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</p> <p style="margin: 0cm 2.05pt 0.0001pt 0cm;" align="left">General Jacobus Hercules (Koos) De la Rey is generally regarded as one of the bravest and most effective fighting generals of the Anglo Boer War.</p> <p style="margin: 0cm 2.05pt 0.0001pt 0cm;" align="left">
</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">Family</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">He was born of Dutch and Huguenot descent, 22 October 1847 in Winburg. His family moved to establish a farm in the district of Wolmaranstad. During the diamond rush, Koos De la Rey worked as a transport rider on the routes, serving the diggings at Kimberley. In 1876, he married Jacoba Elizabeth Greeff. His father-in-law, Hendrik Adriaan Greeff was the founder of Lichtenburg. The De la Reys bought the farm, Elandsfontein and raised 12 children of their own and 6 other children who had lost their parents.</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">
</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">Faith</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">Koos De la Rey was described as deeply religious and his pocket Bible was always with him and frequently in his hands. He was described as: formidable, with a long neatly trimmed brown beard and high forehead with deep-set eyes. He was 19 years old when he took part in his first battle.</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">
</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">Commando</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">De la Rey fought in the Basotho War of 1865, and Sekhukhune's War of 1876. During the First War of Independence (1880-1881), De la Rey took over Piet Cronje's siege of the British fort at Potchefstroom. In 1885, he was elected Commandant of the Lichtenburg Commando.</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">
</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">Volksraad</p> <p style="margin-right: 2.05pt;">In 1893, he was elected a Member of the Volksraad, where he was a supporter of the progressive faction under General Piet Joubert, who opposed Paul Kruger's policies. De la Rey consistently advocated accommodation of the Uitlanders, and peace with Britain. During a Volksraad session,

President Paul Kruger accused De la Rey of cowardice. De la Rey replied that if the time for war came, he would remain in the field, fighting, long after the president had given up and fled for safety.

War

As it happened, De la Rey fired the first shots of the Anglo Boer War and was the last to leave the field. On 12 October 1899, General De la Rey led an attack that resulted in the first shots to the war being fired at the Battle of Kraaipan. Attacking a British armoured train enroute to Kimberley from Mafikeng, De la Rey's men succeeded in derailing the train and after a five-hour fire fight, the British surrendered. 26 British soldiers were captured as well as 3 artillery guns, a number of rifles and quantities of ammunition.

Strategy

From the beginning, General De la Rey argued with General Cronje's strategy of besieging Mafikeng and Kimberley. He believed that it would tie down too many men. These time consuming and ultimately unproductive efforts would be frustrated as the British could call upon vast resources to raise the siege and reinforce their men.

Modder Rivier

De la Rey was overruled and ordered to prevent the British reinforcing Kimberley. On 25 October 1899, at the Battle of Graspan, De la Rey sought to delay General Methuen's First Division. On 28 November 1899, at the Battle of Modder Rivier, De la Rey insisted that his men dig trenches along the bank of the Modder Rivier. This was the first use of trench warfare in the war. They succeeded in holding back the enemy until nightfall, when they withdrew. De la Rey was wounded and his son, Adriaan, was killed in this battle.

Magersfontein

At the Battle of Magersfontein, 11 December, De la Rey had his men entrench on flat ground at the base of the Magersfontein hills. Therefore the British shelling of the high ground, where they expected the Boers to be positioned, was to no affect. The night attack by the Scottish Highland Regiment was decimated by the accurate fire of the entrenched Boers. British General Wauchope was killed in the battle.

Disaster

While De la Rey was organising resistance to General French's advance in the Colesburg area, General Cronje was trapped and surrendered with his entire army at Paarderberg. Bloemfontein fell 13 March 1900. Pretoria

fell 5 June. President Kruger fled via Portuguese East Africa to Europe. Only a core of bittereinders remained in the field to oppose the British occupation of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal.

Resistance

After the surrender of Cronje at Pardenberg, 27 February 1900, De la Rey sought to stem the British tide with the battle of Driefontein, 10 March 1900, and Doorenkop, 28 May 1900. On 11 July 1900, he defeated Colonel Robert at Silkaatsnek.

