdraw, with the South Africans taking 80 prisoners.⁷⁹

Myburgh advanced on Tsumeb and after a misunderstanding about the armistice between Myburgh's force and the German force at Tsumeb, an exchange of artillery fire ensued. The South African force subsequently entered into negotiations with the Germans at Tsumeb.⁸⁰ Franke claimed that Botha had deceived them by deploying his forces during the armistice. Botha responded that he had only agreed to an armistice for the local forces in direct contact and not for the forces that were busy with enveloping movements.⁸¹ The negotiations

⁷⁵ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 299.

⁷⁶ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch number 4 by General Botha covering the period 15 May to 18 July 1915.

⁷⁷ Whittal, *With Botha and Smuts in Africa*, 151.

⁷⁸ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 159; Ritchie states that Gaub was taken during the extended march: Ritchie, *With Botha in the Field*, 59; Whittal states that Gaub was taken unopposed: Whittal, *With Botha and Smuts in Africa*, 151.

⁷⁹ Whittal, *With Botha and Smuts in Africa*, 152.

⁸⁰ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 149, 150.

⁸¹ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Correspondence between General Botha and Lieutenant Colonel Franke on the subject of a breach of armistice by Union troops at Tsumeb on 6 July 1915, 7 July 1915.

resulted in the Germans surrendering the town on 6 July 1915.⁸² At Tsumeb the South Africans found stores of weapons and ammunition; apparently the intention was to make these available for conducting the Afrikaner Rebellion.⁸³

The Germans at Namutoni surrendered to Brits on 8 July.⁸⁴ In order to achieve this victory Brits had to undertake some extensive and arduous trekking. He departed from Karibib on 18 June when Myburgh left Okasisse. Brits moved to Etanaho, Omatjenne and Otijasu where his troops eventually found potable water. Brits' force took Ombika on 3 July and Okakuejo on 4 July; the next day, on 5 July, Rietfontein was captured. Brits' brigade covered 563 kilometres in 13 days, after which Namutoni surrendered.⁸⁵

The final Union envelopments effectively outmanoeuvred the Germans (refer to Map 19).⁸⁶ Ritchie states that the Germans 'were surrounded before they knew it. So neat and swift was the commander-in-chief's plan that the German commander was incredulous – until his scouts kept coming in and telling him what the real state of affairs was'.⁸⁷

⁸² Anon., *Official History*, 40. Whittal says that the South African forces were ready to attack Tsumeb on 5 July and the town subsequently surrendered: Whittal, *With Botha and Smuts in Africa*, 152.

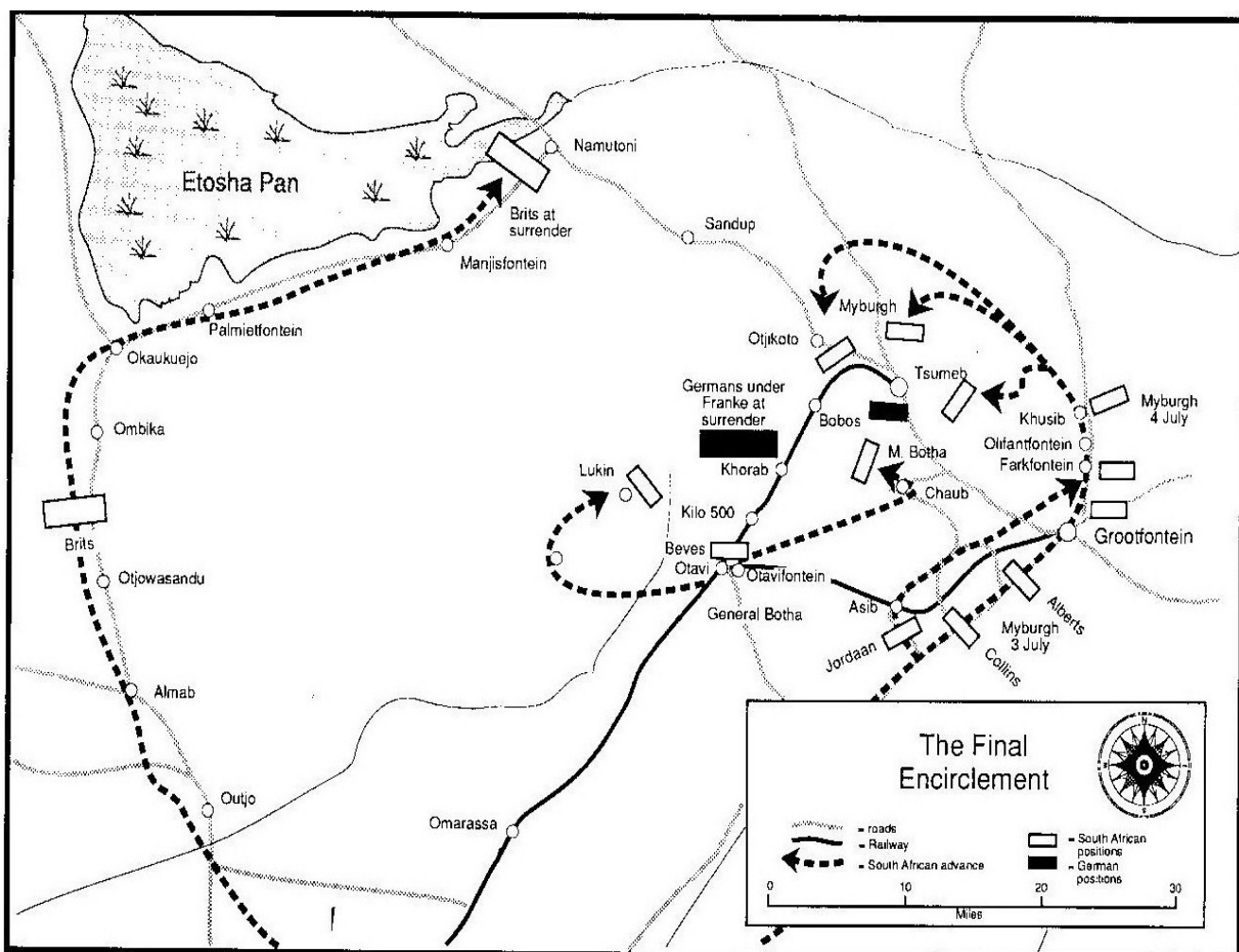
⁸³ Farwell, *The Great War in Africa 1914–1918*, 100; Buxton, *General Botha*, 116. Whittal indicates that besides the stores they also found 5 000 bottles of rum: Whittal, *With Botha and Smuts in Africa*, 152.

