

<p style="margin: 0cm 2.05pt 0.0001pt 0cm;" align="left"> </p> <p>To read this article in Afrikaans as published in the South Africa History Series in JUIG! Tydskrif, click here.</p> <p>This article is also available as a Powerpoint here.
</p> <p style="margin: 0cm 2.05pt 0.0001pt 0cm;" align="left">General Christiaan Rudolf De Wet stands out as one of the most successful and respected of the Boer generals. The British identified General De Wet as their most formidable enemy and gave the highest priority to defeating him.</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">Christiaan Rudolf De Wet was born at Leeuwkop in the Smithfield district, 7 October 1854. His father, Jacobus De Wet, was married to Aletta Strydom.</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">
</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">Majuba</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">Christiaan De Wet was 26 years old when the First War of Independence broke out (1880-1881). De Wet took part in the battles of Laing's Nek, Ingogo and Majuba. After the war, he returned to his father's farm, Nieuwejaarsfontein and he was later elected to the Orange Free State Volksraad.</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">
</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">Commando</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">At the onset of the Anglo Boer War, he acquired his famous horse, Fleur, and signed up with the Heilbron commando. He was soon elected Commandant and promptly proved his skill at the battle of Nicholson's Neck, on 30 October 1899, when, with only 300 men, he managed to drive the British troops from their positions.</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">
</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">In December 1899, President Steyn appointed De Wet as Field General under General Cronje. Both General De La Ray and De Wet tried in vain to persuade Cronje to go on the offensive. However, Cronje was trapped by Lord Roberts' forces at Paardeberg and surrendered with his whole force. President Steyn then appointed General De Wet as Commander of the Orange Free State Forces.</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">
</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">Mobile Warfare</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">Several attempts to slow the tide of British advance on Bloemfontein failed. After the fall of Bloemfontein, De Wet disbanded the commandos and instructed them to reassemble ten days later. He was convinced that those who returned would be the most committed and therefore the most effective. He had no time for the half-hearted.</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;"></p>

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</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">De Wet reassembled the commandos at Kroonstad, 17 March 1900. He urged them to leave their wagons and adopt mobile warfare tactics, operating with complete secrecy, to hit the enemy where he least expected it. They were to evade set piece battles where the British would have the advantage.</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">
</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">On 31 March 1900, De Wet dealt the British a severe blow at Sanna's Post, damaging the railway bridge across the Vaal River, capturing huge stores of provisions and severely disrupting the enemy's supply lines.</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">
</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">Priority Target</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">The British mobilised 15,000 men to pursue and trap De Wet, but he eluded them at every turn. General Roberts concluded that De Wet was the highest priority target and mobilised 50,000 British troops to surround and capture the Free State general, in what became known as "the First De Wet Hunt." The ever elusive Boer general crossed into the Transvaal and shook off his pursuers as he crossed the Magaliesberg.</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">
</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">Against All Odds</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">Towards the end of 1900, many Burghers who had abandoned the fight were inspired to re-join the commandos. To relieve the severe pressure on the Orange Free State, De Wet invaded the Cape Colony. The British mobilised 14,000 troops in 17 flying columns to encircle and defeat him. However, De Wet broke through the British lines near Thaba Nchu.</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">
</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">Unbeatable</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">General Kitchener built a formidable network of blockhouses, linked by barbed wire fences. Huge steamroller operations were mobilised with tens-of-thousands of British troops sweeping through the veld, in order to pin down and trap De Wet and his commandos. However, at the Battle of Groenkop, 25 December 1901, De Wet managed to inflict heavy losses on the pursuing British and escape their drive once again.</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">
</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">Vereeniging</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">Undefeated in the field, De Wet was compelled to come to the negotiation table, for the sake of the terrible plight of the women and children suffering in the concentration camps. After securing the best terms possible, at the Vereeniging Peace Negotiations with General Kitchener, De Wet signed the Peace Treaty in his capacity as acting President of the Orange Free State, as President Steyn was by then too ill.</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">
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</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">Reconstruction</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">In July 1902, De Wet, De la Rey and Louis Botha, left for Europe where they raised funds for the reconstruction of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. While on board the Saxon, he wrote his war memoirs, "De Strijd Tusschen Boer en Brit" which, aided by his chaplain Rev. J.D. Kestell, was published before the end of 1902.</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">
</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">Union</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">Back in South Africa, De Wet was a founding member of the Oranje Unie. When the Orange River Colony was granted self-government in 1906, he was elected a member of parliament and appointed Minister of Agriculture. He was then a delegate to the Union Convention, which succeeded in bringing all the provinces of South Africa back under Boer control, with General Louis Botha as its first Prime Minister.</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">
</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">Resistance</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">When the First World War erupted in 1914, Generals De Wet and De la Rey were against the new nation of South Africa attacking German South West Africa. As Martial law was declared and men were called up from all over the country, De Wet opposed this, believing it dishonourable to fight for the previous enemies of the Boers against their faithful friends, who had supported them during the Anglo Boer War.</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">
</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">Britain's War</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">The Commandant General of the Union Defence Force, General Christiaan Frederick Beyers, resigned his commission in protest, 15 September 1914, stating: "It is sad that this war is being waged against the Germans. We have forgiven, but not forgotten all the barbarities committed in our own country by the British during the South African War." General Maritz also opposed South Africa's involvement, in what they saw as Britain's War, to which South Africa should remain neutral. 12,000 rebels gathered in the Magaliesberg to resist, with force, the government's determination to propel South Africa into the war.</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">
</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">Rebellion</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">During the Battle of Doornberg, De Wet's son, Danie, and several other of the rebels were killed. De Wet was captured at Waterbury, 30 November 1914, and imprisoned in the Johannesburg Fort. He was found guilty of high treason and sentenced to six years imprisonment. Although, in response to many representations, the government granted him a reprieve and he was allowed to return to his farm, Allanvale, on condition that he no longer engaged in politics.</p> <p>

