

**The life and times of Christoph Sandrock,  
missionary of the Berlin Mission Society during the  
Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902) at Springfontein, South Africa**

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*Abstract*

This article traces the life and times of Christoph Sandrock (1845–1930), a missionary with the Berlin Mission Society, during the Anglo Boer War at Springfontein in the southern Free State, South Africa. Based mainly on his diary, his *Erinnerungen aus dem südafrikansichen Kriege aus dem Jahre 1899–1902* and primary sources from South African archives, this research not only contributes to the biography of a remarkable missionary, but also to our knowledge of the local experience of the Anglo-Boer War by blacks and whites who lived at Springfontein or who were forced during the war to reside in the differentiated refugee (or concentration) camps that were erected at the railway station.<sup>1</sup> Sandrock lived in Springfontein throughout the war and ministered to the Boer commandos, a German and a British field hospital, his mission congregation and the white and black concentration camps. He received international visitors – *Missionsdirektor* Gensichen (from Berlin), the German Consul, and the activist Emily Hobhouse. The article discloses a unique perspective on the Anglo-Boer War, which was renowned for its scorched earth tactics, guerrilla warfare and concentration camps.

**Introduction**

Based on an investigation of primary sources, this article portrays the life and times of Christoph Sandrock, a missionary with the Berlin Mission Society, during the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902) at Springfontein, South Africa. It contributes “zu den von den jüngeren Missionsgeschichtschreibung ausgeklammerten Themen ...” that, as Ulrich van der Heyden observed, focus on “die Haltung bzw. die Einbeziehung der europäischen Missionare zum bzw. in den südafrikanischen Krieg von 1899 bis 1902 und dessen Folgen für die Mission wie die Interaktion zwischen Missions- und politische Geschichte.”<sup>2</sup>

At the outbreak of the South African (or Anglo-Boer) War (1899–1902) Christoph Sandrock was an influential and respected figure and a missionary with the Berlin Mission Society stationed at Springfontein, an important railway junction 150 kilometres south of Bloemfontein. Apart from the few notes by Zöllner and Heese (1984:403), which were taken over by Raath and Louw (1991) concerning his involvement in the white refugee or concentration camp at Springfontein during that war, nothing more is known of his life over the period 1899 to 1903.

Sandrock trained as a missionary with the Berlin Mission Society and arrived in South Africa in 1875 (Zöllner and Heese 1984:403). He was deployed on the Bethany mission station, which was situated 80 kilometres south of Bloemfontein in the Orange Free State Republic. Bethany was established in 1834 and became the Berlin Mission Society's main mission station in central South Africa. With his agricultural expertise and skills, Sandrock was a valuable addition to the station and played an important role in advancing the concerns of the Society in the region. Here, on 20 November 1877, he married Clara Albertine Rossmann (1848–1925). Nine children were born to the marriage: Auguste Marie Albertine (1879–1914), Heinrich Carl Reinhard (1880–1965), Theodor Christoph (1882–1953), Clara Louise (1883–19?), Elizabeth Anne Theodora (1884–1964), Christoph Johannes Emil (1886–1957), Frieda Johanna Adele (1889–1895), Marie Wilhelmine Louise Catherine (1890–19?) and Carl Wilhelm Johannes Allen (1893–1964) (Zöllner and Heese 1984:403–405).

In the winter of 1893, the family was relocated to Springfontein, a newly built railway station to the south of Bethany. Sandrock was commissioned to establish an autonomous mission station here, mainly to provide a permanent Christian ministry for (black) labourers involved in the construction and maintenance of the railway lines.

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<sup>1</sup> In cases where offensive language was used in primary sources, it was maintained for academic reasons in the text. The author however does not endorse any form of offensive language.

<sup>2</sup> Van der Heyden U 2000. Der Burenkrieg von 1899 bis 1902 und die deutschen Missionsgesellschaften. In Van der Heyden Ulrich & Becher Jürgen (eds.) 2000. *Mission und Gewalt. Der Umgang christlicher Missionen mit Gewalt bei der Ausbreitung des Christentums in Afrika und Asien in der Zeit von 1792 bis 1918/19*, 208. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag.

## Springfontein: railway junction and mission station 1892–1899

Early in the 1890s Pretoria and Cape Town were linked by rail. The East London railway line (also constructed in those years) joined the Cape Town–Pretoria line on the farm Springfontein<sup>3</sup> in the southern Free State, approximately 40 kilometres north of the Orange River. Inevitably a railway station was built at the junction. The issue of the proclamation of a town at the junction was raised and discussed in 1893 in the (*Volksraad*) (i.e. the National Council) of the Orange Free State. In 1892, reference was made to the selling of stands, but Janse van Rensburg (1990:379–380) could not trace any surveying plans in this regard. The proclamation of a town only followed in 1904.

The construction (and maintenance) of the railway lines created labour opportunities for blacks. Along the lines railway camps were established – including at the Springfontein junction – to house these labourers. The “[p]lan shewing the extent of land required for railway purposes” mapped out for the Cape Government Railways in 1892 located the Springfontein labour camp east of the station.<sup>4</sup> The concentration of black people working on the lines was regarded by the Berlin missionaries at Bethany as an opportunity to start a Christian ministry among them. Springfontein thus became a viable option for the establishment of an outpost. In 1892 it was regarded as an outpost of Bethany (Krankenstein 1892: 432-433), with Christoph Sandrock, who was sent there as a full-time missionary in June 1893,<sup>5</sup> being tasked with the founding of an autonomous and self-supporting mission station.

His knowledge of the farming industry made him the obvious choice to take responsibility for establishing a mission station at Springfontein. After settling with his family, he immediately took to the task. Subsequently, he saw prospects for future development and initiated the acquisition of land. On 25 November 1896, the farms Gerlachsthal 276 (adjacent to and east of the railway station) and the much smaller Berlin 275 (to the south of the railway station and to the west of the line) were bought by the Berlin Mission Society.<sup>6</sup> Two years later the (much bigger) farm Springfontein 146 (south and south-west of the railway station) was purchased from Leonardus Bohmer for £22 000.<sup>7</sup>

Under Sandrock's able leadership, a viable mission station developed during the 90s. In accordance with the Society's policy and strategy, the land was used for the benefit of the Berlin Mission. Wright rented a house and Hartley a piece of land on the Springfontein farm from the Society.<sup>8</sup> Dr Fellic (sic) rented part of Gerlachsthal.<sup>9</sup> Sandrock was also in charge of a sizeable collection of livestock (cattle, sheep, goats and a few horses).<sup>10</sup> People (i.e. *natives*) who accepted the Christian (Lutheran) faith and agreed to the regulations<sup>11</sup> and ecclesiastical rules of the Berlin Mission were also permitted to reside on the land.<sup>12</sup> These residents (around 13 families in 1898) were allowed a certain number of stock, for which grazing rights were given in exchange for a

<sup>3</sup> Subdivided into Springfontein Town Lands A 308, Springfontein Town Lands B 283, Gerlachsthal 275, Berlin 276 and Springfontein 146. See Orange Free State Springfontein. Africa Sheet South H – 35/N-II (War Office, Edinburgh: W & AK Johnson, 1915).

<sup>4</sup> Map 3/123 (Free State Provincial Archives).

<sup>5</sup> *Missions-Berichte der Gesellschaft zur Beförderung der evangelischen Missionen unter den Heiden zu Berlin*, May 1899, 218.

<sup>6</sup> AKT 2/1/1/14, T/D 50721 (Free State Provincial Archives). Gerlachsthal 275 (665 morgen) and Berlin 276 (approx. 5 morgen, see also GS 1816 2225-98, 213-214 (Free State Provincial Archives) were subdivisions of Springfontein 146, endorsed in 1896. See AKT 2/1/1/13 (Free State Provincial Archives). Obviously the subdivisions received their names from the Berlin Mission Society.

<sup>7</sup> AKT 2/1/1/13, AKT 2/1/1/14, T/D 54083, dd. 12 July 1998 (Free State Provincial Archives). Springfontein 146 was 1677 morgen 370 roods large. Originally it was part of Springfontein 443.

