

13 May 1915: Bloemfontein's night of broken glass

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Abstract

Less than a year after the outbreak of the Great (First World) War, the sinking of the passenger ship, RMS *Lusitania* on 7 May 1915 by a German submarine off the coast of Ireland and the death of 1 198 of its passengers and crew, including at least 128 from the then still neutral United States of America, led to much condemnation. In many Allied countries there also followed anti-German protests and riots, including in the Union of South Africa. On 13 May 1915, anti-German riots and the concomitant torching of German businesses took place even in Bloemfontein, where for many decades, people of various cultural groups had lived together in harmony. In this article the reasons for and consequences of the riots in Bloemfontein are analysed. Emphasis will, in particular, be placed on the way in which the local newspapers portrayed the events.

Keywords: First World War; *Lusitania*; Bloemfontein; Riots; Anti-German propaganda/demonstrations.

Introduction

On 14 May 1915 the Bloemfontein newspaper, *The Friend*, reported that “never in its history probably has Bloemfontein experienced an orgy of lawlessness such as was witnessed in its streets...”¹ The paper referred to an event which took place in Bloemfontein, the capital of the then Orange Free State² (as well as in several other South African towns and cities) during the Great (First World) War (1914-1918). During the evening of 13 May 1915 members of the city's local German community were the victims of a shocking, violent outburst. What exactly sparked the Bloemfontein riots? Proceeding from the assumption that violent conflict in the global arena can have profoundly negative consequences for a community far away from the main operational areas, it is the purpose of this study to examine the

1 *The Friend*, 14 May 1915.

2 Since 29 June 1995 known as the Free State Province.

reasons for and consequences of what might be termed “Bloemfontein’s night of broken glass”.

“All dependent on one another”: Bloemfontein’s early white community

Bloemfontein’s earliest white inhabitants did not constitute a homogenous group. Since the founding of the city in 1846, English, Scottish, Irish, Dutch/Afrikaners, Jews and Germans had settled here, giving the town³ a cosmopolitan character. This stood in stark contrast to the rest of the Orange Free State which was mostly inhabited by Dutch-speaking farmers (the so-called Boers); in due course also referred to as Afrikaners. In the difficult pioneering circumstances of those days, ethnic differences diminished in the face of the numerous challenges with which the locals had to deal. For the sake of survival, everyone had to co-operate and stand together. The well-known Sophie Levisieur, a local Jew of German descent, explained that in “...those days we were all dependent on one another. We worked and played together and were really friends. There was no question of any racial non-sense [sic]”.⁴ According to her, the small Bloemfontein community – including the Jews, Germans, English-speakers and Afrikaners – was like a ‘big family’ and they lived in relative peace for the sake of brotherly goodwill and their mutual survival.⁵

Although they constituted a comparatively small minority, the local German community made a positive and tangible contribution to Bloemfontein’s prosperity; it may even be argued that the Germans’ contribution to Bloemfontein’s growth was out of proportion to their actual numbers. Well-known Bloemfontein families of German descent included the Borckenhagens, Dalldorfs, Fichardts, Fraundorfers, Haarburgers, Kellners, Krauses, Radloffs, Schermbrückers, Stollreithers and Wockes. Some families, such as the Baumanns, Ehrlichs and Levisieurs, were Jews from German descent. Through the years many of Bloemfontein’s leaders, especially in the fields of medicine and business, had emerged from the ranks of the German community. In fact, Bloemfontein’s first

3 Bloemfontein received city status only in 1945, but became the capital city of the Orange Free State Boer republic in 1854, and was and is the capital *city* of the (Orange) Free State province since 1910. Consequently, post-1854 Bloemfontein will be referred to as a city in this article; until 1854 a town.

4 *The Friend*, 23 July 1934. See also Bloemfontein Public Library (hereafter BPL), Bloemfontein, Afric. 920LEV, Memories of Sophie Levisieur, p. 101.