⁸⁴ Meintjes, *General Louis Botha*, 269.

⁸⁵ Whittal, *With Botha and Smuts in Africa*, 153.

⁸⁶ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch number 4 by General Botha covering the period 15 May to 18 July 1915.

⁸⁷ Ritchie, *With Botha in the Field*, 60.



Map 19: The final envelopment⁸⁸

Botha had virtually no communication with Brits and Myburgh until the envelopments were completed on 5 July 1915.⁸⁹ The bodyguard and the central column moved northwards to Otavifontein.

The Germans found themselves facing Botha and the infantry at Otavifontein. Meanwhile Myburgh and Brits had cut off their retreat. On 9 July 1915, following negotiations between Botha and Seitz the Germans accepted the conditions of unconditional surrender as put forward by Botha.⁹⁰ The German forces that surrendered at Khorab included approximately 4 000 troops and 30 artillery pieces.⁹¹ Seitz sent an official letter to

⁸⁸ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 314.

⁸⁹ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch number 4 by General Botha covering the period 15 May to 18 July 1915.

⁹⁰ Meintjes, *General Louis Botha*, 262; Trew, *Botha Treks*, 175.

⁹¹ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 169.

the Union Defence Forces to confirm the German surrender; Botha received this at 02:00 on 9 July.⁹²

The German South West African campaign was the first successful campaign of the First World War to be concluded by a dominion of the British Empire. It was also the first armistice of the First World War.⁹³ The casualties for the campaign are demonstrated below in Table 3.

	German South West Africa	Afrikaner Rebellion	Totals
Died in action	114	132	246
Died of other causes		181	181
Wounded	318	242	560

Table 3: Casualties in the German South West African campaign and the Afrikaner Rebellion⁹⁴

Analysis of the final envelopment of the German forces with regard to manoeuvre warfare theory

The reasons for defeat and victory are complex and they are by their nature inextricably intertwined. In order to determine the reasons for victory it is also equally important to understand the causes of defeat of a given military force (in this case the German military).

Gooch and Cohen have created a taxonomy for defeat in which the first step is to determine the cause of the military failure or defeat. This step is followed by determining the critical tasks which led to the defeat, and the third step is to undertake a layered analysis of the organisational aspects which led to the failure.⁹⁵

The reason why the Germans suffered defeat was not that they were outnumbered. They were defeated because they did not fight a defensive battle. The German force surrendered with their entire fighting force almost intact.

⁹² DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch number 4 by General Botha covering the period 15 May to 18 July 1915.

⁹³ Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme*, 76, 77.

⁹⁴ DOD Archives, Officer Commanding Records, Box 92, OR 139, Statistics re casualties Rebellion, German South West Africa, East and Central Africa and Europe, Casualties sustained by the Union forces in the Rebellion and the German South West African campaign.

⁹⁵ Cohen and Gooch, *Military Misfortunes*, 46.

The Germans surrendered with 4 740 soldiers, 37 artillery pieces and 22 machineguns. In addition, they still had substantial amounts of ammunition that had been stockpiled.⁹⁶ The German and Union forces did not engage in a sustained pitched battle on the tactical level at the end of the campaign.

Furthermore, the German forces did not complete several critical tasks during the final envelopments. With hindsight they should have engaged in battle at Kalkveld and at Otavifontein. Instead the German position at Kalkveld was simply vacated by the German forces; no battle was offered.

Botha maintains that the German forces at Kalkveld withdrew because they feared that they would be surrounded by the Union Defence Forces. He alludes to the fact that the terrain and the circumstances did not allow for an encirclement of the German position at Kalkveld.⁹⁷

The position at Otavifontein was critical to the Union Defence Forces's route of advance because it was an important water source. The German force at Otavifontein was of good strength yet they offered virtually no resistance and retreated. Botha mentions that if the Union Defence Forces had been unable to capture Otavifontein then the Union forces would have been compelled to retreat and regroup.⁹⁸

Franke had opted for a defensive strategy; he conserved his forces to give battle at the critical time and place.⁹⁹ The letter written by Franke to his forces conveyed the impression that a colossal clash between the German and Union forces was imminent. Botha states that despite the aggressive tone of Franke's letter and the fact that the numerically larger German force (in comparison to any of the individual advancing South African forces) was virtually intact at the end of the campaign, it was evident that the German morale was badly shaken.¹⁰⁰ Strachan reiterates this in his book, when he writes that the German retreat from Otavifontein was a clear indication that their morale had collapsed.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Strachan, *The First World War*, 568.

⁹⁷ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch number 4 by General Botha covering the period 15 May to 18 July 1915.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Translation of an appeal by Lieutenant Colonel Franke, the commander-in-chief of the Protectorate, 28 June 1915.

¹⁰⁰ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch number 4 by General Botha covering the period 15 May to 18 July 1915.

¹⁰¹ Strachan, *The First World War*, 568.