Resupply

On 3 December 1900, he captured 126 wagons loaded with clothing, boots and food supplies and Buffelspoort. De la Rey's charging tactic resulted in many losses for the British side.

Mobile Warfare

During this guerrilla war phase, General De la Rey became renowned as *The Lion of the Western Transvaal*. Instead of dismounting to fight, he trained his men to fire, at full gallop, from the saddle. For two years he led a highly successful mobile campaign winning battles at Moedwil, Nooitgedacht, Driefontein, Donkerhoek, Ysterpruit and Tweebosch. At Ysterspruit he captured enough ammunition and supplies to reinvigorate the Boer forces. At Tweebosch, he captured General Methuen himself.

Chivalry

General De la Rey was renowned for his chivalrous behaviour and Christian conduct towards his enemy. Regularly he would release hundreds of captured enemy, as he had no means to support them. As General Methuen had been injured by his horse falling on his leg, De la Rey released him to return to his lines, where he could receive medical attention. Even after suffering defeat, such as the Battle of Rooiwal, in April 1902, De la Rey's commandos numbered up to 3,000 men in the field to the very end. General De la Rey led the last cavalry charge of the war.

Jacoba

Throughout the war, De la Rey's wife, Jacoba, evaded capture and imprisonment in the concentration camps by the British by travelling and living in the veld for 19 months. Her book: *A Woman's Wanderings and Trials during the Anglo Boer War*, was published in 1903.

Vereeniging

Lord Kitchener requested to meet with General De la Rey at Klerksdorp for a parley. The huge public pressure being mobilised by Emily Hobhouse in Britain had made the war extremely unpopular and political pressure was being brought to bear on Kitchener to end the war at all costs. President Steyn, General Christiaan De Wet, General De La Rey and General Botha, finally agreed to sign the Treaty of Vereeniging, 31 May 1902. In return for acknowledging the sovereignty of King Edward VII, the Boers were promised self-government (granted in 1906 to the Transvaal and 1907 for the Orange Free State) and for the Union of South Africa in 1910. In addition, the British promised 3 million compensation to help rebuild their homes and farms.

Union

In 1907, De la Rey was elected to the Transvaal Parliament and was a delegate to the National Convention which led to the Union of South Africa in 1910. He became a Senator and supported the first Prime Minister, Louis Botha, in his attempts to unite Boer and Brit. When the South African Communist Party inspired white miners to riot in 1914, De la Rey commanded the government forces that crushed the strikes.

Rebellion

With the outbreak of the First World War, Senator De la Rey strenuously opposed South Africa's involvement in the war. As many South Africans were of German descent and as Germany had been sympathetic to their struggle for freedom during the Anglo Boer War, he regarded it as morally indefensible to attack German South West Africa. In Parliament, De la Rey advocated neutrality, stating that he was utterly opposed to war, unless South Africa was directly attacked. On 15 September 1914, his friend, General C. F. Beyers, the Commandant General of the Armed Forces resigned his commission in protest and sent his car to fetch De la Rey to consult with him.

Assassination

As the two generals set out for Potchefstroom Military Base, where General Kemp had also resigned, General De la Rey was shot dead at a police roadblock. Although the official statement claimed that he had been mistaken for a bank robber, many were convinced that he had been deliberately assassinated, because of his opposition to South Africa's involvement in Britain's war.

Honoured Hero

There is a monument of General De la Rey on his horse in the De la Rey Square in front of Lichtenburg City Hall. Great interest in the courage of De la Rey has been rekindled by the De la Rey song, by Bok van Blerk.

General Koos De la Rey will always be highly respected as one of the bravest of the brave, the Lion of the West Transvaal.

The Reformation Society

P.O. Box 74 Newlands 7725
Cape Town South Africa
Tel: 021-689-4480
Fax: 021-685-5884
Email: mission@frontline.org.za
Website: www.ReformationSA.org

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 Christian Rudolph De Wet](index.php/history/335-heroes-of-the-anglo-boer-war-general-christiaan-rudolf-de-wet)

[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)