THE DIARY OF SUSARHA NEL AND HER ORDEAL IN THE ‘DEATH CAMPA’ AT MAFEKING, JULY 1901- AUGUST 1902

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If there is one story-line that runs through the various figures and stratagems briefly passed in review, it is that this has been by no means an innocent endeavour.²

Sombre the night is
And though we have our lives, we know
What sinister threat lurks there.³

He had seen the truth of war. It was not the sum of glorious fights and flashing blades and men bound by honor. It was bloody, dirty, and disorganized. Flies, fever, infection, mud, tainted water, and starvation. Victory came to the most ruthless, not the bravest. Jack had seen the bodies of young children...⁴

pertij van ons wat en die moort kampe gewees het die het ledeg tüig gekom hendrik goùs se heele famielje het uit gesterf een dogter martha het oor geblij ons het bitter gelij — Some of us who were in the death camp arrived home having forfeited almost everything. Hendrik Gous lost every member of his family except a daughter Martha. Ours was a cruel experience.

Small bushes of colourful cosmos bloom in profusion along South African roadsides in our glorious autumn months. Neither cosmos nor the ubiquitous kakiebos weed are indigenous. They arrived in animal feed during the Anglo-Boer War. The effect of

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¹ Lichtenburg Museum, Accession 07/844. What follows is a free translation of the diary of Mrs. Nel in an attempt to convey its essence to English-speaking readers. We apologize, in advance, to those NederiandsiAfrikaans speakers who would dispute our translation.

² Quoted in David Chidester, Savage systems, colonialism and comparative religion in Southern Africa (1996), preface.


⁵ The use of the phrase 'death camp' by Susarha Nel is instructive. This was some forty years before the Nazi atrocities made this a general term to describe genocidal institutions.
these earthy infringements somewhat parallels the blood-red poppy in Europe, they provide constant reminders of the cruelty of war.

There are those who would dismiss, or at the very least minimize the importance of the Anglo-Boer War in the creation of modern South Africa. The Anglo-Boer War was largely forgotten during the last thirty years - that interminable period of our 'Babylonian Captivity' - when South African history was dictated by Marxist historians who assumed the moral and dictatorial imperatives of opponents of apartheid. Theirs was an ideological construct of confrontation, exploitation and grievance in which the living and dying of the Anglo-Boer War was merely an embarrassing adjunct.

The ignominious collapse of Marxist theory and practice during the penultimate decade of this century has made it imperative that historians return to the 'healthier atmosphere of war'. This work supports the conviction of Paul Kennedy that it was warfare that forged the central features of modern states (including South Africa):

'It was war', Kennedy writes, 'and the consequences of war', that provided a much more urgent and continuous pressure toward 'nation building than... philosophical considerations and slowly evolving social tendencies'. Charles Tilly puts it even more succinctly: 'War made the state and the state made war'.

Doris Lessing, that most dedicated of Marxists before she renounced her secular faith, now emphasizes the social, psychological and material consequences of war. She writes:

We are all of us made by war, twisted and warped by war, but we seem to forget it. A war does not end with the Armistice. In 1919, all over Europe filled with graves, hung miasmas and miseries, and over the whole world too... I used to feel there was something like a dark grey cloud, like poison gas, over my early childhood. Later I found people who had the same experience.

The Susarha Nel diary provides posterity with an almost unique overview of the effects of the Anglo-Boer War on Boer society. It was largely rural Boers who were transported to concentration camps, and most of these people were illiterate and thus unable to articulate the extent of their suffering. This is the diary of a woman of such strength of character and political conviction that she was prepared to pay what she saw as her debt to her country with the highest currency available to her - the life of her two children.


The other side of the coin, showing the extent to which this society was fractured, can also be seen in this diary in the dilemmas facing the hensoppers, forced to become mere ‘dogs of the English’ and do their ‘dirty work’ in order to retain neutrality.

Then there were the black people - some viewed this woman as an enemy and danced in jubilation at her imprisonment, whilst others such as the huge Zulu gaoler showed her great kindness. This diary then, is a kaleidoscope of human emotions, revealing all the pain and suffering of a people engaged in a genocidal war.