<sup>8</sup> GS 1816 2225-98, 213 (Free State Provincial Archives).

<sup>9</sup> GS 1816 2225-98, 216 (Free State Provincial Archives).

<sup>10</sup> *Tagebuch Transcription 1875-1918*, ADA 1284 Hesse Collection, UNISA, 13 March 1899, 36. (Further referred to as *Tagebuch*, followed by the date and page.) The transcription was done by Thea Sandrock. The farming consisted mainly of livestock, but there was also a garden and cultivated land. The building of dams was in progress. See GS 1816 2225-98, 208, 209 (Free State Provincial Archives).

<sup>11</sup> A set of *Regulations* prior to the outbreak of the War could not be located. However, at a public meeting on 5 June 1909 (in all probability), the residents of the Mission Station stipulated and undersigned the *Regulations of Springfontein*, which was a founding document and had a legal character. These agreed-on *Regulations* a.o. stipulated that:

- the farms Springfontein, Gerlachsthal and Berlin are the property of the Berlin Mission Society (See *Regulations* 1);
- the farms were purchased for the purpose of allowing such natives, who are desirous of attending church services and of having their children educated, to reside thereon. Such residents are obliged to attend church services and send their children to the school (See *Regulations* 1);
- school fees are to be paid in advance (See *Regulations* 2);
- the discipline and ethos of the Mission Station should be adhered to, vindicated and maintained (See *Regulations* 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, & 17);
- Every resident will be allowed a certain number of stocks, for which grazing rights by way of charges are to be made (See *Regulations* 90).

See *Regulations of Springfontein*, NTS 150 2/31 (National Archives, Pretoria). These *Regulations* correspond with those of Bethany. For them see HG 4/2/1/1/47 340 (Free State Provincial Archives). See also AANW 15 Zittlau 1.3 (Hesse Collection, UNISA, Pretoria).

<sup>12</sup> *Tagebuch* 25 September 1899, 39-40.

monthly mission contribution.<sup>13</sup> These members were employees of the railways or the Berlin Mission, and some of them were occupied in the construction of dams on the Springfontein farm.

In 1898 the following people resided on *Springfontein*: Daniel Makoepê (with his family), employed in the building of three dams; Jan Gombici, employed to help with the dams and wire straining; Jan Molathloa, a catechist; Jacob Mohotete and his family, employed by Sandrock; Samuel Sheba and his family, ecclesiastical assistant and also helping with the dams on Springfontein; Johannes Goliath and family, employed at the railway station; an old widow (her son was an employee of the railways and boarded in the railway camp) and another old woman with two sons and one daughter (the elder son boarded at the railway camp, while the remaining children lived with their mother).

The following people resided on *Gerlachsthal*: Wilhelm Pieterse, a mason and carpenter; Jan Jacobs, a blacksmith, who plied his trade at Hartleydale. Both Pieterse and Jacobs viewed themselves as whites, and were indignant when others in fact regarded them as *coloureds*.<sup>14</sup> Kieviet Veldmann and his family; he was *Köster* (churchwarden). Cornelius Morogai and family; he was employed to work on the dams on Springfontein. Also Moses Gaputhlula and family; he was an employee of the railways. Frans Nelkrin and family, also an employee of the railways, lived on Gerlachsthal because there was no accommodation available at the station. Philip Cronee (who regarded himself as white) also lived on Gerlachsthal. Then there were two women, also residing on the farm.<sup>15</sup>

The remarks concerning the colour of Cronee, Pieterse and Jacobs in the original source should not go unnoticed. It is clear that for the (white) compiler of the report, as well as those involved, it was an issue that should be noted. The three families were indeed well aware of the social, economic and political consequences of being pushed out of the white-dominated society and identified as coloureds. The remarks consequently disclose the existence of differentiated social and unjustifiable racial patterns that not only threatened, but also determined, the existence of these people – an issue of which Sandrock, as will be seen, was not unaware.

Berlin was developed as the hub of the mission station. A handsome church (which received a plank floor in May 1899<sup>16</sup>) with manse (where Sandrock and his family lived) and a school were erected on this small farm.

At the turn of the century, the Berlin Mission and its congregation at Springfontein were on a firm footing and were no longer bound to the uncertainties of the initial phase of its development. The Bethany outpost became a mission station. A church council was instituted,<sup>17</sup> and a number of assistants helped the missionary in guiding the growth and development of the congregation.<sup>18</sup> In the surrounding district a network of “outposts” was organised and received consistent ministry.<sup>19</sup> More than 50 communicants regularly celebrated the Lord’s Supper.<sup>20</sup> On special occasions more than 200 people attended the services.<sup>21</sup> Such an event was the *Helferkonferenz* which was organised at Springfontein in April 1899. The local *Lutherische Posaunenchor* (Lutheran brass band), composed of congregants and children, performed and a successful *fête (Bazaar)* involved the whole community.<sup>22</sup> According to the official statement of statistics for 1899, there were 77 baptised members, 47 holy communion participants, 225 present at the holy communion, 14 adults baptised, 14 children baptised and seven catechists or helpers.<sup>23</sup> As far as the income of the station was concerned, the following figures prove its viability: Farmlands (which included lease money) – DM 1235.00; Support from Germany – DM 1000.00; ‘Head’ money – DM 210.00; School funds – DM 271.00; Collections – DM 664.75.<sup>24</sup>

By August 1899, Springfontein comprised a few scattered structures with 100 or so permanent inhabitants. In addition to the station and its buildings, there was a railway camp and the shop of Reitz &

<sup>13</sup> See *Tagebuch* 4 March 1900, 42. For example: On 4 March 1900 Rebecka Malale brought 1/- in this regard. Weinhold Feldmann, a respected inhabitant of the Mission, contributed 6/- on a monthly basis, even during the War. See *Tagebuch* 8 May 1900, 43. See also CO 20 1775/01, CO 121 5655/02 (Free State Provincial Archives).

<sup>14</sup> GS 1816 2225-98, 216 (Free State Provincial Archives).

<sup>15</sup> GS 1816 2225-98, 213-214 (Free State Provincial Archives).

<sup>16</sup> “Eine hübsche Kirche.” *Tagebuch* 27 May 1899, 38. See also GS 1816 2225-98, 213-214 (Free State Provincial Archives).

<sup>17</sup> See e.g. *Tagebuch* 6 August 1899, 39. See also *Tagebuch* 23 April 1899, 37.

<sup>18</sup> *Tagebuch* 12 February 1899, 35.

<sup>19</sup> Cornelius Morogai frequently visited Donkerpoort, a railway station to the south, Jan Molato worked on Kraaifontein, Petrus Lepuquane (living at a distance of 2 hours by horse, see *Tagebuch* 27 May 1899, 38) had seven persons in catechist training (*Tagebuch* 5 January 1899, 35) and Samuel Sheba travelled along the railway line to minister to railway workers (*Tagebuch* 23 April 1899, 37). Sandrock also mentions Wilhelm Pieterse and Jacobus Maambe (*Tagebuch* 4 June 1899, 38), as well as Danie Veldman and Van Schalkwyk (*Tagebuch* 2 July 1899, 39) who received permission to visit and proclaim the gospel to workers on several farms in the surrounding district.

<sup>20</sup> The sacrament of baptism was administered to both adults and children. See *Tagebuch* 17 September 1899, 39. See also *Tagebuch* 24 September 1899, 39. Holy Communion was celebrated regularly. See *Tagebuch* 3 April 1899, 36 where Sandrock noted that “am Karfreitag fand Feier des H.A. statt an welchem 51 Gästen teilnahmen.” See also *Tagebuch* 6 August 1899, 39.

<sup>21</sup> *Tagebuch* 17 September 1899, 39.

<sup>22</sup> *Tagebuch* 5 & 6 April 1899, 36. The *Helfer* (assistants or auxiliary spiritual workers) were accommodated by the members of the congregation. Missionaries Grützner, Grosskopf, Arends and Schulz attended this event, which was of great importance for the Berlin Mission Society and its endeavours in the region between the Orange and Vaal Rivers.