Gooch and Handel explain that once the critical failures have been analysed then the failures should be compared to the different levels of organisation. The German failure to give battle at the required times at Otavifonein and Kalkveld was the result of the shaken morale of the German subordinate commanders. Added to this, the German force had no previous experience of engaging in this type of campaign.

The Union force's mobility was something novel and the Germans found themselves retreating on a continuous basis. The German military was unfamiliar with facing a rapid, highly mobile enemy which targeted its logistical and communication lines. The Germans became accustomed to trading space for time. Retreating became an operational procedure. The constant withdrawal of the German forces resulted in the forces becoming increasingly disconnected with the prospect of an actual pitched defensive battle. The leadership skills of Franke and his subordinate commanders must be questioned in this regard. Furthermore it should be questioned whether the German force was more acquainted, familiar and comfortable with offensive warfare as opposed to a defensive campaign.¹⁰² Von Kleist and Ritter were perhaps overwhelmed by the magnitude of their commands and their responsibilities in the final phase of the campaign.

The Germans appear to have accepted defeat long before the final surrender to the Union Defence Forces. The tacit understanding of German sections and detachments to retreat may have become an organisational norm which led to the final surrender.

Figure 6 represents the equation that will be applied to the German and Union forces in the analysis of the final envelopment in German South West Africa.

Total Military Power = Quantity x Materiel Quality x Non-Material Quality
--

Figure 6: Formula for total military power¹⁰³

In terms of the above formula the 'quantity' or numerical strength of the Union forces was considerably larger than that of the German forces. The quality of the equipment (the materiel) available to the German and Union forces was approximately equal. As the campaign progressed the Union Defence Forces controlled the railway which allowed for the logistical provisioning of the Union forces (this tilted the scale of materiel towards the Union

¹⁰² The German victories at the Battle of Sandfontein, the Battle of Naulila (against the Portuguese military) and the Herero and Namaqua campaigns (massacres/genocide) are examples of previous German military victories which comprised offensive operations.

¹⁰³ Handel, *War Strategy and Intelligence*, 95, 96.

Defence Forces). The non-material 'quality', which refers to issues such as morale, motivation, offensive spirit and leadership, was superior within the rank and file of the Union Defence Forces than it was in the German force.

The formula shows that the Union forces were stronger than the German forces in number, materiel quality and non-material quality. On the point of numerical superiority the Union did not have overwhelmingly stronger numbers than the Germans during the final envelopments. Botha claims that knowing where the enemy forces were located made it feasible to advance with the required number of troops and no more.¹⁰⁴

During the last phase of the campaign and the Union Defence Forces's final envelopments, the Germans were on interior lines. The German force was in the central position and it was able to concentrate superior forces on any of the separate Union forces that were deployed in a forward position.¹⁰⁵ Hence the numerical superiority of the Union's forces was not the most decisive factor when the final envelopments were in progress.

What was significant about the South African campaign in German South West Africa was its brevity. Handel maintains that qualitative factors are usually the most decisive factors in the outcome of a short war.¹⁰⁶ In this case the offensive spirit, leadership and morale of the Union Defence Forces were crucial in the success of the campaign.

According to Handel, quantitative superiority normally becomes important in extended campaigns.¹⁰⁷ The brevity of the German South West African campaign is thus testament to the strength of the qualitative factors of the Union Defence Forces. The importance of numerical superiority is in no way undermined, but the reason for the South African victory and the German defeat was not a direct result of numerical strength. If the Germans had repulsed the Union forces in the final envelopments, the duration of the campaign would have become protracted. In that case the Union Defence Forces's superior numbers may well have influenced the outcome of the campaign in the longer term.

In his official correspondence with the Kaiser, Seitz claims that the German defeat was caused by the superior numbers of the Union Defence Forces which had encircled them at Khorab by taking the German positions at Namutoni and Tsumeb. Seitz maintains that every

¹⁰⁴ DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch number 4 by General Botha covering the period 15 May to 18 July 1915.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Handel, *War Strategy and Intelligence*, 96.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 96.

attempt to break through the Union encirclement proved futile.¹⁰⁸ The dissertation argues that the Germans had the option to give battle before the final surrender.

Botha gives the reason for the Union victory as the effect of surprise on the German force due to the speed of the enveloping attacks on the German positions at Tsumeb and Namutoni.¹⁰⁹ The collapse of morale in the German ranks was central to their defeat. The numerical superiority of the Union was an important factor but can be regarded as an oversimplification of the complex phenomenon of military failure and defeat.

The significance of the campaign is often related to its brevity. This dissertation links the short duration of the campaign to the qualitative factors evident in the Union Defence Forces; these are in turn analysed in terms of manoeuvre warfare theory. The final envelopments resulted in the dislocation of the physical and psychological dimensions of the German commanders. The low morale and lack of offensive spirit and cohesion of the German force led to their surrender without suffering substantial physical harm. The surrender of a military force without physical resistance indicates that they were compelled to do so by psychological pressure and the perceived threat of death or destruction.

¹⁰⁸ DOD Archives, SD, Box 886, Letter, Dr Seitz to the Kaiser, 4 August 1915.

¹⁰⁹ DOD Archives, WW1 GSWA, Box 23a, Citations, German South West Africa, Northern Army, Commander of the 1st Mounted Brigade Special Appointments, 17 February 1918.

CHAPTER 9: ANALYSIS OF THE GERMAN SOUTH WEST AFRICAN CAMPAIGN

Botha and Smuts and the Union Defence Forces staff section had to determine whether Windhoek, as the capital of the colony, or the headquarters of the *Schutztruppe* was the centre of gravity of the German force. It became evident that the German centre of gravity was not their capital, because when Windhoek was taken the German force merely retreated with as much of their equipment and stores as possible. The centre of gravity was the *Schutztruppe* headquarters. A specific headquarters is typically a centre of gravity.¹ The *Schutztruppe* headquarters moved from Windhoek to Khorab as the South African forces advanced systematically throughout the colony.