Susarha Nel’s diary will also be of great value to those who appreciate the active role and social situatedness of language, who view language as being part of the culture and institutions of society.⁹ The Afrikaans language used in this diary is the almost phonetic vernacular one would expect from the poorly educated rural class of the time. There is no attempt at embellishment or class deception - which adds much to the veracity of this historical record.

⁹ Peter Burke, Introduction to Peter Burke and Roy Porter (eds.), The social history of language (1987).
Boy in Mafeking concentration camp
(Photo: Lichtenburg Museum)
During the night of the 4th July 1901, my husband who was sick, my two day old baby and I were sleeping together. I will never forget how the enemy stormed the house, screaming and beating on the doors. I was so afraid I sought only to flee but my husband told me to trust in the Lord who would care for us. He was arrested and although he was so sick and despite the fact that my youngest daughter clung desperately to him, she was pulled off and he was taken out of the house. Luckily, my husband’s youngest sister was with me and she comforted me and pointed to her own circumstances - her husband had been arrested a long time before. Otherwise I cannot think what would have happened to me and my children.
Two days later Hensoppers arrived at the farm. They told us they would return to transport us to a camp. When I refused, they said that the orders were that my man was to be arrested and I was to be removed from the area for my safety. They rummaged through the farm taking anything of value. Even those valuables we had buried outside were discovered and pillaged so that we would have almost nothing left to begin our lives after the war. The hensoppers accused my husband of feigning illness and said he would be punished and given work. They were discussing a man who had lost consciousness when he was arrested.

The hensoppers came again four days later and informed us that we must complete our preparations to leave. This was in our best interests they said, as all our men had been arrested and women alone would die of hunger if the government did not provide assistance - as if I was stupid enough to believe such nonsense. I replied that my child was only 8 days old and that I was used to a 10 day lying-in period. The hensoppers replied that they had no alternative but to remove the women. They then left.

Thereafter another pair of hensoppers arrived - one a Boer, the other I did not know. They said I had to rise because the waggon was coming. I refused saying that they would have to use force - and then they would be responsible for my condition and that of my baby. My sister-in-law calmed me down and pointed out that in the end we would have no option but to leave the farm.

Hensoppers - Boers who surrendered to the British and often assisted them or were forced to assist them in non-combative roles. Those that took up arms were the joiners - they 'joined' the Imperial cause.
Then three hensoppers arrived, one with a Red Cross on his left arm. He took my pulse and examined my baby, but didn't say anything. These people then left. The whole time they were there, however, both my-sister-in-law and I cried and the children were so afraid. A waggon then arrived looking more like an earthworm with animals front and rear.

With the waggon came six coloured people who told me I had to stand as the waggon was there. I refused and said they would have to carry me as a prisoner. They accepted this and the six of them carried me to the waggon(although one did play that he would drop me). Meanwhile, my sister-in-law scrambled to put our few remaining possessions onto the waggon. It was nightfall by the time we left with many tears, and much later after suffering badly we made camp. My second youngest child was normally a very sickly child.

Later that night we outspanned in Zeerust. My sister-in-law sought news of my husband and was told that he had been taken by ambulance to Mafeking Early in the morning we also left for Mafeking. Late that afternoon we outspanned and asked for a little milk because the little children were all hungry and crying, and I had no milk to give. The older children were given biscuits which they dunked in water and stamped on to make them edible. One of the oxen was unable to go any further and was cut
from the traces. It shocked and saddened me when they merely rode the wagons over
the animal and killed it.

I will never forget the suffering of an older woman - a Mrs Swanepoel and her daughter,
whose wagon was fastened to mine before we reached Zeerust. In the terrible cold all
they had as shelter was three oxen yokes bound together, an army blanket and a small
piece of canvas. You can think for yourself how terrible it was for the poor mother to
see her child in this terrible situation.