<sup>23</sup> *Missions-Berichte*, June 1900, 369.

<sup>24</sup> *Missions-Berichte*, June 1900, 372. DM = Deutsche Mark, monetary unit of Germany.

Schröder. The houses of the railway inspector, three or four officials (all of them British citizens),<sup>25</sup> three white families<sup>26</sup> and the Berlin Mission and its residents were clustered around the station.

### Christoph Sandrock, an experienced and respected missionary

Christoph Sandrock was an experienced<sup>27</sup> and competent missionary, and highly respected by all. He commanded (besides his mother tongue) Dutch, English, Xhosa and Setswana.<sup>28</sup> He ministered in Dutch to the “Mischlingen” (*coloureds*)<sup>29</sup> – the same language used when preaching to white audiences.

In January 1899, he was appointed Justice of the Peace at Springfontein by the Magistrate of Bethulie.<sup>30</sup> A month later he accepted an additional position: the “uitreiker van certificate voor vrije invoer van producten van dezen staat naar de Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek by de Spoorwegstatie Springfontein.”<sup>31</sup> He managed not only the farming activities at Springfontein, but also the administrative and ecclesiastical duties peculiar to a late 19th century mission station. At Donkerpoort, whites (at different times)<sup>32</sup> and *Farbigen (coloureds)*<sup>33</sup> attended his services, which were conducted in a school hall. Once in a while he also helped the Dutch Reformed minister Becker at Bethulie.<sup>34</sup> On such an occasion in April 1899 he preached in the white *Bauernkirche* in the morning.<sup>35</sup> In the afternoon he administered the sacraments in the Mission Church. He observed that he “... konfirmierte auf lutherische Weise und gebrauchte wörtlich unser Synodeformal”.<sup>36</sup>

It is apparent that the social differentiation (based on racial and political prejudices), notably between whites and *coloureds*, also prevailed in the ecclesiastical ministry, as it was embodied in the conducting of separate services and churches (*Bauernkirche* [Boer church] and *Missionskirche* [Mission church]). Black Christians of course also had to come to terms with the fact that becoming Christians did not imply equality. The white and Christian communities remained variously simply exclusive. As a missionary, Sandrock was confronted with a growing resistance to this injustice. The (feared) Ethiopian Church was making inroads among black Christian congregations. This church and its movement was an organised ecclesiastical expression of the emerging indigenous (black) leadership and the independent church movement (not without definite political aspirations) that had been taking place in South Africa since the 1870s. It was negatively evaluated by missionaries, mission societies and churches and associated with secession and political consciousness and social demands. Consequently, general concern was created, and it was decided to deal with it on a national level.

On an official visit by a number of missionaries and clergymen (which included Wesleyans and Roman Catholics) to the President of the Free State in May 1899, Sandrock associated himself with their expressed disapproval of the admittance of the Ethiopian Church<sup>37</sup> into the Republic. He was convinced that this movement was politically motivated, because they appealed to their followers “sich von jeglicher europäische Autorität loszureissen”<sup>38</sup> – which of course included that of the Berlin Mission, which had first-hand experience of its members revelling against the Mission in the South African Republic in the early nineties.<sup>39</sup> The Mission had first-hand experience of President Steyn (1857–1916) (Krüger 1972:727–734) receiving the delegation

<sup>25</sup> C. Sandrock, *Erinnerungen aus dem südafrikansichen Kriege aus dem Jahre 1899–1902* (Archives German Africana, Unisa), 54. Hereafter referred to as *Erinnerungen*, followed by the page number.

<sup>26</sup> *Erinnerungen*, 52.

<sup>27</sup> On 29 August 1900 he celebrated 25 years in the ministry as a missionary in the Free State. See *Tagebuch* 29 August 1900, 44. He used the *Laterna Magisa* to project biblical pictures and images. *Tagebuch* 3 April 1899, 36; 29 May 1899, 38.

<sup>28</sup> See *Tagebuch* 23 April 1899, 37.

<sup>29</sup> *Missions-Berichte*, May 1899, 217.

<sup>30</sup> GS 1955 R 32/99 (Free State Provincial Archives).

<sup>31</sup> GS 2005 1421/99 (Free State Provincial Archives). That is, Issuing Officer of Trade Certificates to the South African Republic in the north.

<sup>32</sup> See *Tagebuch* 29 May 1899, 38.

<sup>33</sup> *Tagebuch* 19 February 1899, 36.

<sup>34</sup> See *Tagebuch* 23 April 1899, 36–37 for the visit to Bethulie.

<sup>35</sup> Becker had two services in his church, one in Dutch and one in English. It is therefore apparent that Sandrock preached in both Dutch and English. See *Tagebuch* 23 April 1899, 37.

<sup>36</sup> *Tagebuch* 23 April 1899, 37. The confirmation was done according to the Lutheran tradition, strictly keeping to the words of the synodical formula. The black congregation was affected by his preaching in Xhosa and the use of Setswana when administering the sacraments.

<sup>37</sup> See e.g. B.G.M. Sundkler B G M 1961. *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*. London: Oxford University Press; Kamphausen, E 1976. *Anfänge der kirchlichen Unabhängigkeitsbewegung in Südafrika: Geschichte und Theologie der äthiopischen Bewegung 1872–1912*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang; and Heese Hans 2005. British, Boers and Berlin Missionaries. In Van der Heyden Ulrich & Stoecker Holger (Eds.) 2005. *Mission und Macht im Wandel politischer Orientierungen. Europäische Missionsgesellschaften in politischen Spannungsfeldern in Afrika und Asien zwischen 1800 und 1945*, 425–436. Stuttgart:

<sup>38</sup> *Tagebuch* 23 May 1899, 38.

<sup>39</sup> See in this regard Van der Heyden Ulrich 1994. Der Einfluß der Unabhängigen Afrikanischen Kirchen in Südafrika auf den sogenannten Burenkrieg von 1899–1902. Eine Problemdarstellung. In Bearth T, Möhlig W J G, Sottas B and Suter E (Eds.) 1994. *Perspektiven afrikanistischer Forschung. Beiträge zur Linguistik, Ethnologie, Geschichte, Philosophie und Literatur*, 451–466. Cologne: Köppe.

cordially, Sandrock wrote, but he could see no reason to restrict religious freedom as long as no improper or revolutionary aspirations were connected with it.<sup>40</sup>

In October 1899, the quiet daily life at Springfontein was disturbed by the outbreak of war.

### October 1899: Refugees

During the last weeks of September 1899 the overcrowded south-bound trains were the first definite indications of the inevitability of war in South Africa. From the manse alongside the railway line to Cape Town, *Pastor* Christoph Sandrock watched the exodus of mostly foreigners from the South African Republic. Thousands were forced to resort to goods trains, while the poor people, he noticed, had to leave Johannesburg on open coal (rail) wagons (“auf offenen Kohlenwagen”), exposed to the elements.<sup>41</sup> At the bustling Springfontein junction the Berlin Mission did what it could to make nourishment available to the exhausted refugees on the waiting trains.<sup>42</sup>

In a calculated move to avoid being trapped in war, people from the district of Springfontein – even white farmers – also departed to the Cape Colony,<sup>43</sup> he noted. At the end of September 1899, the Mission was directly involved. Five families of “our *Farbigen*”, Sandrock wrote, asked for passes and left.<sup>44</sup> The numbers of the congregation declined and by 1 October 1899 only 41 communicants celebrated the Lord’s Supper.<sup>45</sup> The Hartleys, the Wrights and the widow Reitz also left. And, eventually, the railway officials departed as well. In the Free State all able-bodied men were commandeered, including Sandrock’s sons Theodor and Heinrich. Sandrock himself did not join a commando. After the war, in a required explanation to edify his personal claims<sup>46</sup> for losses suffered during the war, he wrote: “I consider myself a neutral German subject, but I had, I believe, full Burgher rights in the Orange Free State, and I voted for Mr Fraser in the last election for President.” The last (significant) remark indicates that he did not support the war option of Steyn, and therefore stated that his sons “were commandeered against his will”.<sup>47</sup>

### October – March 1900: Boer commandos

Boer commandos, mobilised for war, followed in the wake of the refugees. A number of laagers were formed along the Orange River, the southern border of the Republic. Sandrock remembered the “*Siegebewusstheit*” (“awareness of victory”) with which they took the field against the British Empire.<sup>48</sup> War was officially declared on 10 October 1899. The missionary was again involved in (extraordinary) ministerial duties. During October and November he preached in several Boer laagers (i.e. temporary encampments); on 22 October at Donkerpoort with 300 burgers attending. He also gave a separate sermon to the *Farbigen* employed in the laager. In November he paid a pastoral visit to the Edinburgh commando at Donkerpoort.<sup>49</sup> On Sunday 12 November he preached to the “*Deutsche Corps im Transvaallager*”<sup>50</sup> at Springfontein. By the end of October he was in Bethulie: in the morning he took the service in the ‘Boer church’, in the afternoon in the Boer commando laager and in the evening he preached to the *Farbigen*<sup>51</sup> in their church.