The Union forces made use of external lines of communication to advance on the German centre of gravity. The logistical question on the movement and supply of the Union Defence Forces over vast distances without infrastructure was a key consideration in the campaign.

Operational pauses versus culmination

In order to secure victory a given force should maintain the initiative and exploit the lines of communication of the opposing force. In doing so the exploiting force, the attacker, risks reaching culmination.² There is a state of culmination for the attacker and the defender.

For the attacker, culmination is reached when the combat power used to engage and pursue the enemy runs out. The culmination point for the defender is reached where the defender can no longer defend and counterattack successfully.³ The state of culmination should be avoided at all costs. The rapid advances of the South African forces led to various operational pauses to prevent culmination.

Clausewitz mentions the loss of morale as one of the critical factors in losing the tactical initiative and reaching the culminating point where the spirit of the mass is broken.⁴ The German force culminated in that their fighting spirit was broken.

The South African forces avoided culmination by waiting for supplies and preparing for their final advance on the German forces. During an operational pause a given military force is

¹ South African Army College, *Operational Concepts*, 7/11-8.

² Solberg, 'Maneuver Warfare', 31.

³ South African Army College, *Operational Concepts*, 7/12-2.

⁴ Von Clausewitz, tr. Graham, *On War*, 109.

naturally on the defensive. On this Sun states that a defensive stance allows for security against defeat; however, in his opinion victory can only be achieved on the offensive.⁵

The campaign in German South West Africa was characterised by swift advances followed by operational pauses which were used to consolidate the space covered. The Northern Army paused from 20 March until the end of April 1915 so as to convey the necessary supplies to the front. The Union Defence Forces was in the field for 133 days of which only 24 days were spent on the move.⁶ The 24 days when the forces were executing operational movements were offset by 109 days of operational pause.

Ordinary and extraordinary forces

Leonhard argues that 'operational planners must determine how to use the available combat power to achieve the goals of a campaign'.⁷ Botha made efficient use of the South African commandos and mounted infantry with their high mobility while the regular infantry was used to take and hold ground.

The extraordinary and ordinary forces as mentioned by Sun allude respectively to a highly mobile force used to execute envelopments; and an ordinary force used to take and hold ground.⁸ Sun states that rapidity is the quintessence of war; it should be applied to take advantage of the enemy's lack of preparation and achieved by taking unexpected routes.⁹

The Union forces comprised the ordinary and extraordinary components as mentioned by Sun but these components had their own South African uniqueness. The extraordinary forces were the mobile commandos and mounted infantry, while the regular infantry formed the ordinary component. The ordinary force holds ground and forms the hinge which supports the mobile forces which in turn creates leverage.¹⁰ The infantry provided the hinge on which the commandos swung.¹¹

Botha understood the importance of mobility and surprise as the most important consideration on the tactical and strategic level.¹² Botha's emphasis on mobility was vividly

⁵ Sun, tr. Sadler, *The Art of War*, 7.

⁶ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 158.

⁷ Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver*, 10.

⁸ Solberg, 'Maneuver Warfare', 32.

⁹ Sun, tr. Sadler, *The Art of War*, 27.

¹⁰ Simpkin, *Race to the Swift*, 96.

¹¹ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 142.

¹² Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 173.

demonstrated by the UDF strength return in December 1914, which indicated some 33 308 mounted soldiers.¹³ Botha further attributed the German surrender to the surprise which was affected by the rapid final envelopments.¹⁴

For the most part, the commandos formed the extraordinary component of the Union Defence Forces. Collyer is of the opinion that without an understanding of the special characteristics of the commandos, it is difficult to understand the significance of their contribution to the German South West African campaign.¹⁵ He feels that the campaign was strategic because it comprised wide movements that were designed to defeat the German force.¹⁶

The commandos were independent in thought and impatient of any formal means of control. The members of commandos were astute and relied on their tactical sense and their rifles as a means of protection.¹⁷ Together, the Boer, his horse and his rifle had become part of South African military history and this was passed down from father to son as part of the Afrikaner tradition. The result was a combatant who could deliver accurate and economical fire and could cross almost any kind of terrain.¹⁸

The horses used in the commandos were trained to gallop while the riders fired from the saddle – or to stand while their riders dismounted to fire.¹⁹ The commandos had their own doctrine which had evolved from their history and experience of war. Doctrine combines ideology, national culture, technology and the grouping's formative experiences.²⁰

During the South African War the commandos had no communication lines; they simply moved over extended distances without any formal re-supply arrangements.²¹ The methods employed by the commandos sometimes led to confusion and frustration during the German South West African campaign. At times Collyer was frustrated by the commando scouts and

¹³ DOD Archives, AG 1914–1921, Box 150, Summarised states of forces and garrisons, Mounted Brigade field state, 22 December 1914.

¹⁴ DOD Archives, WW1 GSWA, Box 23a, Citations German South West Africa, Northern Army, Commander of the 1st Mounted Brigade Special Appointments, 17 February 1918; DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch number 4 by General Botha covering the period 15 May to 18 July 1915.

¹⁵ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹⁷ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 11.

¹⁸ Anon., *Official History*, 38.

¹⁹ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 12.

²⁰ Gooch, 'The Use of History in the Development of Contemporary Doctrine', 6.