The following midday we arrived at the “kaffir stad” (town) on the other side of
Mafeking. We moved through two rows of Black men and women who with jubilation
shouted that others should come and see the ‘maBoere’ prisoners and the ‘baboons’.
Later that night we were deposited on a naked sand hill. Some people were
immediately dropped and left on that empty open hillside with nothing. It was a night
of much suffering. The following morning the daughter of Mrs Swanepoel came to us
with tears in her eyes and begged some coffee because her poor mother had had
nothing to drink since they were transported. We were able to give her coffee because
my sister-in-law Hannie Vevier chopped her own wagon into firewood with an axe and
saw given to her by her husband. She ensured that we had supplies of firewood. With
the arrival of morning, people began dying.
Here and there lay a group of people. Their blankets were stiff with the frost. When the sun arose they were forced to squeeze water from their clothes because they were soaked through, and this was the only manner to dry them. We lived for 8 days out in the open with no shelter, before the army arrived with tents. Thereafter conditions improved to a small degree but there was still no firewood. I will never forget how I struggled to make a meal for my sickly child from plant roots and mule flesh which I was forced to cook over a dung fire. The dung made the fire very smoky and I had to keep blowing it to keep it alight and stop the smoke from hurting my children. I was also forced to give my children food made of a little meal mixed with water. I often cried when I saw my sickly child go to sleep hungry.

October was the month of great suffering when the sicknesses began. All the children became sick with a variety of illnesses from measles, German Measles, fever to loose teeth. Often we didn't know what sickness the children were suffering from. Although everyone tried to doctor the children, it was a grim tableau to see up to twenty one bodies laid out for burial each day. The food we received was neither nutritious nor sufficient to sustain life. My oldest son who was 14 was delegated to go and get the rations (ressens) - that is what they termed the food supplies there. It was a drawn out operation to get food because everyone had to go to the one window from which rations were dispensed. There was much pushing and shoving and some who were weak were pushed out the way and either received help from others or lay down and died for there was not much room for charity in the face of starvation.
This is how we fared day in and out. The wood we received was only the roots of the kameel bush and these we had to carry on our heads until our necks felt like they would break. My tent A8 which contained everything I had, was on the far side of the camp, so my burden was greater. Then the illnesses and number of those dying intensified. In the night I would anxiously tender my family because I had seven children and they were all sick. In those dark nights one had only to go outside the tent to hear the piteous sound of crying for the dead and dying. I was only able to give verbal support to my sister-in-law Hanie Opperman and my sister Henie Vevier and to ask them whether they were all still living because we were all struggling to stay alive. The problem was the food given to us which was too little and not nutritious enough, so that those who were still healthy were forced to sacrifice their rations to those who were dying.

Then my child of 3 died and my sister's child was so malnourished that the doctor came and gave her a letter so that she could immediately get medicine. When the medicine arrived and she administered it the child's mouth turned black. Another doctor arrived and demanded to know what medicine my sister had given to her child. She showed him the medicine and he said 'by God' and threw it out. It was a different doctor from the one who had prescribed the medicine. More than one child died as a result of medicine provided by the authorities.

My youngest child of 5 months then died. Then my sister's youngest child also died. I shall never forget how I went to the hospital in which were 3 of my children. At that stage my youngest was 6 years old. I had to practically beg to be allowed to go to the hospital. After a short while at his bedside, I was told to leave, whilst he begged me to stay a little while longer. Then I went to my other two children. The first thing I had to hear was "please, I am so hungry".

The baby who had just been born when she and her husband were transported.
gaan gee mij zusster was kok later ver die school meesters toe kon zij altijd kossies
breng om ver helle te gaan gee van haar was 4 en die hospitaal geleek ons vat kljin
medesijnne viessies 10 tot 12 dan maak ons dit vol van die sap wat zij breng dan steek
zij dit en haar bors dan hang zij en groot mantel om dan gaan zij en die nag ver hüle
gee en zoo het ons helle weer almal trug gekrij ons kinders en ons zelf het begen kaal
[-voet] word toe gaan ons klere vra dan jaag helle ons weg [helle het beloof om ver ons
alles te gee