5 BPL, Bloemfontein, Afric. 920LEV, Memories of Sophie Levisieur. See also M Bidwell & CH Bidwell, *Pen pictures of the past* (ed. K Schoeman), Vrijstatia series no. 5 (Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1986), pp. 19, 32. For similar sentiments, see Caroline Egginton’s reminiscences, *The Friend*, 4 December 1936.

medical practitioners were all German. The names of Dr CJG Krause, Dr BO Kellner⁶ and Dr M Stollreither may be mentioned in this regard.⁷

Furthermore, many of Bloemfontein's prominent family businesses were German-owned for generations. The well-known Fichardt's department store⁸ was a beacon in Bloemfontein's city centre for decades. In addition, Ivan Haarburger, who served as mayor of Bloemfontein from 1912 to 1914, owned a music shop, and the Dalldorf family managed a large department store under the name Dalldorf Brothers. Other influential German personalities included Carl Borckenhagen, who was editor of the influential (and anti-British) Bloemfontein newspaper *De Express*, and Wolff Ehrlich,⁹ who was twice elected as mayor of Bloemfontein.¹⁰

The role played by the Lutheran Church and the local Lutheran pastors, specifically Rev P Winter and his successor Rev JG Grosskopf, deserve mentioning. Rev Grosskopf was well respected among Bloemfontein's Afrikaners and he and many other local Germans were sympathetic towards the Afrikaners, most notably during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) when many Germans in the Reich sympathised with the Afrikaners (Boers); but the Kaiser and his government stayed strictly neutral.¹¹ In a letter to Rev'd. Grosskopf, a group of prominent local Afrikaner women thanked him for his support of the Afrikaners:¹²

6 J Haasbroek, "Die rol van dr BO Kellner in Bloemfontein 1863-1918", *Navorsing van die Nasionale Museum Bloemfontein*, 20(4), November 2004, pp. 74-87.

7 GPJ Trümpelmann, *Deutsches Schaffen im Oranje-Freistaat: Festgabe zur Feier des 75-jährigen Bestehens der deutsch-lutherischen Gemeinde zu Bloemfontein* (Supplement to *Die Eiche*, Beilage 8, 1950), pp. 15-18; Anon., *Feeskryf: Duitse Feesjaar 1992* (Bloemfontein, Reëlingskomitee OVS, 1992), pp. 8-10; SM Botes, "Bloemfontein gedurende die bewind van president F.W. Reitz, 1889-1895: 'n kultuurhistoriese studie" (PhD, UFS, 2014), pp. 77-80; J Haasbroek, "Die rol van Wolff Ehrlich in Bloemfontein", *Navorsing van die Nasionale Museum Bloemfontein*, 22(3), July 2006, pp. 78-79.

8 J Haasbroek, "Die rol van Charles (Charlie) Gustav Fichardt in Bloemfontein 1891-1923", *Navorsing van die Nasionale Museum Bloemfontein*, 28(4), December 2012, pp. 56-57.

9 For more details, see J Haasbroek, "Die rol van Wolff Ehrlich...", *Navorsing van die Nasionale Museum Bloemfontein*, 22(3), July 2006, pp. 89-103.

10 Anon., *The German contribution to the development of the Orange Free State* (Unpublished manuscript, no place or publisher), pp. 6-7.

11 For more information about German support of the Afrikaners during the Anglo-Boer War, see Free State Provincial Archives (hereafter FSPA), Bloemfontein, Accession A.155.41 (vol. 3, 4, 10, 12); FSPA, Bloemfontein, Accession A.155.164 (vol. 2). It should also be noted that at least 850 Germans joined the Boer forces during this war as foreign volunteers. See e.g. E Wessels, *They fought on foreign soil* (Bloemfontein, Anglo-Boer War Museum, 2001), pp. 96-131.

12 FSPA, Bloemfontein, Accession A.162.16: Letter from the Dames Komite Boeren Hulp Fonds to Rev'd. JG Grosskopf, 28 May 1907, p. 1. "...not only in times of sunshine, but particularly in the dark days of the most recent war [Anglo-Boer War], when few people in this city [Bloemfontein] were willing to show true sympathy with our suffering and depressed people in the camps or elsewhere...". (Free translation.) Please note that in the light of the fact that by 1915 there was a transition from Dutch to Afrikaans, the spelling of certain words might differ from one source to the other; e.g. "die" and "de", and "y" and "ij".

...niet alleen in tyden van zonneshyn, maar meer byzonder in de donkere dagen tydens den jongsten oorlog [Anglo-Boer War], toen er maar weinigen in deze stad [Bloemfontein] waren, die de vrymoedigheid hadden ware sympathie met onze lydenden en bedrukten in de Kampen of elders te betoonen.