²¹ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 18.

their commandants who were reluctant to give feedback and information. The members of commandos did not always recognise that they were part of a combined fighting force.²²

Bezuidenhout's actions at Riet are a case in point. He led the envelopment at Riet and was ordered to move through a gap in the mountain range. However, the gap shown on the map was a topographical error – it did not exist and Bezuidenhout was forced to turn back. On his return he failed to inform Botha or Collyer that he was unable to envelop the German position. This shows that British military traditions of formal channels of reporting and command were difficult to align with the unorthodox approach of the commandos.²³

The commandos traditionally relied on the horse and rifle in defence and for hunting and the burghers were accustomed to use cover and deliver accurate fire.²⁴ They acted by instinct more than by command. Their tactics were normally discussed the night before an advance or attack in a democratic fashion once the scouting information was received.²⁵

Commandos would assume a formation according to the terrain and the tactical situation. If they were fired upon they would take cover as if they were ordered to do so. There were no orders needed for a night march because commando members instinctively saddled up and set off. Furthermore the hardy lifestyle that the commandos could endure was an asset that ensured their mobility.²⁶ As Sun put it, 'manoeuvring with a flying column is faster than with the entire army, however the flying column must sacrifice baggage and stores'.²⁷

The commandos deployed with a minimum of supplies. They used the same tactics that they used against the British in the South African War,²⁸ although with superior numbers in the German South West African campaign.²⁹

The Germans were amazed by the commando's methods of advance and attack. They 'marched on the cannon thunder' – a reference to the fact that when the advance scouts drew fire from the German rearguard actions, the firing would attract other commando scouts

²² L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 196.

²³ *Ibid.*, 191.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 193.

²⁵ Anon., *Official History*, 38.

²⁶ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 194.

²⁷ Sun, tr. Sadler, *The Art of War*, 14.

²⁸ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 169.

²⁹ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 5.

who would promptly join the action.³⁰ Furthermore, the commandos expected their commanders to lead from the front.³¹

Line of least expectation and resistance

The German South West African campaign illustrated some of the essential psychological aspects necessary to execute manoeuvre warfare. The movement of the South African forces communicated enough of a threat to the German force to deflate their morale and sap their will to fight. Morale is essential to the attainment of victory in battle.³²

Two maxims of fundamental importance are that an advance or attack should be along the line of least resistance; and the line of least expectation. These deal with the physical and psychological aspects of warfare respectively. The line of least resistance typically refers to geographical and tactical considerations, while the line of least expectation is linked to surprise.

In terms of the line of least resistance, German South West Africa had natural obstacles such as the desert (and by implication the lack of water supplies) which were deterrents to the movement of the Union's forces. Rayner and O'Shaughnessy explain that 'the Germans said that the 80 mile (128 kilometre) stretch of Namib Desert separating Lüderitzbucht from the inland and its comparatively fertile plateau which begins at Aus ... plus their own valuable assistance, would bring about our annihilation'.³³

The *Official History* states that the Germans believed their position to be secure because of the natural advantages (as far as they were concerned) of the terrain and the lack of water available to the advancing South African force.³⁴ However, Jomini cautions that remoteness will not necessarily protect a country from invasion.³⁵ This was the case in the German South West African campaign, where the Germans believed that the terrain was impassable from all sides.³⁶ Given that the Germans perceived the terrain as impassable, the rapid advance of the Union forces might well have surprised the enemy.

³⁰ Trew, *Botha Treks*, 126.

³¹ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 201.

³² Du Picq, trs. Greenly and Cotton, *Battle Studies*, 70.

³³ O'Shaughnessy and Rayner, *How Botha and Smuts conquered German South West*, 55.

³⁴ Anon., *Official History*, 3.

³⁵ Du Picq, trs. Greenly and Cotton, *Battle Studies*, 100.

³⁶ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 5.

Moral surprise refers to a situation where the enemy does not know that you are advancing. Material surprise differs in that the enemy is aware that that you are coming but cannot do anything about it.³⁷ In both cases, the element of surprise could result in the dislocation of the mind of the commander. Psychological dislocation occurs as a result of physical dislocation due to supply lines being cut or threatened, or being forced to change front.³⁸

The final envelopments in the German South West African campaign surprised the German force and it was overwhelmed. German staff officers underestimated the mobility of the Union Defence Forces.³⁹ As Du Picq puts it, the 'surprised adversary does not defend himself, [but instead] he tries to flee'.⁴⁰ An army that is surprised cannot make effective use of its resources.⁴¹ The German force surrendered with its entire fighting force virtually intact.

Surprise was dependent on the mobility of the South African forces.⁴² This mobility was in turn dependent on its logistical support. The provision of transport and supplies was essential to ensure the mobility of the commandos, which in turn ensured surprise.

In terms of the line of least resistance and expectation, Liddell Hart maintains that a dispersed advance could have a single objective, a number of successive objectives or alternatively, it could have simultaneous objectives.⁴³

The dispersed advance in German South West Africa took on successive objectives, applying pressure on the German force from the north, south and the southeast of the colony. The advances and envelopments from the divergent axes of advance attacked the physical and psychological dimensions of the German force. The envelopments of the Union Defence Forces were applied on the tactical and operational levels of war and they had a strategic objective in mind.

The many forced marches and extensive sweeping envelopments forced the Germans to retreat because their logistical and communication lines were constantly threatened. Jomini explains that manoeuvre and outflanking movements can be used to dislodge the enemy or

³⁷ Simpkin, *Race to the Swift*, 182.

³⁸ Liddell Hart, *Strategy of the Indirect Approach*, 327.

³⁹ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 18.

⁴⁰ Du Picq, trs. Greenly and Cotton, *Battle Studies*, 34.

⁴¹ Von Clausewitz, tr. Graham, *On War*, 65.

⁴² Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 51.

⁴³ Liddell Hart, *Strategy of the Indirect Approach*, 201.

turn its position.⁴⁴ An attack on the opposing force's lines of communication has a huge psychological impact by creating a lack of control.⁴⁵

Decentralised forces

Fuller maintains that a manoeuvre force requires a general who has exceptional initiative and a minimal command staff.⁴⁶ The German South West African campaign mirrored this in the methods used by Botha and Smuts; they emphasised doing their own reconnaissance and applying decentralised command at all times.