O reader, you can imagine how mothers must have felt day after day until the children
were released from the hospital. My sister and I stole food for the children. My sister
was cook for a group of schoolteachers and she could always bring food home to give
to the children - my three and her four children in the hospital. We took ten to twelve
small medicine flasks and filled them with the juice that she was able to steal. She then
took them hidden in her bosom and under a wrap and gave it to the children at night.
This is how we were able to save all the children. At this stage we were practically
walking about barefoot. When we asked for clothes, the British chased us away,
despite the fact that when they transported us they had promised to give us everything
we needed.

ons eigen boere meisies het ons baja sleg behandiel is die engel se meisies dit was ver
mij die betterste ons moet saans ons kinder kaal uit trek en onder die komberse laat
lee dan moet ons helle klere schoon maak van die lang steert lúise wat ons [-wat]
<ol\> van die kakies ge-erwe het want pertîj kinders het nie klere om en die dag aan te
trek ik het toe begen hekel werk doen ver die school meisies helle het mij toe goed
betaal zoo kon ik toe ver <ol\> en stúkki klere koop toe breng helle mij òò oom
hans vanderberg uit Lütchenbúrg ook en die plek waar ons was toe was ons biekie
verlos hij het en koei en een kalf gehad toe krij ons altijd e biekie melk die kalf kon en
een túig trek hij het en blokewiel waankie gehad waar helle die kalf voor span toe rijhelle
altijd ver ons die kameel stompe aan dit was ver ons en verlo<ol\>sen van die houd
dra mij oom het ook en groot hond gehad die was ook geleer om en een túig te trek en
kassie met 2 wile was die hond se wa dan dan span helle die hond en dan draf die
hond heen en weer en zoo het helle ons kos ver ons aan gerôf of ressens zoo helle dit

genoom het

Our own Boer girls treated us very badly. The English girls treated us much better. In
order to wash our children's clothes, we had first to undress them and then let them lie
unclothed under a blanket. Only then could we wash their clothes and fumigate them
to get rid of the long-tailed lice that we inherited from the English. Some children were
entirely without clothes. I then began to do crochet work for school children and it paid
well so that I could afford to buy clothes which my old uncle Hans Vandenberg bought
in Lichtenburg. He also had a cow and calf so that we always had a bit of milk. The
calf we used to inspan a small cart with which we were able to transport the firewood.
My uncle also had a big dog which was also trained to pull a box with two wheels, so
that we were able to transport our rations - as they called them.

toe die [-oveheid] afesiere dit zien gebied helle mij òò oom om die koei ùìt die kamp te
rûm ons het eintiek gehûûil want toe moes ons maar li onder die kameel stompe die vlijs
wat ons toe gekrij het, het zoo gestenik ik weet zelf nie waar na nie maar ons kon det
When the officers saw the cows we were told to get rid of them. We cried because we were once again forced to transport firewood ourselves. The meat which we got from slaughtering the cows went bad immediately and we had to throw it away without eating it. When we went to the English to complain, they gave us cans of bully beef. This was also worthless because the cans contained tufts of human hair and other rubbish. My sister took some of the bully beef tins to the English to complain. She ended up throwing the cans at them so that the English had to flee. So we stayed hungry. The coffee we received was merely burnt seeds when you put bread in it, it turned black like iron.

daar was en annie jacobs zij het zoo <ol-en smaak> gesmeek ver en biekie melk voor haar dood ons het baha moeite gedaan veren biekie melk maar helaas toe die biekie melk daar was kon zij dit nie en slik nie en zoo met die woord van honger is zij dood want die kos wat ons gekri het kon en ziek mens nie eet nie ik gaan na die hek om na mije kenderkies se graffies te kijk toe ik bij die hek kom vra die wagter waar is jou pas toe se ek maar en kaffer dra mos en pas nie en mens nie hij se noû ja ik kan nie die hek oop maak is ij nie en pas het nie dit was bitter om nie eers na die graffies van jou dooja kan gaan ik moet maar om draai en mij naam gaan opgee om en maand pas te krij om na die graffe te gaan en een week pas is ik wel dorp toe gaan elke week moet helle die paste zien