Repression

General De la Rey was shot by police (*accidentally they said*) at a roadblock. Many of the rebels were sentenced to terms of imprisonment from six to seven years with heavy fines. However, two years later, they were all released from prison in a general amnesty by order of Prime Minister Louis Botha.

General De Wet died 23 February 1922, and was buried at the foot of the Women's Memorial at the Anglo Boer War Museum in Bloemfontein.

Honoured Hero

Everyone who dealt with General Christiaan De Wet respected him as a Christian of the highest standards of integrity. Even his enemies honoured him. His achievements in the field of battle, against all odds, stand as some of the most extraordinary military accomplishments in history. *"The tenacity with which the Republics defended their independence was due to the love of liberty, self-sacrifice and faith in God, perseverance and courage of the burghers on commando and the resolution and outstanding generalship of their leading officers."* - Piet De Wet, *To the Bitter End.*

General De Wet was the first Boer general who thoroughly understood the tactics of mobile warfare. He understood the need to avoid superior forces and to quickly strike the moment his adversaries relaxed their vigilance. De Wet's daring raids made his name a legend throughout South Africa and across the world, inspiring the spirit of resistance in the Republics.

General Christiaan De Wet stands out as one of the greatest heroes of South Africa. He was known in his time as: *"the fighting general."* Within his lifetime he was recognised as the greatest guerrilla fighter in the world.

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[See also:](#)

[Founder of the Reconnaissance Commando of the Transvaal Republic - Danie Theron](index.php/history/339-founder-of-the-reconnaissance-commando-of-the-transvaal-republic-danie-theron)

[Heroine of the Anglo Boer War - Emily Hobhouse](index.php/history/307-heroine-of-the-anglo-boer-war-emily-hobhouse)

[Hero of the Anglo Boer War - General Koos De La Rey ♦ The Lion of the Transvaal](index.php/history/336-heroes-of-the-anglo-boer-war-general-de-la-rey-the-lion-of-the-transvaal)

[Great Achievers in Afrikaans History - Paul Kruger](index.php/history/338-great-achievers-in-afrikaans-history-paul-kruger)

[President Martinus Steyn](index.php/history/337-president-martinus-steyn)

[Wolraad Woltemade](index.php/history/289-wolraad-woltemade)