The Lutherans not only reached out to the Afrikaners, but also to the local black community. The Lutheran Mission Church in Goddard Street was a spiritual home for some of Waaihoek's¹³ black residents for many years. It may thus be argued that all spheres of Bloemfontein society were in some way or another touched by members of the local German community. Many of Bloemfontein's leading and influential residents were German, and the German community, which at one stage could boast to be the biggest non-English-speaking group in the Free State capital, brought with them a level of development and sophistication that is not typically associated with pioneer communities.¹⁴

The advent of the twentieth century ushered in a new and more complex era for Bloemfontein, particularly as far as the city's inter-group relations were concerned. After the Anglo-Boer War, Bloemfontein's demography changed considerably because large numbers of English and Scottish immigrants settled in the city. A sizeable portion of these newcomers were military personnel who were stationed at the Tempe military base on the outskirts of the city. Bloemfontein, which was already predominantly English before the war, became even more so after the war. As a result, the balance of power tilted decisively in favour of the English-speaking community. Despite this trend (which inevitably led to the demise of the other minority groups' influence), respect and goodwill still characterised relationships in Bloemfontein's white community, which was by then largely integrated. The common interest and a strong commitment to the welfare of the community as a whole were still more important than petty differences.¹⁵ But these pragmatic attitudes came under pressure at a time when an English superiority complex and the demands of the 'Empire', which expected of citizens to support Britain's

13 Waaihoek was one of Bloemfontein's black townships or locations – as they were known in those years and for most of the twentieth century.

14 GPJ Trümpelmann, *Deutsches Schaffen im Oranje-Freistaat...*, pp. 15-16, 19-20; Anon., "Die Duitse bydrae tot die geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika", *Lantern*, XI(4), June 1962, pp. 16-17; Anon., *Feesskrif: Duitse Feesjaar 1992...*, pp. 8, 10; SM Botes, "Bloemfontein gedurende die bewind..." , pp. 77, 79, 81.

15 D du Bruyn (Personal Collection), interview, AD Hoehne (daughter-in-law of E Hoehne, Bloemfontein), 10 June 2016.

imperialist aspirations, began to weaken the social fibre of the Bloemfontein community.¹⁶

The major turning point in Bloemfontein's inter-group relations came in 1914 with the outbreak of the Great (First World) War. After Britain had declared war on Germany on 4 August, tensions between English-speakers and German-speakers all over South Africa increased, including in Bloemfontein. As a dominion of the British Empire, all South Africans were automatically involved in the conflict, although they could decide to what extent they would actively support Britain's war effort. General Louis Botha's government decided that it was indeed in South Africa's interest to actively participate, and in due course invaded and defeated the German forces in German South-West Africa.¹⁷ These events placed the local German community in a difficult position. Although they were in most cases German-speaking, most Bloemfontein residents of German descent were also patriotic South Africans and entirely committed to Bloemfontein, the town which they and their ancestors had served and helped to build. But the tide had turned against them and they had to brace themselves against the animosity of an English-speaking majority, many of whom were newcomers to Bloemfontein.¹⁸

“An everlasting infamy”: The sinking of the RMS *Lusitania*

The smouldering anti-German sentiment reached a climax when the news got to Bloemfontein that the 240 m 31 500 ton British Cunard Steamship Company passenger liner RMS (i.e. Royal Mail-Ship) *Lusitania* had sunk after it was torpedoed by a German submarine, the *U* (i.e. Unterseeboot) 20, commanded by Kapitänleutnant (i.e. Lieutenant) Walther (or Walter) Schwieger on the afternoon of Friday 7 May 1915.¹⁹ The ship was on its way

16 GPJ Trümpelmann, *Deutsches Schaffen im Oranje-Freistaat...*, pp. 22-24; K Schoeman, *Bloemfontein: Die ontstaan van 'n stad 1846-1946* (Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1980), pp. 170, 183. See also AH Marais, “Die politieke uitwerking van die verhouding van die Afrikaanssprekende tot die Engelssprekende 1910-1915” (PhD, UOFS, 1972).

17 JJ Collyer, *The campaign in German South-West Africa 1914-1915* (Pretoria, The Government Printer, 1937); G L'Ange, *Urgent imperial service (South African forces in German South West Africa 1914-1915)* (Rivonia, Ashanti, 1991).

18 K Schoeman, *Bloemfontein: Die ontstaan van 'n stad...*, pp. 236-238; GPJ Trümpelmann, *Deutsches Schaffen im Oranje-Freistaat...*, p. 27.