Annie Jacobs begged for a little milk before her death and with much difficulty we managed to procure some. Unfortunately by that time she couldn't swallow and died of hunger because the food which we received was not suitable for sick people. I went to the gate of the camp and asked to visit the graves of my children. The guard asked where my pass was and I said who all are supposed to carry passes? The guard said he couldn't open the gate without a pass. It was bitter to be refused permission even to visit the graves of my dead children. I had to turn round and make application for a month pass to be able to visit the graves and a week pass to be able to visit Mafeking.

o dit zal ik nooit vergeet ik het vedag nog die een pas wat ik moes dra elke maant gee helle en maand pas en elke week en week pas is daar een is wat dit nie wel glo nie kon helle kom kijk dit is en mij huis bijbel! lesers denk zelf hoe het ik gevoel toe die 2 paste aan mij gegee word al is ik ook al dood dan kan mij kenders det wijs want helle moet dit bere ver gedagte nes van ons lijden en die moort kampe want ons mense wat rond gevlij het die die ons almal weer kom krij en pertij van ons wat en die moort kampe gewees het die die ledeg tûig gekom hendrik goûs se heele famijiel het uit gesterf een dogter martha het oor geblij ons het bitter gelij maar ons was maar altijd tevrede en gereken ons zal weer ons land trûg krij maar god het ons gestraf om dat ons volk
I kept the two passes in my Bible and the reader can think what it felt like and my grandchildren can preserve and look at the passes and realise how we suffered in the death camp. Some of our people survived the war by fleeing around the country - they all arrived safely back home. Others of us who were in the death camps returned home having lost almost everything. Hendrik Gous lost his whole family in the death camp except for one daughter Martha. We suffered greatly but we were always satisfied and knew that we would regain our country and that God was punishing us for being divided against each other.

This is how our lives were. In an effort to combat sickness, the authorities arrived to fumigate our tents with powder. We talked nicely to the Hensoppers. They were the tame dogs of the English whose job it was to fumigate. A few of the Hensoppers were good to us and sorry that they couldn't protect our sick children from the terrible smell of the powder. The following morning, however, the Hensoppers arrived again with more powder. My sister talked kindly to the Hensopper in charge to go easily with the powder. However, he told his black workers in their language to use a great deal of powder on our tent. My sister was so annoyed she stormed up to the Hensopper and hit him a blow in the ribs that bent him over and winded him. She gave him a few other blows with her fists before he could get away and we never saw him again. The blacks picked up their cans of poison and left and this was the last powder that was used on our tent. There was a dear old man who suffered from sore legs. The powder burnt his legs and he was taken to hospital where he died. His old wife begged them not to defumigate their tent but the authorities went ahead and the gas from the powder infected his blood and this dear old man died. It was a sad thing because the old man had suffered much together with us. This was how I lived through thirteen months in the Mafeking death camp.
Children in Mafeking concentration camp
(Photo: Lichtenburg Museum)
Children in Mafeking concentration camp
(Photo: Lichtenburg Museum)
One day we laughed together, another day it was all tears. I had been in the camp fifteen days when I heard that my husband lay in Mafeking hospital. That evening I made application for a pass - because no-one was allowed to go anywhere without a pass. I had to talk nicely to the English because it was outside their office hours. I was unknown so they wouldn't give me a pass immediately but only the following day at 8 o'clock. Then I met an elderly man Diewenaar and I asked him if he would help me to reach my husband because I could not speak English. I had to give him 2/6d to take me in his horse and cart.

I then had to go to an office above the Market Square in Mafeking and present my pass. The officials looked through their records and were able to confirm that my husband had been arrested, but they couldn't say where he was. They thought that he might have been transported with another group of prisoners. I told them that my husband was very sick when he was arrested and they gave me a pass for the hospital. The old man came with me because he could understand the English language. He heard the officials at the hospital say that my husband was there but they would first have to assess his condition and whether he could receive visitors.