Later he recalled that while on a visit to Bethulie, the Thaba Nchu commando plundered the shop of Reitz & Schröder at Springfontein.<sup>52</sup> The unoccupied private home of the widow Reitz was also ransacked. She had left her house in Sandrock’s care, with the mandate to use it as a hospital to treat the wounded should the occasion arise. Obviously the conduct of the commando was unacceptable. They even interrupted their work of destruction to gather for devotions, the entry in his diary reads – only to continue afterwards.<sup>53</sup>

With the outbreak of war Sandrock thus had supplementary ministerial duties to carry out, although he remained committed to his commission as a missionary. He was, however, confronted with the fact that very

<sup>40</sup> *Tagebuch* 23 May 1899, 38. “... dass er nicht den Grund sehen könne, die religiöse Freiheit zu beschränken, solange keine unlauteren oder revolutionären Bestrebungen damit verbunden seien.”

<sup>41</sup> *Tagebuch* 6 October 1899, 40. “... die armen Leute ...”

<sup>42</sup> *Erinnerungen*, 51. At the time there was neither hotel, nor any other means available at Springfontein for refugees and passengers to refresh themselves.

<sup>43</sup> *Tagebuch* 25 September 1899, 40.

<sup>44</sup> *Tagebuch* 25 September 1899, 40. See also *Missions-Berichte*, May 1899, 220.

<sup>45</sup> *Tagebuch* 1 October 1899, 39, 40. Their eldest son Heinrich, born in the Free State and on Commando, also joined. *Tagebuch* 1 October 1899, 40. Their younger son Theodor, in Bloemfontein, was also commandeered. *Erinnerungen*, 52. Later Theodor was taken prisoner and sent to Ceylon as a prisoner of war. *Tagebuch* 2 May 1900, 43. Their daughter Clara, who stayed at the mission station during the war, was confirmed in April 1899. *Tagebuch* 3 April 1899, 36.

<sup>46</sup> See CO 49 4493/01 (Free State provincial Archives).

<sup>47</sup> CO 106 4366/02 (Free State Provincial Archives).

<sup>48</sup> *Erinnerungen*, 52.

<sup>49</sup> *Tagebuch* 11 November 1899, 40.

<sup>50</sup> *Tagebuch* 12 November 1899, 40.

<sup>51</sup> *Tagebuch* 19 October 189, 40. See also *Erinnerungen*, 53.

<sup>52</sup> *Erinnerungen*, 52.

<sup>53</sup> *Tagebuch* 29 October 1899.

few people and members of the Mission remained on the farms. The traditional culmination of the ecclesiastical calendar, Christmas, was attended by only ten children. His school had already been closed for two months (since September) because the children had to work on the farms as replacements for the adults and workers who had left.<sup>54</sup> Even when labour replacements arrived and occupied the railway camp, their religious impartiality was discouraging. They did not attend the church services. His visits to the camp, going from room to room, had little effect. And, he significantly remarked, whites<sup>55</sup> in actual fact never really attended his church.<sup>56</sup>

Early in the following year a German Medical and Ambulance Corps of the Red Cross was stationed at Springfontein, under the authority of Dr Ringel, whom Sandrock immediately befriended. The missionary was committed to the spiritual needs of the wounded, both white and non-white,<sup>57</sup> and was thus occupied with ministering to the wounded, and with the inevitable funerals. He was officially involved in the buying of livestock in Bloemfontein, being of significant help to the German doctor.<sup>58</sup>

In early February 1900 members of a passing Boer commando burgled two houses. They also took the hospital's wagon, which they eventually had to return. Sandrock was outspoken. "Dass ist wirklich das traurigste, dass die Bauern das Stehlen nicht lassen können," he commented.<sup>59</sup> He nonetheless invited the officer (a field-cornet) and his men to the service on the Sunday. His invitation was refused. The officer, Sandrock wrote in his diary, remarked "... dass er grundsätzlich in keine Kafferkirche gehe, da ein jeder auf seinen Platz gehöre".<sup>60</sup> This conviction represents a powerful expression of a fundamental set of beliefs among the Boers that explains the conducting of separate services for whites and *Farbigen* in the same town and laager.

Sandrock subsequently also declined to lead devotions in the commando's laager. He was, as a matter of fact, also afraid that they would send him away because he was a missionary. "Der alte Bauernhochmut sitzt noch immer fest bei diesen armen Leuten."<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, on Sunday three Boers attended the service.

The war was now to change its course.<sup>62</sup> The British offensive was launched and gathered momentum (Pakenham 1998:309–459). The tide turned. In the south some Boer commandos were surrendering, while others were falling back in disarray. For the third time Sandrock saw the spectacular movement of people and equipment through Springfontein – this time from the south. Again, some Boers took with them what they could. Two horses belonging to Weinhold Feldmann, one of the remaining members (and an elder) of the church, also fell victim to them. Feldmann however managed to retrieve them.<sup>63</sup> Sandrock witnessed ill-discipline among the Boer commandos. Many of the Boers, he remembered, returned to their farms to see to their farming.<sup>64</sup> The German Ambulance Corps withdrew to avoid falling into British hands.<sup>65</sup>

### March 1900: British occupation

In his *Erinnerungen* of the war Sandrock depicted the period after the commandos had left and prior to the arrival of the British troops as a time divested of all civil authority. On 16 March 1900, British forces under the command of the "friendly"<sup>66</sup> Lieutenant-General William Gatackre<sup>67</sup> reached Springfontein unimpeded. As a precautionary measure Sandrock raised a white flag.<sup>68</sup> Soon a sea of white tents surrounded the mission station: infantry, cavalry, Indians and volunteer coloureds from the Cape Colony.<sup>69</sup> Sandrock recalled how soldiers – hungry and thirsty because provisions had not yet arrived – approached them and asked – on payment – for bread. His wife responded and baked three times a day to meet the troops' needs.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *Tagebuch* 4 January 1900, 40. See also *Missions-Berichte*, June 1900, 285.

<sup>55</sup> This is apparently a reference to those who were then employed at the Springfontein railway station, in order to get the lines operational again.

<sup>56</sup> *Tagebuch* 4 January 1900, 40.

<sup>57</sup> *Tagebuch* 14 February 1900, 42.

<sup>58</sup> *Tagebuch* 18 January 1900, 41.

<sup>59</sup> *Tagebuch* 8 February 1900, 42. "It is really the most regrettable, that the Boers could not refrain from stealing." My translation, DB.

<sup>60</sup> *Tagebuch* 10 February 1900, 42. "that he would absolutely not attend a *Kaffir* church, since each one belongs to his own place." My translation, DB.

<sup>61</sup> "The long-standing boer haughtiness is still seated firmly in these poor people." *Tagebuch* 10 February 1900, 42. My translation, DB.

