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Stefanus Ockert Vermeulen<1481>(1857 to 1925), a descendant of Jan Willemsz, bought the farm Vluytjeskraal in 1882. Orania was established on this farm. The graves of S O Vermeulen and his spouse and S O Vermeulen's inscriptions on dolerite stones are still found on the farm and will be preserved for posterity in future development. The full articles depicting the above commitment in full are found on our web page and in the Commemorative Edition.

Stephanus Ockert Vermeulen was the half-brother of Urbanus Johannes Vermeulen <1499>(1883 to 1962) referred to in the article. Their father was Johannes Urbanus Vermeulen<1461>(1815 to 1883) of Hopetown which held the record as the Vermeulen with the most children namely 26. Stephanus was the 8th child and Urbanus Johannes was the youngest of the 26 children.

CONFESSION OF A BOER SNIPER

By Manie Opperman

Snipers are operators with specific talents that are strengthened by training and specialised equipment. Such an operator was Chris Kyle, a member of the US Navy Special Forces (Seals). A recent film, 'American Sniper', is based on an autobiography of his sniping activities in Iraq where he accounted for 160 confirmed victims in military operations. In newspaper reviews the film is described as the most popular war film in recent years and Kyle is portrayed as a national hero.

Having read the reports with interest, I remembered an engraved dolerite stone on which a Boer sniper recorded his victims during the Anglo-Boer War, 1899 to 1902. The stone is located in Orania, a Northern Cape town, on a hill overlooking the Orange River. A concentration of prehistoric and historic engravings occurs here (Opperman 2014). The stone is 1,5 m long and 50 cm wide at one end, tapering to 27 cm at the other. Below the words *Engelse geskiet* ('Englishmen shot') scratched lightly on the stone, are two groups of vertical parallel lines or strokes scratched 11 cm apart. One group consists of 37 and the other of 17 strokes. Each stroke represents a British soldier, making a total of 54. The lengths of the parallel strokes vary from 7 cm to 15 cm and the distance between the strokes varies from 1 cm to 3cm. The style of the lines gives the impression that one person was responsible for making them. There is no name or date attached to the engraving, which is in contrast with other historical engravings found on the site, including some by British soldiers who identified themselves. British forces suffered heavy losses at Magersfontein in December 1899 and minor battles took place at Graspan, Belmont and Modder River in the initial stages of the war. However, there is no documented or oral evidence of fighting having taken place in the area where Orania is located.



Dolerite stone in Orania, Northern Cape, with an engraving by a Boer sniper, Anglo-Boer War. 1899-1902

A farm house dating to the period is located about 1 km north-west of the site. It is possible that the owner at the time, SO Vermeulen, knew who the sniper was and also saw the engraved stone. According to oral family history, Vermeulen often visited the hill and left several engravings himself for posterity (Opperman 2011). Circumstantial evidence, which may indicate the identity of the Boer sniper, was supplied by Flip Vermeulen, a descendant of SO Vermeulen. The Vermeulen men were good marksmen and hunters. However, outstanding in this regard was Urbanus Johannes Vermeulen (1883–1962), whom Flip remembers well. He was the half-brother of SO Vermeulen who acted as his guardian after he lost his father at the age of five months. Urbanus was the youngest of a family of 26 children. He was proud of his shooting ability and kept a record of his hunting successes. Once he bought 100 rounds of ammunition and shot and killed 98 buck. In a photo album of the family Pieters, his name appears with the annotation *Goeie skut* ('Good shot'). Urbanus took part in the Anglo–Boer War, just as many Boer colonials did in the beginning. It would fit his profile to engrave a record of his sniping successes during the war on a stone at a place where there were other engravings by his family. Even in a military context shooting and possibly killing so many soldiers must have influenced the life of the person responsible. The engravings suggest a desire by the Boer sniper to leave a record of his activities, as was the case with the autobiography written by Kyle. Such a desire was not common among members of Boer commandos, although they had a reputation of being good marksmen.

Reminiscences of my grandfather, Jan Opperman, who was a member of the commandos of General Koos De la Rey and other *Oudstryders*, whom I met as a youngster, did not quantify the British soldiers shot during his campaigns. In this respect the engraved stone is unique. Members of Boer commandos were mostly unpaid citizens called up for military service. Their preferred weapon was the 1896, 7 mm Mauser (Bester 2003), which could shoot accurately for up to 400 m. Probably relying on good eyesight and good physical condition, experience gained as a hunter and in previous conflicts, as well as steady nerves and motivated by religion and nationalism, the Boer sniper survived extreme conditions. Even artillery was applied by the British to neutralise snipers.

References

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