toe moes ik eers gaan tot bokant die mark daar was helle affies (office) toe gee ik mij pas toe het helle al helle boeke deûr gezoek helle se die man is gevang maar helle weet nie waar hij is nie helle denk hijis weg zaam met die ander presenier ik se toe ver helle die man was ziek toe helle hom gevang het toe se helle o dan lee hij seker nog en die hospetaal toe gee helle mij nog en pas toe het ik 2 paste om mij man te gaan zoek ons het baja bij al die hospetale gezoek toe se die ou man ons moet nou na die melletere hospetale toe kom ons daar ik gee toe mij paste ver die een wat daar bij die tent staan toe loop [-hij die ou oom zaam want hij goed <ol•kon> verstaan wat helle se hij hoor toe helle se ja agter die paste ver die dokter gegee die man is hier helle zal eers gaan kijk is hij <ol•zoo> gezond [-genog] is kan ik hom zien
They then went to investigate amongst the houses and tents. One returned with my pass signed by the doctor and said I should follow him. The old man took my child and the three of us walked together to an extended room in which there was 10 to 14 wounded English soldiers in bed. I began panicking and it felt as if my legs would collapse under me. The old man said I should get control of myself or the English would chase me away before I could see my husband.

One day when I arrived at the hospital I was told that my husband had been sent to the goal. I went back to the camp with heavy thoughts knowing that he was too weak to be imprisoned. Two days later I was given a pass to walk to the goal. I went with Marta Gous, a 15 year old daughter, who always went with me. When I arrived at the goal I was met by a very black Zulu man. He asked me what I wanted and I was very scared when he told me I had to follow him to an office. There was just him and us and
we had to sign our names. I was so scared that I shook and the old Zulu told me not to be scared and to sit down and he would call my husband.

O vriende en die tronk akeleg om jou dierbare en die tronk te ontmoet en hoe akeleg hy daar uit zien toe kon ons zoo en half uur daar by hom zet toe <ol-se> die ou soeloe ons moet nou maar gaan toe loop ons die ou loop toe en enttie met ons zaam hy loop toe zoo na aan mij ik kan nie se hoe bang het ik gevoel die ou scheepsels kon zeker mij hart hoor klop hy se ver mij moenie bang wees ik wel net ver jou se jij kon ver jou man en stukkie kos breng en klere want die tronk is zoo vol lusie dan kan hy jou schoon maak hy se ver mij die preseniers kry slegte kos helle kan nie daar van leef toe se ek dankie en die zwarte kater draai o maar ons was te blij toe hy om draai toe <ol-ik> by mij tent kom wes <ol-ik> nie wat om te doen toe toe gaan ik na aë sannie kraaf en ons maak toe zaam wat ons het en maak toe en biekie brood gaar ik het nog paar stukkie klere gehad wat die kakies nie en hande gekry het nie toe gaan ik maar ver <ol-hom> die kos en klere weg breng daar waar hy en die akeleg tronk set uit geteer van honger ja maar ik moes mij bijna dood loop om al die paste bij mekaar te krijis ik mijn man wel gaan zien toe ik weer bij hom kom se hy ver mij ou piet fourie was hier bij hom en gese hy moet en zweer dan kan hy na die kamp toe gaan bij zij vrouw en kender toe se ik ver hom nee ik wel nie <ol-dat jij> en die kamp wees nie toe se ik ver mijn man die boere wat en die kamp is helle <ol-is> niks meer is honde en is hy uit kom kamp toe dan loop ik weg transvaal toe want ik zien elke dag hoe gaan dit met die hensoppers toe se hy ver mijn god het hom tot hier toe gelij en hy zal verder met hom gaan helle kan hom maar lievers weg stuur

O friends, it was terrible to see your dearest in the goal and how terrible he looked. We were able to spend a half hour with him before the old Zulu told us we had to go. The old Zulu walked a little way with us. He could probably see how scared I was and hear how my heart was beating. He told me not to be afraid and said we could bring food to the prison for my husband and some clothes because the food was bad and was not nutritious and the goal was full of lice and my husband would be able to get rid of them with other clothes. We were glad when the black man turned and went away (being so afraid of him).

When I arrived back at my tent I didn't know what to do and went to old Sannie Kraaf. The two of us prepared a parcel of what we had, we baked a little bread and included a few articles of clothing that the English had not taken. Then I took the food and clothing to the terrible goal where my emaciated husband sat - but I had almost to walk myself to death to achieve everything.