<sup>62</sup> See Wessels A 1998. *The Phases of the Anglo-Boer War*. Bloemfontein: War Museum of the Boer Republics.

<sup>63</sup> *Tagebuch* 14 March 1900, 42.

<sup>64</sup> *Erinnerungen*, 53.

<sup>65</sup> *Erinnerungen*, 53.

<sup>66</sup> *Erinnerungen*, 54.

<sup>67</sup> W F Gatackre, Commanding Officer of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division was defeated at Stormberg (Pakenham 1998:214-215). After a detachment of 400 men of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division surrendered at Mostertshoek to General C R de Wet, Gatackre was relieved of his command on 10 April 1900 and returned to Britain. He was replaced by Major-General Chermiside (Krüger 1972:262-263).

<sup>68</sup> *Erinnerungen*, 54.

<sup>69</sup> *Erinnerungen*, 54.

<sup>70</sup> *Erinnerungen*, 55.

He found the British officers to be quite friendly and courteous. Sandrock was even asked to take up spiritual duties at a large military hospital, until he was replaced by a chaplain.<sup>71</sup> The Cape Volunteers, however, dismayed him. They antagonised the returning *natives*, who refused to work on the farms and did not hesitate to betray their masters.<sup>72</sup> On the whole, it was the Volunteers, according to him, who caused the most devastation and destruction at Springfontein.<sup>73</sup> Despite the military restrictions,<sup>74</sup> the Berlin Mission and its remaining residents still had their livestock and could continue after a fashion. It was not easy, however.

Firewood became very scarce and soldiers took down the fences and poles for this purpose,<sup>75</sup> which meant that the Mission's livestock started to run loose. This created a further problem, since fines had to be paid to get them back.<sup>76</sup> From 15 to 18 July 1900, the station received a welcome visit from the Director of the Berlin Mission Society, Gensichen and his wife. In September 1899, Gensichen undertook an extended journey to all the mission fields of the Berlin Mission Society.<sup>77</sup> In South Africa the visiting party had to reckon with the war, but eventually, after June 1900, could visit the missions in the north. Springfontein, though "im Zustand der Zerstörung", impressed him.<sup>78</sup> His sermon was translated into Dutch by Sandrock. "Eine ernste Diakonen-Konferenz folgte, in welcher ich erkannte, dass die Ältesten liebe, verständige Leute sind," he reported in the *Missions-Berichte*.<sup>79</sup> On the 18th he departed for Bethany and Bloemfontein.

Despite all the upheaval, Sandrock was allowed to attend a conference at Bethany at the end of July 1900,<sup>80</sup> where the immediate future of the work and the ministry was discussed. A claim compensation for war damages suffered at Springfontein was also compiled and delivered to the British Command.<sup>81</sup> The following week Herr and Frau Direktor Gensichen again visited Springfontein.<sup>82</sup> The mission school was reopened during the first week of August 1900 with 36 children.<sup>83</sup> More people also attended the services on Sundays.<sup>84</sup> In September a Mr Smith came from Bloemfontein to estimate the damage done to the mission station by the troops<sup>85</sup> and the claim received official attention. The Mission's livestock had to be sent away because there was no grazing left, the pasture having been burnt by the troops.<sup>86</sup> During those months Springfontein became a desolate place.

By October it was clear to Sandrock that the war was not to end soon.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, it had changed character: the guerrilla strategy of (reorganised) Boer commandos introduced a new phase (Pakenham 1998:470ff). In the surrounding district military activity had also escalated.<sup>88</sup> For a short time the neighbouring town Philippolis was even recaptured by the Boers.<sup>89</sup> More civilians arrived at the station, and as they were not allowed to leave, the missionary was compelled to put up several families.<sup>90</sup>

### November 1900: Scorched earth strategy introduced

These civilian families were the first visible consequences of the British reprisal against the unpredictable tactics of guerrilla warfare adopted by the Boers. "Die Bauern werden böser und böser," Sandrock remarked, "wegen der brutalen Behandlung, denen sie den Truppen ausgesetzt sind. Sie sind Böse über die Verwüstungen die geschehen sind. Nun fangen sie an, es ebenso zu machen. Das ist auch die Ursache, weshalb sie wieder zu den Waffen greifen."<sup>91</sup> Lord Kitchener (1850–1916) succeeded Roberts as commander-in-chief on 2 November 1900. He vigorously pursued Roberts's scorched earth policy and greatly extended the scope of what started as

<sup>71</sup> *Erinnerungen*, 56.

<sup>72</sup> *Erinnerungen*, 55-56.

<sup>73</sup> *Erinnerungen*, 56. See also *Missions-Berichte*, June 1901, 246. Sandrock estimated the damage to be between DM 12 000 and 14 000. See also *Missions-Berichte*, October 1903, 551.

<sup>74</sup> *Tagebuch* 1 July 1900, 43. Military and martial law were now in force. All had to apply for official passes. Travelling by horseback was prohibited and nobody was allowed to travel by night. Sandrock could no longer travel freely.

<sup>75</sup> *Tagebuch* 2 May 1900, 43.

<sup>76</sup> *Tagebuch* 31 July 1900, 43.

<sup>77</sup> *Missions-Berichte*, October 1899, 629.

<sup>78</sup> *Missions-Berichte*, November 1900, 654. ("... in a state of destruction"). My translation, DB.

<sup>79</sup> *Missions-Berichte*, November 1900, 654. "A serious deacon's conference followed in which I realised that the elders were dear and understanding people." My translation, DB.

<sup>80</sup> *Tagebuch* 28 July 1900, 43. See also *Missions-Berichte*, November 1900, 659 ff.

<sup>81</sup> *Missions-Berichte*, November 1900, 660.

<sup>82</sup> *Tagebuch* 5 August 1900, 43. See Also *Missions-Berichte*, November 1900, 666.

<sup>83</sup> *Tagebuch* 5 August 1900, 43.

<sup>84</sup> See *Tagebuch* 2 September 1900, 44. 62 people took part in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

<sup>85</sup> *Tagebuch* 4 September 1900, 44.

<sup>86</sup> See *Tagebuch* 3 September 1900, 44, 2 October 1900, 44.

<sup>87</sup> *Tagebuch* 8 October 1900, 44.

<sup>88</sup> *Tagebuch* 10 October 1900, 45.

<sup>89</sup> *Tagebuch* 27 October 1900, 45.

<sup>90</sup> See *Erinnerungen Tagebuch*, 57 ff. See also *Tagebuch* 13 October 1900, 45.

<sup>91</sup> *Tagebuch* 13 October 1900, 45. "The Boers are becoming more and more enraged," Sandrock remarked, "because of the brutal treatment they are subjected to by the troops. They are angry because of the devastation that happened. Now they are starting to do the same. This is also the reason why they take up arms again." (My translation, DB.)

refugee camps for burghers and their families loyal to Britain.<sup>92</sup> The scorched earth policy almost reduced the country to a wasteland. Both the white and black civilian population became involved and during 1901 more than a hundred refugee or concentration camps for blacks and whites were set up.<sup>93</sup> The effects of the war were devastating and unmitigated.

By the end of November 1900, the Mission's herdsman and his family were brought into Springfontein and the livestock were left to their fate.<sup>94</sup> At this time, women and children, evacuated from Philippolis, had to be sheltered in the church building until they could depart for Bloemfontein.<sup>95</sup> On Saturday 15 December 1900, Direktor Gensichen again arrived at Springfontein. More than 100 people attended church and listened to his sermon the next day, which Sandrock summarised in *Sestwana*.<sup>96</sup> Gensichen stayed until Christmas Eve, but spent Christmas at Bethany.<sup>97</sup>

For military purposes the Mission's fountain was blocked off. Wilhelm Pieterse had to vacate his house and an officer moved in.<sup>98</sup> By the end of 1900 the church building served as a prison for captured or removed Boers.<sup>99</sup> They attended Sandrock's services under strict supervision (no objections or refusals this time), as well as a concert performed by Miss Warding.<sup>100</sup> These prisoners informed Sandrock (and apparently Gensichen) of the disastrous consequences of laying bare the countryside: everything was burnt, livestock captured and driven away, poultry killed by wringing their necks. Women and children were left in a vulnerable position.<sup>101</sup> Gensichen did not however include any references to this in his journey account – probable because it would have jeopardised his and the missionaries' position.