A decentralised command system allows subordinate commanders control over how they wish to achieve the required objectives within the framework of the commander's intent. Only a decentralised military force allows for a fast OODA cycle.⁴⁷ A case in point is that Botha deployed his forces without there being interactive contact between them.⁴⁸ Thus the *Official History* is of the opinion that, 'manoeuvre control would have been impossible if it was not for the commando influence'.⁴⁹

Some theorists maintain that the command decision has to take place at the lowest tactical level for manoeuvre theory to be effective.⁵⁰ The commander's intent forms the decision making framework of subordinate commanders whether on the operational or tactical level.⁵¹ Botha states that he trusted the leadership and initiative of Myburgh and Brits to execute the final envelopments which led to the surrender of the German forces.⁵² The decentralised approach affords subordinate commanders the opportunity to use their initiative but the overall commander must allow room for them to make mistakes.⁵³

Botha had a keen military mind and was a talented leader. He studied the activities of British Army in the South African War and took note of their mistakes. He understood the relative

⁴⁴ Jomini, tr. Mendell and Craighill, *The Art of War*, 148.

⁴⁵ Solberg, 'Maneuver Warfare', 29.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁴⁷ Lind, *Manoeuvre Warfare Handbook*, 6.

⁴⁸ Anon., *Official History*, 30.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁵⁰ Esterhuysen, 'The Theories of Attrition versus Manoeuvre', 93.

⁵¹ South African Army College, *Operational Concepts*, 7/1-2.

⁵² DOD Archives, SD, Box 252, 17138, Reports of Force Commanders in German South West Africa, Despatch number 4 by General Botha covering the period 15 May to 18 July 1915.

⁵³ Lind, *Manoeuvre Warfare Handbook*, 14.

difference of the speed of march of the infantry as opposed to the cavalry. There were not many of the commandants who appreciated this.⁵⁴

Whittal is of the opinion that 'the chances that were taken by Botha's forces were harrowing for any officer not trained in the guerrilla school of war. For example Manie Botha and Myburgh marched over 160 kilometres through waterless country to cut the German railway'.⁵⁵ This is an example of decentralised command being part of the commander's intent and what the *Official History* describes as 'manoeuvre control'.

Manoeuvre forces should be decentralised and they should employ a 'command by influence' system where the commanders are highly trusted and respected and also have a great hold over their subordinates.⁵⁶ Botha certainly fulfilled the requirement of 'command by influence'. Whittal describes him as, 'a charismatic leader with a directness and a personal magnetism that inspires men'.⁵⁷

Furthermore the command by influence system filtered down to the lower levels. The commando scouts were often named after their leader, for example Bezuidenhout's Scouts.⁵⁸ The recruitment of commandants was often based on their strength of personality and influence.⁵⁹

All the South African senior officers were veterans of the South African War and were personally selected by Botha.⁶⁰ The selection of suitable subordinate commanders is essential if the overall commander applies decentralised command.

Decisive points and the German centre of gravity

Decisive points are defined as positions in time and space which can threaten the centre of gravity; where lines of operations join decisive points and centres of gravity.⁶¹ The Union Defence Forces advanced on Riet, Karibib, Windhoek and Tsumeb. These positions were

⁵⁴ Lind, *Manoeuvre Warfare Handbook*, 167.

⁵⁵ Whittal, *With Botha and Smuts in Africa*, 66.

⁵⁶ Solberg, 'Maneuver Warfare', 50–52.

⁵⁷ Whittal, *With Botha and Smuts in Africa*, 25.

⁵⁸ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 72.

⁵⁹ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 57; DOD Archives, AG 1914–1921, Box 8, G10/307/9199 Rebellion, Letter from Defence Headquarters to Military Districts, 3 November 1914.

⁶⁰ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 242.

⁶¹ Solberg, 'Maneuver Warfare', 27.

decisive points on the line of operations to the German centre of gravity which was the headquarters of the *Schutztruppe*.

In terms of the line of operations in the north of German South West Africa, Karibib was a decisive point. Karibib was an intermediate objective and part of the plan to capture Windhoek.⁶² The advance on Karibib involved the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 5th Mounted Brigades who advanced on Otjimbingwe and Okahandja while the 4th Infantry Brigade advanced at a slower pace on Kubas and Karibib.⁶³ The Infantry Brigade formed the ordinary force (as mentioned by Sun) and the extraordinary force was made up of the Mounted Brigades.

The capture of Windhoek and Karibib allowed for the neutralising of the German use of the railway and with that, their ability to concentrate forces on the Union Defence Forces within the broader German South West Africa.⁶⁴ The objective of Karibib effectively severed the German lines of communication because it was a central railway junction.⁶⁵ The Union's capture of Karibib meant that the Germans no longer had many options in terms of taking the initiative.⁶⁶

Following the capture of Karibib, taking Windhoek was a mere formality. Collyer describes Windhoek as a decisive point because its capture resulted in the withdrawal of the German forces to the north.⁶⁷ Windhoek was a limited objective of the advance, but it was not the German centre of gravity. Collyer is of the opinion that the value of Windhoek in terms of its impact on the Germans was purely sentimental.⁶⁸ The line of operations in the north led the Union Defence Forces to take Riet, Karibib, and Windhoek as decisive points en route to the *Schutztruppe* headquarters.

The logistical supply of the Union Defence Forces was the greatest limiting factor for the enveloping and outmanoeuvring of the final German position. Botha only kept the mobile forces and infantry units required to execute the final envelopment.

The final envelopment of the German positions involved both ordinary and extraordinary forces. The extraordinary force comprised the Mounted Brigades under the command of

⁶² L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 252.

⁶³ Anon., *Official History*, 32.

⁶⁴ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 50.