On returning to my husband he told me that old Piet Fourie had visited him and said that he must take the oath and become a Hensopper and then he would be allowed to stay with his wife in the death camp. I told him that I would not have him in the camp because I saw what happened to the hensoppers who were there and they were little more than dogs and I would run away to the Transvaal if he came there. He agreed with me and said that God had directed him so far and would continue to do so and thus the English could send him anywhere they wanted.
zoo het helle hom 28 dagen en die akelege tronk gehou toe stūûr helle hom weg tot op groenpunt en van daar endiea bombaai waar hij 14 maande enege dagen gebly het toe ik die dag die tydēn krië laat híj weg <ol>[-is] [-is was] dit was ver my bitter die dag kon ik nie eet of drenk maar die liewe heer het my krag gegee en zoo het gedag ons weer gespaar om [-zaan] mekaar met lewe en gezondheid saam te kan leef ik het al die tyd saam met my zuster en schoonzuster saam gewees want ons was verbant aan mekaar want ons het bittere dagen en nagten deûrgemaka helle mans was ook weggestûûr en die liewe heer het ons gespaar om weer mekaar te ontmoet na al die bitter wat ons deû gemaak het daar was en paar van ons boere vrouwen en meisies wat moet op gegee het helle is toe af gekamp en een kliûn kampie die kampie was genoem die ouie kampie ons ander vrouwen was bôa hard seer daar <ol>oor> en ander paar vrouwen het weg geloop ut die kamp waar helle velleg bij die boere uit gekom het ons het bitter deûr dagen en nagten deûr gemaak maar ons was maar al tyd tevrede en op en verwagten geleef dat ons weer ons land zal trûûg krië maar helaas dit was hoope loos deûr al die weder spanegheid van ons volk en ontrouwheid het ons ons land moes af ghee ons ik denk ons het goed en bloed op geofer en was dit hoope loos

The English kept him in that terrible goal for twenty eight days until they sent him away to Groenpunt in the Cape and then to Bombay where he remained for fourteen months and some days. It was a bitter day when I found out he was gone and I could not eat or drink. The Lord gave me strength and was to look after us so that we were thereafter able to live together in health. I lived in the camp closely linked with my sister and sister-in-law because we experienced and got through bitter days and nights. A few of our Boer women and daughters gave up hope and lived in a separate camp called the ewe camp - this waste of life made all the other women very sad. Another group of women managed to escape from the camp and found refuge amongst the Boers. We, on the other hand, lived through bitter days and nights, but we were always satisfied and lived in expectation that we would one day get our land back. But alas it was hopeless to go through all the conflict and unfaithfulness we had to give up our country. We sacrificed both our property and blood and it was hopeless.

wat ik hier schriûf is nie stories nie toe die vrede tijdêng en die kamp kom en ons moes hoor ons mense het wapen afgele en ons het ons land verloor o det was te vreesleek dit was en geween van groot en kliûn ons kon dit nie gloo nie maar ons moes dit maar glo toe wou ik nie langer en die kamp blij nie my zwaar louw pretoriûs het my toe laat haal van my broer en agûstes het ik <ol>[-het>] toe eers weer bij my mense gekom ik <ol>het> nie weer na die selfde plek gegaan waar helle my gevang het nie ons het al die 4 dagen op pad gebly van mafiekien af tot op zeerûûst toe was ik nog 7 myl waar ik moes heen op zeerûûst het ik my ou moeder en my een zuster ontmoet helle het al die tyd wat ons en die moort kamp was en die bergen <ol>en klowe> rond gevûûg maar helle was nog almal nie een het meeker ons ôû kinderies was die slagoffers van die moort kamp dit was en bûtûn schap die ontmoeten ons het die nag 12 uûr gaan slaap want ik moes toe alles vertel wat met ons aan gegaan het

What I have written here is the truth and not stories. It was horrible when the people in the camp came to hear news of the surrender and the peace. Young and old couldn't believe the news, but it was true. I didn't want to stay in the camp a moment longer and my brother-in-law Louw Pretorius sent for me. I did not go back to the
same place where they caught me and only in August was I united with the people of my district.