Early in 1901 a number of captured white men, women and children were again placed under arrest in the church building. They confirmed what Sandrock had already learnt from the previous group,<sup>102</sup> that the civilian population – black and white – were being methodically captured and removed from the farms.<sup>103</sup>

“So ist das Land eine Wüste geworden.”<sup>104</sup> (“Thus the country has become a wasteland.”)

### 1901: Springfontein a rendezvous for black civilian victims of the war

The Springfontein station became a rendezvous for civilian victims of the war.<sup>105</sup> The captured *natives* built shelters and huts on the Berlin Mission's land without any authorisation of the missionary, Sandrock complained. Their livestock came with them. Would they be prepared to accept the gospel and be taken up in the church? Sandrock, accepting the challenge, appointed two spiritual helpers for these camps – grouped into three locations.<sup>106</sup> Most of them, however, were not interested in the church, or in attending any services, the missionary soon realised. Only members of the Berlin Mission attended church.<sup>107</sup> In a report, published in the December 1901 *Missions-Berichte*, he nevertheless informed his German readers: “Welch ein Segen ist es, daß

<sup>92</sup> This War became renowned for its concentration or refugee camps, as they were officially called at the time. Historical investigation highlights in particular the suffering and affliction of white and black civilians in these camps, where approximately 45 000 men, women and children met an untimely death. The ‘brunt of the war’ (Hobhouse E 1902. *The Brunt of the War and Where it Fell*. London: Methuen) fell on these camps. In particular infectious diseases (whooping cough, measles, typhoid fever, diphtheria, diarrhoea and dysentery) claimed a high toll. Pretorius (2000) includes a map, showing the locations of the approximately 100 white concentration camps constructed during the War. For the black camps see Mohlamme 2000:110ff and Kessler 2000:132ff, 148, 150. The Orange River Colony provided for 37 and the Transvaal for 28 black concentration camps, which housed more than 110 000 people. See also “Camps,” [www.anglo-boer.co.za/concentration-camps/](http://www.anglo-boer.co.za/concentration-camps/)

<sup>93</sup> For the involvement of civilians in the war, see Spies S B 1977. *Methods of Barbarism? Roberts and Kitchener and Civilians in the Boer Republics, January 1900-May 1902*. Cape Town: Human & Rousseau; Ploeger J 1990. *Die lotgevalle van die burgerlike bevolking gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*. 5 Vols. Pretoria: Staatsargiefdiens.

<sup>94</sup> *Tagebuch* 29 November 1900, 44.

<sup>95</sup> *Tagebuch* 2 December 1900, 46.

<sup>96</sup> *Missions-Berichte*, April 1901, 149.

<sup>97</sup> *Tagebuch* 18 December 1900, 46.

<sup>98</sup> *Tagebuch* 1 December 1900, 46.

<sup>99</sup> *Erinnerungen*, 59.

<sup>100</sup> *Tagebuch* 27 December 1900, 48.

<sup>101</sup> *Tagebuch* 27 December 1900, 48; 9 January 1901, 48.

<sup>102</sup> *Tagebuch* 9 January 1901, 48; 20 February 1901, 49.

<sup>103</sup> *Tagebuch* 1 January 1901, 48.

<sup>104</sup> *Erinnerungen*, 60. Surplus livestock that could not be handled were either shot dead, or stolen by blacks. Horses and livestock belonging to the Mission were commandeered for military purposes. Sometimes written evidence was not given – a matter that Sandrock later took up with the German Consul. See *Tagebuch* 24 December 1900, 47. During these months Sandrock received viands by train, sent to the Mission station by Rev. Grosskopf of Bloemfontein. See *Erinnerungen*, 58. In August 1901, with the help and influence of the German Consul, an agreement was also made between the Mission Station of Springfontein and the military authorities to compensate for losses and damages to property of the Mission. In terms of this agreement, the Mission could claim for two first-class cart horses, 29 head of cattle, 10 calves, and 65 goats. As for the livestock belonging to the residents of the Mission station, it was left to the British authorities to pay the due price in cash, in case it would not be possible to return the stock in natura – with the exception of one span of 16 oxen, which was to be returned to them in natura. See CO 121 5655/02 (Free State Provincial Archives).

<sup>105</sup> *Erinnerungen*, 63.

<sup>106</sup> *Tagebuch* 13 January 1901, 49. Some reported for baptism and catechism education. Ecclesiastically, however, it remained a multiform situation. Members of other churches did not comply with the Lutheran strictness, he thought.

<sup>107</sup> *Tagebuch* 13 January 1901, 49.

wir jetzt eine Missionsstation haben, auf der sich die armen, zerstreuten Eingeborenen zusammen finden! Jetzt gibt hier so vil Arbeit. Daß ich dieselbe allein nicht ganz bewältigen kann. ... Die Kirche ist beim Gottesdienst stets übervoll ...<sup>108</sup>

Many of the black refugees found employment with the military authorities: building blockhouses, securing the railway line with barbed wire<sup>109</sup> – some were armed and used in espionage operations.<sup>110</sup> Despite these arrangements, conditions in the three camps quickly deteriorated, Sandrock observed. There was no firewood, the accommodation was inadequate and food resources very limited. No medical doctor was available to see to their wellbeing or to monitor the health situation. March saw an increase in illness, resulting in many deaths. Misery and distress rose to new levels at the Springfontein station, as the war continued to exact a grim toll.<sup>111</sup>

The “‘native locations’ were under control of the ‘Station Commandant’”.<sup>112</sup> In a letter to the Secretary of the Orange River Colony, Gostling confirms the official interest and involvement of the British authorities in this regard. He observed that “some of the natives that camped on the land of the German Mission, are refugees, and some are families of men in Government employment”.<sup>113</sup> This statement confirms general practice in the way in which the British managed and used black concentration camps during the war. Springfontein was no exception to the rule.

The existence of so many native huts and shelters on Mission land, however, created a problem for Sandrock. He appealed to the *Kaiserlich Deutsches General-konsulat für Britisch Süd-Afrika*, G. von Lindequist, who brought the matter to the attention of the Deputy Administrator of the Orange River Colony in Bloemfontein, requesting that the three illegal camps be removed from the land of the Berlin Mission.<sup>114</sup> This led to a local investigation by Gostling, the Superintendent of the (white) refugee camp. At the end of May 1901 he reported to Major MH Hall, the Acting Officer-in-command at Springfontein, that he had met with Sandrock on the issue. Sandrock agreed that the two camps on Gerlachsthal<sup>115</sup> could remain where they were, on condition that “those natives at the donga<sup>116</sup> near the railway station” acknowledged the Mission’s rights and therefore paid rent – an arrangement Gostling thought Sandrock should take care of himself. With regard to the third “location a mile west of his house”, the missionary insisted that it should be removed.<sup>117</sup>

After several further meetings and agreements, a conference between the parties and the visiting German Consul<sup>118</sup> decided that the camps on Gerlachsthal could stay where they were. This decision was reached through due consideration of the undesirability of placing these refugees beyond the line of outposts until the cessation of hostilities. The condition that the inhabitants acknowledge the Mission’s rights, and that they were required to pay rent,<sup>119</sup> was also acknowledged. It was decided to move the camp about a mile west of the missionary’s house, thus from the farm Springfontein to a location on Gerlachsthal.

Who were the people occupying this camp? In his *Erinnerungen* Sandrock recorded the existence of an “Ethiopian group” that caused serious trouble. Their actions were politically motivated, and fuelled by the belief that the British had won the war and taken over the country. Convinced of this, they settled on the Mission’s land, he wrote, and erected a church.<sup>120</sup> The “Kommandant” of Springfontein, he recalled, removed them from the land and they were taken to a camp for natives east of the station – on Gerlachsthal,<sup>121</sup> “... wo sie noch viel Unruhe stifteten”.<sup>122</sup> Apparently the authorities implemented strict control and management of the residents.<sup>123</sup>

More information about these camps and their residents during the war could not be traced in the archives. At the same time, Springfontein also became a rendezvous for white civilian victims of the war. West of the railway station and north of the Berlin Mission’s farms Berlin and Springfontein, a white refugee camp was erected at the end of January 1901.

