

Foreword

by

Theodore Roosevelt, 26th President of the United States of America.

It was during the latter months of 1899, in the Anglo South African War, that Mr. Winston Churchill, a war correspondent for the 'London Morning Post', was taken prisoner by the Boers. Churchill had no darned business anywhere near the fighting, but had capitalized on his many influential connections to be included in a questionable venture on board an armored train.

Churchill's arrest and imprisonment in the Boer capital of Pretoria is a well chronicled piece of history, the majority of these chronicles having been written by Churchill himself! His subsequent escape, however, has been the subject of debate, the true facts never before revealed. It is now evident that Churchill's escape and his grueling journey were planned and implemented by two soldiers of obscure heritage serving in an unofficial American contingent.

The Anglo South African War of 1899 – 1902, between Great Britain and the Boer Republics of the Transvaal and Orange Free State, broke out shortly after my return from the Spanish – American War of 1898.

The tactics of both wars, fought within a short period of each other, could be considered in many ways similar. The British, like the Spanish, commenced by fighting with European tactics, marching in fixed formations like pikemen, against murderous fire from modern weapons. Neither the British nor the Spanish knew the value of mounted

infantry. Consequently, the British suffered sorely at the hands of Boer mounted riflemen and the Spanish learned their lesson most sharply from my own Rough Riders.

During the Boer War, the British were fortunate to have their Empire from which they could draw this type of horseman, the hardy healthy, self-reliant soldier, born to the saddle and gun. These were the only volunteer units equal to the Boer Commandos during the early months and it was some time before the British High Command understood.

My own experience with the Rough Riders left the impression upon me that they would have served with distinction if allowed into South Africa on the side of the British. This, of course, could not officially happen. But two adventurous spirits who served in the Rough Riders, Osborne, an Australian who had been an officer in the New South Wales Mounted Rifles, and Cook, an Englishman, who had served previously in South Africa, were vocal in their wishes to fight against the Boers.

I believe this eventually happened. With the cessation of the war with the Spanish, the Rough Riders were disbanded, and Osborne and Cook conceivably recruited Americans for this adventure. Twenty-three thousand Americans volunteered for the original Rough Riders, out of which I had to hand pick one thousand. Osborne and Cook, therefore, would have had no difficulty in finding 500 plainsmen for their volunteer force for South Africa.

I have said it before and I will say it again: In all the world there could be no better material for soldiers than that afforded by these grim hunters of the mountains, these wild rough riders of the plains.

Funds for this covert American contingent probably flowed directly from Mr. Cecil Rhodes, the colossus of Africa. Rhodes stood to gain immensely from this war of annexation of territory ripe for exploitation. Money for any soldiers of fortune was readily available from his coffers.

Considering the strict physical standards of recruitment for this American unit, which had been designated the 'Rhodes Mounted Rifles', and rather humorously nicknamed 'Cecil's Chiselers', it is a mystery how two low Englishmen crept into their ranks. They feature, rather ignominiously, in this book. They brought no honor to American arms, so they must have been examples of the strange bedfellows one hears about and with whom we have to lie, infrequently if we are lucky.

In this story the characters are not horsemen, they are bicyclists. I can only conclude that the British saw merit in the bicycle for military purposes, whereas the United States Army had concluded the opposite. In 1897, bicyclists of the U.S. 25th Infantry Bicycle Corps rode 1900 miles from Missoula, Montana to St. Louis, Missouri. The Bicycle Corps was disbanded after this experiment. The British, however, felt differently and with their traditional obstinacy continued using bicycles for military purposes.

Of the lead character, Winston Churchill, an aristocrat and descendent of the English Duke of Marlborough, I know very little. It is to his credit that his mother was an American. But I am less than knowledgeable about either aristocrats or half-breeds. I notice that the writer has chosen the title 'Beside the Golden Door', a quotation from the poet Emma Lazarus that appears on the Statue of Liberty. What an infernal cheek!