⁶⁵ Dane, *British Campaigns in Africa and the Pacific 1914–1918*, 96.

⁶⁶ L'ange, *Urgent Imperial Service*, 252.

⁶⁷ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 51; Meintjes, *General Louis Botha*, 257.

⁶⁸ Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 50.

Brits and Myburgh; the ordinary force was made up of the 6th and 1st Infantry Brigades under Lukin and Beves respectively.

The final surrender was a close cut decision when analysed with the advantage of hindsight. The mass of the Union's forces were at Otavifontein and the rations were running extremely thin. The lines of communication were overextended and the South Africans were counting on forcing the Germans to surrender.

The German force was still physically able to give battle; however the manoeuvres of the Union Defence Forces had dislocated Franke and his subordinate commanders and psychologically weakened the German force. The Germans thus chose not to give battle because of their low morale and weakened psychological state.

A quick decision in war, operations and or battle indicates a slow decision making process by the defeated army.⁶⁹ The decisive outcome was thus evidence of a slow decision making cycle by the German forces. They were dislocated on the operational level. Their physical and psychological spheres were compromised by being surrounded and cut off. A feeling of helplessness ensues when a force is outmanoeuvred; when the psychological dimension is negatively influenced to the point where it loses its will to fight.⁷⁰ The Germans surrendered in their final position without firing a single shot. The German force was pre-empted on the tactical level because they surrendered without fighting which was a likely result of the dislocation on the operational level.

Botha commented to Buxton that the final result might well have been more difficult to achieve had the Germans put up more of a fight in their final position. Their defensive position was very strong and it had artillery and machine gun support.⁷¹ Because they did not have the will to engage in a defensive battle, they opted for a quick decision and immediate German surrender.

Numerical superiority versus manoeuvre warfare

The divergent lines of advance into German South West Africa using external lines of operations required a reasonably large force on the four divergent axes. The logistical needs of the advancing forces also had to be met. The divergent lines of advance had a paralysing

⁶⁹ Von Clausewitz, tr. Graham, *On War*, 113.

⁷⁰ South African Army College, *Operational Concepts*, 7/5-4, 7/5-5.

⁷¹ Buxton, *General Botha*, 117.

effect on the German force. So much so that it is probably safe to presume that if the Union Defence Forces had deployed a far smaller force on each axis of advance it would still have gained a similar result.

The South African force that enveloped the German force's final position comprised less than 5 000 soldiers. These soldiers were divided into three force groupings. The German force was numerically equal to the Union force that participated in the final envelopments. Furthermore the German force held the central position and could have concentrated superior forces on any of the separate advancing Union forces.

The numerical superiority of the Union Defence Forces facilitated the taking and holding of ground. The lines of communication were secured by the infantry. The large number of commandos allowed the Union forces to pursue different lines of advance while ensuring mobility and rapidity. Although the importance of numbers cannot be underestimated, the decisive factor in the operational and strategic success points towards manoeuvre theory and Botha's innate understanding of its attributes. Donn Starry, former United States general and originator of the so-called AirLand Battle doctrine,⁷² states that within reasonable limits it does not matter if the enemy is outnumbered.⁷³

The hypothesis addresses the issue of whether the German South West African campaign was won by numerical superiority or whether it was the application of manoeuvre warfare theory that compelled the Germans to surrender. Leonhard expands on the issue of numerical superiority by stating, 'the commander who pre-empts the enemy may be numerically stronger or weaker than his foe and his weapons may be better or worse ... if the commander's decisive approach to the conflict is overwhelmingly superior'.⁷⁴

This concept refers back to the intention and the mindset of the commander and the way the forces are used. Pre-emption is the threat of force communicated by the use of mobile forces so as to induce the enemy to surrender or prevent the enemy's intended action.⁷⁵

The analysis of the final envelopments in Chapter 8 determined that the reason why the German forces were defeated was that they did not put up defensive battles at the required

⁷² AirLand Battle doctrine is a United States war fighting doctrine that is comprised of rapid ground operations integrated with Air Force support.

⁷³ Simpkin, *Race to the Swift*, x.

⁷⁴ Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver*, 63.

⁷⁵ Simpkin, *Race to the Swift*, 141.

time and place. Instead of taking a stand, the German forces chose to retreat time and again – which was indicative of low morale and poor combat cohesion.

When the morale of the attacking force is higher than that of the defending force, entrenched troops are inclined to give way and flee.⁷⁶ The morale of the conquerors will then increase and the defeated force will experience a dip in their morale.⁷⁷ The analysis section of Chapter 8 also determined that in the Union Defence Forces qualitative factors such as morale, leadership and offensive spirit were strong and that these were fundamental to the rapid decision of the Union Defence Forces and the German surrender. The significance of the campaign was its brevity. Qualitative factors usually lead to rapidly concluded military campaigns or successes.

The drop in morale in German ranks was responsible for their lack of fighting spirit which in turn was caused by the Union Defence Forces's application of mobile warfare which emphasised enveloping action. Therefore the Union Defence Forces's operational strategy and tactics induced the German surrender by neutralising their will to fight and collapsing their morale.

The numerical superiority of the Union Defence Forces did not result in the final surrender of the German forces. It is protracted campaigns that are usually won by numerical superiority. The brevity of the campaign is thus significant and is associated with the qualitative elements evident in the Union Defence Forces. If the German forces had repulsed the Union Defence Forces by means of a stout and spirited defensive battle, then over time one could reasonably assume that the numerical superiority of the Union Defence Forces would eventually have won the campaign. The essential difference between these two scenarios is the time taken to achieve the military victory.

Sun maintains that 'the victorious strategist seeks battle after the victory⁷⁸ has been won'.⁷⁹ Clausewitz is of the opinion that 'if a detachment is sent away to cut off the retreat of a fleeing enemy, and the enemy surrenders in consequence without further resistance, still it is through the combat which is offered to him by this detachment sent after him that he is

⁷⁶ Du Picq, trs. Greenly and Cotton, *Battle Studies*, 79.