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<sup>108</sup> “What a blessing is it that we at present have a mission station where the poor dispersed natives have gathered together! Now there is so much work that I cannot cope with all by myself. During service the church is always overflowing.” *Missions-Berichte*, December 1901, 453. (My translation, DB.)

<sup>109</sup> *Erinnerungen*, 60.

<sup>110</sup> *Tagebuch* 11 April 1901, 50. See also *Erinnerungen*, *Tagebuch* 63.

<sup>111</sup> *Tagebuch* 19 March 1901, 50. Soldiers, but in most cases many blacks died.

<sup>112</sup> See CO 20 1775/01, 25/5/1901 (Free State Provincial Archives).

<sup>113</sup> CO 201775/01, 31/5/1901 (Free State Provincial Archives).

<sup>114</sup> CO 1686/01 1775/01 (Free State Provincial Archives).

<sup>115</sup> SRC 7 RC 2125 (Free State Provincial Archives).

<sup>116</sup> This is probably a reference to the ballast excavation that was made during the construction of the station.

<sup>117</sup> CO 20 1775/01.

<sup>118</sup> See CO 20 1775/01, 267 (Free State Provincial Archives).

<sup>119</sup> CO 20 1775/01, 68, 69 (Free State Provincial Archives). The amount was 1/- per adult male. See CO 20 1775/01, 33, 34 (Free State Provincial Archives).

<sup>120</sup> See *Missions-Berichte*, October 1903, 555.

<sup>121</sup> *Erinnerungen*, 63. At the moment, (November 1902) Sandrock observed, the Government is very strongly opposed to them.

<sup>122</sup> *Missions-Berichte*, October 1903, 555, “where they further have instigated much unrest.” (My translation, DB.)

<sup>123</sup> See SRC 7 RC 2125 (Free State Provincial Archives). There is list of names, compiled on 30 July 1901. See SRC 15 RC 5674 (Free State Provincial Archives).

## 1901: Springfontein a rendezvous for white civilian victims of the war

Early in 1901 the Springfontein junction, west of the railway line and station, was selected by the British military command as yet another site for the erection of a white refugee camp.<sup>124</sup> In the second week of February 1901, Emily Hobhouse<sup>125</sup> (1860–1926) (Krüger 1972:308–313) passed through Springfontein and was received by Sandrock (Van Reenen 1984:59).<sup>126</sup> The refugee camp was still new and comparatively small: at the end of February 1901 it had 409 inhabitants.<sup>127</sup> En route to Kimberley, she was “again taken in by the Rev. Sandrock, a poor but most hospitable German Lutheran missionary. They give me a room and the best of everything they have (which is not much at the best of times, poor souls, and now their living is very sparse). But I enjoy seeing how they live and they are charming in their simple way and truly generous” (Van Reenen 1984:80).<sup>128</sup>

The most pressing need in the camp was fuel. There was no wood to speak of, and only very limited coal resources. Springfontein was “bare veld, covered with sparse short grass, ringed by bare kopjes – stony and without even grass ... There are no trees ...” Hobhouse noticed (Van Reenen 1984:81).<sup>129</sup> She was aware of the suffering and misery in the black camp too, but could not pay any attention to them herself (Van Reenen 1984:83).<sup>130</sup>

At the beginning of April 1901, more than a 1000 women and children arrived unexpectedly at Springfontein in open coal wagons. They found themselves dumped at a place where no canvas shelter was available. They had to remain in the open veld until the extension of the camp was completed. Sandrock was deeply moved by the wretchedness and anguish – and the crying of the children. “Es ist herzerreissend anzusehen und das Weinen der Kinder zu hören”.<sup>131</sup> The women looked for discarded tins and old sacks in the veld to construct some sort of shelter against the sun and rain.<sup>132</sup> Some asked for food (at the manse) because they received only hard fish, rusks and canned meat. Many suffered from diarrhoea, measles and typhus.<sup>133</sup> At the end of April 1901 more than 1600 people were interned in the tented camp. The camp was bursting out of its seams.<sup>134</sup>

On her journey from Kimberley to Bloemfontein, the train on which Hobhouse was travelling stopped over at Springfontein on Sunday 21 April 1901. Clara Sandrock (15 years of age) was sent with a pot of hot coffee for her. The coffee was given to a cluster of women who were part of a group of 600 people waiting to be transported to Bethulie, where a new camp was under construction. As they had been travelling for two days without receiving food, Hobhouse gave Clara some money “and told her to buy all the food she could in the station and take it down to them, and to devote the day to it, leaving alone church” (Van Reenen 1984:107).<sup>135</sup>

Ten days later, Hobhouse broke her journey to Cape Town at Springfontein. Again, she was received as a guest of the Sandrocks. To her horror she found, still massed on the railway siding, the same unfortunate people whom she had seen when passing north ten days previously. “– Their conditions beggar description –”, she wrote in her memoirs, “... the picture photographed on my mind can never fade” (Van Reenen 1984:111). The people had no tents. Some crept under the railway trucks, others made rude shelters – and waited (Van Reenen 1984:112). To such a shelter she was called to see a sick baby. “The mother sat on her little trunk with the child across her knee. She had nothing to give it and the child was sinking fast ... There was nothing to be done and we watched the child draw its last breath in reverent silence. The mother neither moved nor wept. It was her only child. Dry-eyed but deathly white, she sat there motionless looking not at the child but far, far away into depths of grief beyond all tears. A friend stood behind her who called upon Heaven to witness this tragedy and others crouching on the ground around her wept freely” (Van Reenen 1984:112.) A few years later she described this scene to Anton van Wouw, who reproduced it in bronze (1913) for the Woman’s Memorial in Bloemfontein.

Hobhouse found the camp superintendent rather annoying – he seemed to be drawing her into a political discussion. He tried to extract some remarks on Sandrock’s views, but she shied away. Sandrock was, as was she, indeed under suspicion. Just before she departed the superintendent drew from her “some general remark as

<sup>124</sup> For the white concentration camp at Springfontein, see Britz 2002:235-275 and Raath & Louw 1991. See also *Erinnerungen*, 61 ff.

<sup>125</sup> Hobhouse’s first visit to South Africa to the concentration camps south of Bloemfontein and to Kimberley, Warrenton and Mafikang, occurred between January and May 1901.

<sup>126</sup> Letter 12 To Lady Hobhouse, dd. 10 February 1901. See also *Erinnerungen*, 62.

<sup>127</sup> See the Report by Gostling SRC 3 510 (Free State Provincial Archives).

<sup>128</sup> Letter 18 To Lady Hobhouse, dd. 4 March 1901, 80: “I brought them down a big box of groceries from Bloemfontein to help a bit. Everything here is so scarce, many necessities unobtainable.”

<sup>129</sup> Letter 18 To Lady Hobhouse, dd. 4 March 1901. 81. She found the people “poorer and more utterly destitute than any I have yet seen” (Van Reenen 1984:80).

<sup>130</sup> Letter 18 To Lady Hobhouse, dd. 4 March 1901.

<sup>131</sup> “It is heartbreaking to watch and hear the children crying.” My translation, DB. *Tagebuch* 2 April 1901, 50.

<sup>132</sup> *Tagebuch* 11 April 1901, 50.

<sup>133</sup> *Tagebuch* 11 April 1901, 50.

<sup>134</sup> SRC 6 1689 (Free State Provincial Archives).

<sup>135</sup> Letter 28 To Lady Hobhouse, dd. 22 April 1901.

to their existing different opinions upon Milner's policy ... It found its way to Milner" (Van Reenen 1984:113). The train was signalled and she was seen off by the Sandrocks.