We travelled for four days between Mafeking and Zeerust and when we were still seven miles from where we were going, we ran into my old mother and my one sister. All the time that we were in the death camp they fled through hills and dales. They all survived but our small children were the victims who died in the death camp. We were overjoyed to meet them and only went to sleep at 12 o’clock because I had to tell them everything that had happened.

en voor lees die anderdag het ik toe na kalkdam toe gegaan waar mij zwaar mij en kijn hûsie gegee het om en te blij tot mij man een dag trug kom toe hoor ik ons het nog 1 veers en 2 esels en 5 schape wat die où oom japie v d merwe mee rond gevlug het want ons het bij die où oom geblijt toe ons die middag op die plaas bij mij zuster kom was die heele plaas in rep en roer van blijdschap almal het gekom en mij kom groet en ik moes weer alles vertel en voor lees zoo het dit en heel week gegaan toe aû karel zwaan mij ook <ol-kom> groet want ik was die verlore zeûn hij se ver mij jû aû hand is nog bij jouû hûis dit was ver mij ongelooflik [-toe stûûr 13] 13 maande lank toe stûûr ik mij kinders om die goed te gaan haal toe krië helle die aû kond op die stoep van mij hûis zoo vet is en vârk maar dit was en ontmoeten en toe helle bij mij met die hond kom was dit en naarheid al wat daar was het zaam met die aû kond gehûîl hij kon nie op hoe met blaf en te keere gaan toe se die man zoo veel mal is hij daar bij die verlate hûis kom leg die aû hond op die stoep toe vriende die aû hond was baja meer getrouwer is baja van ons mense want toe die aû hond ons lamal deûr geloop <ol•het> toe was dit af hij na zij baas ook zoek en toe moes ik maar zoo aan zükkel ver en lewe een où man gee mij toe die koren rijo was en stûkkie *K* koren wat te kort was om af te snij toe <ol•het> ek en mij 2 zeûns dit uit getrek toe het mij zwaar dit ver mij laat dors ik kriê twee en half zak toe se <ol•ik> dankie want <ol•toe> is ik weer rijk ik het toe al baja tuin gemaak toe het mij kinders nie meer hungre gelij nie want helle <ol•het> baja aande op en biekie melk moes gaan slaap ja vriende en ware moeder voel dit beterlik om te denk mij kend is hungre ik het 19 maande en 17 dagen zoo geleef zonder en zorg dit het ik hier geschrië ver mij kinders en vriende wat niks weet hoe die engels man met ons gewerk ver aandenken ver mij na geslag

Sûsarah Eliesabetha Nel
gebore Lange, g b 25 Jûlîj 1869

My brother-in-law gave me a small house at Kalkdam to live in until my husband returned from Bombay. I then heard that the family still had one calf, two donkeys and five sheep that old Japie v.d.Merwe was able to hide from the English during the war. When we arrived at my sister’s farm at midday, the whole farm was in an uproar with their happiness. Everyone came to greet me and I had to retell the events over and over. This is how it went the whole week because I was the Biblical ‘lost son’. Karel Zwaan came to visit and told me that my old dog was still alive on the stoep of my house and was fat and lazy. When they brought the dog to me everyone began crying and the dog wouldn’t stop barking and being excited. Yes friends, that dog was more faithful than many of our own people.
Thereafter it was a struggle for survival. An old man gave me some corn that had not grown as much as the ripe crop. With my two sons I reaped this corn, my brother in law threshed it for us and we harvested two and a half sacks. I said thank you because now I was rich. In the mean time I had also planted a huge vegetable garden to make sure that my children would never again suffer from hunger because on so many occasions they had to go to sleep with only a little milk. Yes friends, a mother feels especially bitter when her child is hungry. I was without assistance for 19 months and 17 days (until husband returned). What I have written is for my children, grandchildren and future generations so that they will know what the English did to us.

Susarah Eliesabetha Nel, born Lange, 25 July 1869.