⁷⁷ Von Clausewitz, tr. Graham, *On War*, 122.

⁷⁸ Sun refers to victory in the operational or strategic sense, in that by positioning one's forces in such a way that offering battle would result in the forgone conclusion of victory.

⁷⁹ Sun, tr. Sadler, *The Art of War*, 8.

brought to his decision'.⁸⁰ The final envelopments of the German positions resulted in the defeat of the German forces.

The final positioning of forces made the situation untenable for the Germans and their surrender was inevitable. Manoeuvre theory holds that mobility is more important than firepower, but that certain elements of the opposing force will have to be destroyed; and following that the eventual positioning of forces will induce defeat with the threat of annihilation.⁸¹ This positioning of forces fulfils the psychological and physical requirements of dislocation of the enemy. When you surround a foe – leave an outlet free.⁸² This does not have to be physical but can be the option of surrender.

⁸⁰ Von Clausewitz, tr. Graham, *On War*, 79.

⁸¹ Solberg, 'Maneuver Warfare', 132.

⁸² Sun, tr. Sadler, *The Art of War*, 16.

CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION

This dissertation analyses the German South West African campaign in the First World War with reference to the modern theory of manoeuvre warfare. The dissertation's hypothesis questions whether the campaign was won because of numerical superiority or whether success was a consequence of the application of manoeuvre warfare theory.

The topic is introduced and the literature review is addressed in Chapters 1 and 2 respectively. Chapter 3 discusses the framework of manoeuvre warfare theory. Chapters 4 to 8 provide an account and analysis of the campaign addressing the course of events. Chapter 9 then analyses the entire campaign with reference to the manoeuvre warfare theory framework.

One of the central figures in this campaign was Louis Botha, the prime minister of the Union of South Africa and the commander-in-chief of the Union's expeditionary force in German South West Africa. Botha met all the classical requirements of a great commander, including decisiveness, ingenuity, power of personality and charisma, which enabled him to motivate his troops. In terms of the operational strategy in the German South West African campaign he displayed an understanding of the complexities of the campaign which included logistical considerations and the limitations and capabilities of the commandos, the mounted infantry and the regular infantry.

Trew is of the opinion that Botha's campaign was that of a genius in the art of war. He goes on to question whether future historians will rate him as one of the great commanders of the past.¹ Collyer argues that there are not many strategists who had Botha's tactical ability and strategic insight.² Reflecting on Botha's military background, Whittall claims that 'his elastic military training allowed for the accomplishment of the campaign'.³ Botha was a man of his time with a distinct vision in terms of military strategy. His war experience and insight into military operations made him the ideal commander for the campaign in German South West Africa considering the forces he had at his disposal.

Botha employed a strategy in German South West Africa that was congruent with those executed by the great captains of war throughout history. The decisive campaign he led was the first successful campaign of the First World War to be concluded by a dominion of the

¹ Trew, *Botha Treks*, vi.

² Collyer, *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*, 168.

³ Whittall, *With Botha and Smuts in Africa*, 4.

British Empire. The campaign induced the surrender of the German forces without extensive loss of life or materiel.

Despite Botha's abilities there were also other factors that contributed to the defeat of the Germans, such as their inability to put up a strong defence at critical times due to the collapse of their morale. The German force's reluctance to engage in battle is perhaps also related to organisational aspects such as their lack of defensive campaign experience when faced by a rapidly advancing and determined enemy.

The collapse in German morale was caused by the operations conducted by the Union Defence Forces which emphasised rapid attacks and envelopments. The final confrontation between the German and Union forces was one of equal numerical strength where the Germans possessed superior materiel such as artillery pieces and machineguns. The German force also held the central position during the final envelopments whereas the Union forces were divided into three main detachments. The German force could thus have concentrated superior numbers on any of the Union's enveloping forces during the last phase of the campaign. This makes it clear that numerical superiority was not a pivotal factor in the rapid decision and German surrender.

Numerical superiority should however not be underestimated because it gave the Union Defence Forces an advantage in the securing of communication lines which were essential for the campaign. The numerical superiority of the Union Defence Forces also allowed for a four-pronged advance on divergent axes. However, the effective culmination of the German forces was brought about by the application of highly mobile troops which resulted in the dislocation of the physical and mental dimensions of the German forces and thereby ensured their surrender.

Liddell Hart argues that the psychological and physical dislocation of the enemy on a continuous basis requires the advancing force to change its lines of operations through divergent advances on a central objective or through divergent advances on successive decisive points en route to the centre of gravity.⁴ This was the case in German South West Africa where the Union Defence Forces had a northern and southern offensive which were directed at the headquarters of the *Schutztruppe*, their the centre of gravity.

⁴ Solberg, 'Maneuver Warfare', 30.

The four-pronged advance of the Union Defence Forces forces fulfils the requirement of divergent advances on the German centre of gravity. It completes the requirement of working on external lines of operations and the objectives and decisive points were successive in leading to the *Schutztruppe* headquarters.

The mobility of the commandos ensured tactical and operational surprise resulting in quick decisive outcomes. The operation was designed as a quick, decisive campaign of manoeuvre.⁵ The *Official History* states that the German South West African campaign is an example of one of the most clear cut campaigns in history.⁶ Lord Buxton described the campaign – which effectively took six months – as ‘no small feat in a country of vast distances, deficiency of water, heavy and dry sand, and hot and dusty marching’.⁷

⁵ Dane, *British Campaigns in Africa and the Pacific 1914–1918*, 32.

⁶ Anon., *Official History*, 3.

⁷ Meintjes, *General Louis Botha*, 269.

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