Although Dutch Reformed (applicant or candidate) ministers were appointed by the authorities to see to the pastoral and spiritual needs of the inhabitants of the camp (Britz 2002:236), Sandrock was also involved in this ministry. He was in fact the only ordained minister at Springfontein and therefore baptised many children in the camp.<sup>136</sup> He was also responsible for most of the many funerals (more than 650 in total). The graveyard was laid out on Gerlachsthal<sup>137</sup> and also served military purposes.

By the end of May 1901 – probably temporarily – Superintendent Gostling placed the camp out of bounds for Sandrock “whose anti-English sentiments are well-known and is bent on harassing the authorities”.<sup>138</sup> This coincided with Gostling's ‘political’ conversation with Hobhouse. The agreement between the German Consul, Von Lindequist, the Berlin Mission Society and the British authorities in August 1901 may have redressed the political suspicion against Sandrock.

At the end of the year conditions started to improve, with a shop and a school being built in the camp. Sandrock was not allowed to buy any provisions from the military shop, although troops would sometimes assist the family in this regard by buying provisions for them. Among the troops, Sandrock once noted, were sincere and devoted Christians.<sup>139</sup> In a letter (dd 3 March 1902) to the Mission's director in Berlin, Sandrock underlined the good relationship between the Mission and the military authorities, stating in particular that the soldiers treated them very well.<sup>140</sup> Most of the time their shopping was done at the shop in the camp or they received goods from Bloemfontein.<sup>141</sup> When the entire Sandrock family fell victim to typhus at the end of December 1901, the camp doctor attended them and the refugee camp superintendent sent two women to care for them. Sandrock also received three milk cows, and was allowed to buy soda water and wine. During his illness the congregation was left to its own fate. Feldmann, the church elder, died<sup>142</sup> and Sandrock was unable to attend the Orange Free State Synod in Beaconsfield from 19 to 24 February 1902.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> *Erinnerungen*, 63. See also “Dooop-Register van verscheidene Gemeenten der Ned. Gereformeerde Kerk gedoopt te Springfontein.” (Baptism Register of Several Congregations of the Dutch Reformed Church, baptised at Springfontein.) A 91.60 (Free State Provincial Archives).

<sup>137</sup> In November 1901 he conducted the funerals of 115 residents of the camp. See *Erinnerungen*, 62. He continued with the funerals and baptisms in the camp, and he helped to distribute goods that came from Germany in the camp.

<sup>138</sup> CO 20 1775/01, 85 (Free State Provincial Archives).

<sup>139</sup> *Erinnerungen*, 63.

<sup>140</sup> *Missions-Berichte*, June 1902, 165. “... insonderheit, daß wir keine Last von den Soldaten haben, unter denen wir nun über zwei Jahre wohnen. ... Sie betragen sich überhaupt gut, ich habe noch nie einen betrukenen Soldat gesehen.”

<sup>141</sup> *Erinnerungen*, 63.

<sup>142</sup> *Erinnerungen*, 63.

<sup>143</sup> *Missions-Berichte*, July 1902, 214.

## May 1902: the end of the war

The end of the war came in May 1902. The Sandrock family went on a much-needed holiday to their children in Beaconsfield (Kimberley) and then to *Kaffirland* in the Eastern Cape to rest and recover. On their return, the Springfontein camps were in the process of being broken up. He had the uneasy task – by order of the authorities – of informing the black people that lived on Gerlachsthal that they had to evacuate their camps within two weeks. “Die armen Leute wussten nicht wohin. Ihr Eigentum war ihnen genommen, kein Geld, nichts in Händen, so mussten sie sich mit ihrem Bündelchen in allen Winden zerstreuen um einen Platz zu finden wo sie sich wieder ein Obdach errichten konnten. Hoffentlich lernen sie nun einsehen, dass ihre träuerische, goldene Freiheit nichts als Nebel ist.”<sup>144</sup> On 31 October 1902 the last British troops left Springfontein and on 30 November 1902 martial law was abolished.<sup>145</sup>

The immediate future for the inhabitants of the white camp was also hopeless. Sowing time had passed, livestock imported from the Cape Colony was excessively expensive and prospects were bleak. The claims for damage by the Berlin Mission were rejected, Sandrock noted. Up to that day even “unser Farbigen” have not yet received any compensation. “Wir sind aber Deutsche” (“But we are German”).<sup>146</sup>

By the end of 1902 the Berlin Mission Society asked for official recognition as a mission station from the government.<sup>147</sup> This would give them by law certain concessions as far as the number of natives residing on its property.<sup>148</sup> Only a portion of its land, the part of Springfontein 146, west of the railway line to Cape Town and south of the (eventual) line to Jagersfontein, “together with the small farm Berlin”, received recognition,<sup>149</sup> “as the mission land is not all in one piece it would be undesirable to recognise all of it in view of the probability of Springfontein shortly becoming a township”.<sup>150</sup> In the event of a town being proclaimed a problem would arise if there were three black locations next to it.<sup>151</sup> Thus, the members of Sandrock’s church who lived on Gerlachsthal east of the station had to move across to the recognised part of Springfontein. There they erected houses on both sides of the stream.<sup>152</sup> The Mission school by now had 150 children<sup>153</sup> and Clara Sandrock held the position of teacher there. Petrus Mathani was employed as a paid *Nationalhelfer*, (“native helper”) while Willem Pietersen, Daniël Schalwyk, Samuel Shebe, Jacobus Dewu, Eduard Lefiki, Efraim Lebakeng, Jim Jansen and Johannes Kgompiere were voluntary assistants. Getrud Pietersen, Liza Lepokoane, Maria Mokobeti, Martha Mohule and Maria Pieters served as deaconesses in the church.<sup>154</sup>

## Conclusion

On New Year’s Day 1903, Sandrock sighed: “Aber der Armut ist furchtbar” (“But the poverty is terrible”).<sup>155</sup> Although the war was over, and life had returned to normal, he still had to contend with the consequences of a destructive war that he, and his mission station, had survived. Over the past four years he had been involved in an extraordinary ministry to Boer commandos and British wounded, to black and white civilians who had become victims of the war in refugee camps at Springfontein, as well as to his congregation. He was faced with the discriminatory social structures that determined the life of his congregants. And then, “der alte Bauernhochmut”, that long-standing haughtiness and profound prejudice among the Boers against missionaries and their work, did not pass unseen or without mention. Sandrock was still affected by the memory of the Boer commando attacks on and their destruction of the mission stations, including Bethany in 1848, approximately 50 years before. Nevertheless, an ineradicable and memorable period of his life and ministry was brought to an end.

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<sup>144</sup> *Erinnerungen*, 66. “The poor people did not know where to go. Their property was taken from them, they had no money, were empty handed. With just small bundles [of possessions] they had to disperse in all directions to find a place where they could build a shelter again. Hopefully they now realise that their imagined, dreamed of, golden freedom is nothing but mist.” My translation, DB.

<sup>145</sup> *Missions-Berichte*, October 1903, 556.

<sup>146</sup> *Erinnerungen*, 66. As mentioned, Sandrock was suspected of anti-English feelings. He hints that this is the reason why their compensation claims were delayed.

<sup>147</sup> CO 108 4554/02, 5 November 1902 (Free State Provincial Archives).

<sup>148</sup> CO 108/4554/02 (Free State Provincial Archives).

<sup>149</sup> CO 108 4554/02 (Free State Provincial Archives).

<sup>150</sup> CO 108 4554/02 (Free State Provincial Archives).

<sup>151</sup> CO 108 4554/02 (Free State Provincial Archives).

<sup>152</sup> *Tagebuch* 31 December 1902, 67. These ‘Sandrock locations’ would give offence to the white town of Springfontein until their formal dissolution in 1946. See CO 298 446/04 (Free State Provincial Archives).

<sup>153</sup> CO 108 4554/02 (Free State Provincial Archives).

<sup>154</sup> *Jahresbericht* 1903, 240.

<sup>155</sup> *Tagebuch* 1 January 1903.

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