

*To read this article in Afrikaans, as published in the South Africa History Series in JUIG! Tydskrif, click [here](http://www.frontline.org.za/Files/PDF/Juig%20Articles/Danie%20Theron.pdf).*

*You can also view Peter Hammond's PowerPoint presentation on [Danie Theron](http://www.slideshare.net/frontfel/danie-theron), on Slideshare on [www.ReformationSA.org](http://www.reformationsa.org/).*

**Danie Theron**

General Christiaan de Wet said of Danie Theron: *a more brave and faithful commander I have never seen!*

**A Lawyer**

Danie Theron was born in Tulbagh, in the Cape Colony, 9 May 1872. At age 10, he moved to Bethlehem in the Orange Free State to be brought up by his older brother. He trained as a school teacher, then served as a lawyer, passing his Bar Exams in 1897 with the highest possible marks. In that year he started his own Law firm in Krugersdorp.

**A Fighter**

In 1899, in the lead up to the Anglo Boer War, Danie Theron was found guilty of assaulting Mr W. F. Moneypenney, the editor of the Star newspaper. This was in response to a derogatory editorial against: *"The Ignorant Dutch."* As Moneypenney had been in the country for less than two months, Danie Theron confronted him over his prejudice and the incident ended up as an assault charge in court. He pleaded guilty, citing *"extreme provocation"* and friends quickly paid his fine of **20**.

**A Soldier**

Danie Theron's first military action was in the Malaboch War. His bravery in battle won him citizenship in the Transvaal.

**Wielrijders Rapportgangers**

Even before the Anglo Boer War had broken out, Danie Theron was developing the idea of using bicycles for despatch and reconnaissance work. Commandant General Piet Joubert challenged Theron to prove his point as to the effectiveness of bicycles for despatch riders by choosing a man who would race the

best horse rider in the Army from Pretoria to the Crocodile River. Danie's friend, Koos Jooste, won the 75km race and permission was granted to Danie Theron to form his Wielrijders Rapportgangers Korps. Soon he had recruited 108 men, divided into 7 sections, each led by their lieutenant directly reporting to Theron. Each scout was equipped with a bicycle, a revolver and a rifle.

**Battle Proven**

Although initially many of the Burghers laughed at the Rapportgangers Korps on bicycles, they soon grew to admire their bravery and recognise the success of their exploits. Theron's men were not stopped by rivers, bad weather, impassable roads, or enemy patrols. At the Battle of Talana, near Dundee, Theron's men were responsible for most of the 246 British prisoners captured.

**Paardeberg**

When General P. A. Cronje was surrounded by General Roberts forces at Paarderberg, General De Wet chose Theron to cross through enemy lines and attempt to co-ordinate a break-out of Cronje's trapped men. Theron evaded enemy patrols and swam the flooded Modder River. However General Cronje flatly refused to attack the British trenches in force while De Wet organised a cavalry attack from the other side. Instead General Cronje and 3,919 of his men surrendered to Lord Roberts. General De Wet reported on the event with much grief over the stubbornness and failure of General Cronje to respond, but with great appreciation of the courage and tenacity of Theron.

**Verkenning Korps**

It was after this, in March 1900, that General De Wet appointed Danie Theron to establish his own Reconnaissance Corp (Verkenning Korps), (TVK). General De Wet commented that he had never seen a more colourful grouping of men from all over the world than the TVK. Cronje's scouts consisted of 80 men on horses, who concentrated on reconnaissance and guerrilla attacks behind enemy lines.

**Devastatingly Effective**

Commandant Danie Theron was tough and self-sacrificial and he expected his men to adhere to the highest standards. Theron led his TVK to destroy bridges, ambush supply columns, eliminate enemy artillery, capturing and derailing trains, wreaking havoc behind enemy lines. Already by 7 April 1900, the British Commander in Chief, Lord Roberts described Danie Theron as: *"the hardest thorn in the flesh of the British advance!"* Roberts placed a reward of ♦1000 on Theron's head - dead or alive!

**Courageous and Compassionate**

It was notable how much care

Theron took for wounded British soldiers, sharing his very last water ration with them. His men adhered to high Christian standards and treated their prisoners generously. Theron's men stormed the Klip River Jail and freed 69 prisoners.

**Killed in Action**

On 5 September 1900 at Gatsrand, while scouting alone on a koppie, 6km North of present day Fochville, he collided with a section of Marshalls Horse. As he killed 3 and wounded 4 of the enemy, he came under artillery fire from 6 field guns and died in action. On 15 September 1900, the men of the TVK exhumed the body of their courageous Commandant and reburied him on a farm nearby. 10 March 1903, Danie Theron's body was exhumed to be reburied next to that of his beloved fiancée Hannie Neethling, on her father's farm, Eikenhof, on the Klip River.

**Honoured Hero**

On 28 December 1907, General Louis Botha unveiled the Danie Theron Monument near Potchefstroom.

On 9 September 1950, a monument was unveiled at the location where Danie Theron was killed in action (this is near the N12, between Johannesburg and Potchefstroom).

The Commando Combat School established in Kimberly, 1 November 1967 was renamed the Danie Theron Combat School in 1968.

The South Africa School of Military Intelligence was also named after Danie Theron.

The Danie Theron monument which had stood outside the military base in Kimberley was relocated to Fort Schanskop, on the outskirts of Pretoria. Former South African President, Nelson Mandela, in one of the very rare occasions when he spoke Afrikaans in public, declared that he valued the fighting spirit of Danie Theron. Mr Mandela commended his honesty, bravery and determination to do the right thing for his nation and his beliefs. South Africa needs more Danie Theron's in order to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

(Charlize Theron, the academy award-winning actress, is a great-great niece of Danie Theron.)

Dr. Peter Hammond

The Reformation Society

style="font-family: arial, helvetica, sans-serif; font-size: 12pt; line-height: 1.3em;">P.O. Box 74  
Newlands 7725<br /></span><span style="font-family: arial, helvetica, sans-serif; font-size:  
12pt; line-height: 1.3em;">Cape Town South Africa<br /></span><span style="font-family: arial,  
helvetica, sans-serif; font-size: 12pt; line-height: 1.3em;">Tel: 021-689-4480<br  
</span><span style="font-family: arial, helvetica, sans-serif; font-size: 12pt; line-height:  
1.3em;">Fax: 021-685-5884<br /></span><span style="font-family: arial, helvetica, sans-serif;  
font-size: 12pt; line-height: 1.3em;">Email:◆</span>