19 For detailed descriptions of the event in local newspapers, see *The Friend*, 10 May 1915, 29 May 1915; *Het Volksblad*, 14 May 1915; *De Vriend des Volkes*, 10 May 1915. For general sources on the sinking of the *Lusitania*, see e.g. AA Hoehling and M Hoehling, *The last voyage of the Lusitania* (London, Longmans, Green and Co, 1957); C Simpson, *Lusitania* (London, Longman, 1972); TA Bailey and PB Ryan, *The Lusitania disaster. An episode in modern warfare and diplomacy* (New York, The Free Press, 1975); D Hickey and G Smith, *Seven days to disaster. The sinking of the Lusitania* (London, Collins, 1981); D Preston, *Wilful murder. The sinking of the Lusitania* (London, Doubleday, 2002).

from New York to Liverpool when it was hit (at 14:10) by a torpedo 18 km off the Old Head of Kinsale on the south-eastern Irish coast near Cork, and sank at 14:28 (i.e. a mere 18 minutes since struck by the torpedo). Prior to the ship's departure from the United States of America (USA), the German embassy in Washington, D.C. published (on 22 April) a statement in 50 USA newspapers which warned passengers that all:²⁰

... vessels flying the flag of Great Britain, or of any of her allies, are liable to destruction in those waters [i.e. the war zone] and that travellers sailing in the war zone on ships of Great Britain or her allies do so at their own risk.

Initially, Germany feared that unrestricted submarine warfare could bring the USA into the war, but on 18 February 1915 Germany nevertheless resorted to such warfare in an effort to cut Great Britain off from her war supply sources. There was indeed an increase in the number of merchant ships that were sunk, and Britain suffered accordingly.²¹

Despite the passengers also receiving messages warning them that the ship could be torpedoed by German submarines, the *Lusitania's* Captain, William Thomas Turner, was apparently unconcerned about these threats. Turner's ignorance happened to be a fatal error because German submarines stalked British waters and were continually looking for enemy ships to sink.²² A heavy price was paid: of the at least 1 257 (maximum 1 266) passengers and 696 (maximum 702) crew on board, 1 198 died, including 128 USA citizens. (Three anonymous stowaways also died.)²³ The world, particularly the Allied powers, reacted with shock and outrage, especially after it was reported that the victims included nearly a hundred babies and children under the age of two years. It was the greatest disaster at sea since the loss of the ill-fated RMS *Titanic* in the early hours of 15 April 1912.²⁴ Germany was widely condemned and the overriding sentiment was that the atrocity "will cost Germany dear".²⁵ Later, it was revealed that apart from the human cargo, the

20 D Preston, *Wilful murder...*, p. 89; TA Bailey and PB Ryan, *The Lusitania disaster...*, pp. 66-79; *The Friend*, 8 May 1915.

21 D Preston, *Wilful murder...*, pp. 40-41, 61-72; TA Bailey and PB Ryan, *The Lusitania disaster...*, pp. 47-63.

22 For more on the development of submarines and their role in World War I, see e.g. R Humble, *Undersea warfare* (London, New English Library, 1981); A Preston, *Submarines* (London, Bison Books, 1982); J Crane, *Submarine* (London, British Broadcasting Corporation, 1984).

23 Sources supply different figures with regard to the number of passengers and crew on board, as well as to the number who died, e.g. C Simpson, *Lusitania*, p. 9 says 1 201 died; D Hickey and G Smith, *Seven days to disaster...*, p. 317 says 1 195. D Preston, *Wilful murder...*, p. 299 also says 1 201, and seems to be the most reliable figure. Of the 129 children on board, 94 died, including 35 of the 39 babies.

24 R Gardiner and D van der Vat, *The riddle of the Titanic* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1995).

25 *The Friend*, 10 May 1915.

Lusitania also carried 173 tons of ammunition, including 4 million rounds of rifle ammunition, as well as empty shell cases and non-explosive fuses. As a matter of fact, the ship was (although unarmed) officially classified as an auxiliary warship.²⁶ Furthermore, it has to be borne in mind that Germany had declared the seas around the British Isles a war zone. Nevertheless, the sinking of the *Lusitania* strongly turned public opinion in the USA against Germany, and when the USA eventually, on 6 April 1917, declared war against Germany and joined the Allies, the sinking of the *Lusitania* was one of the motivating factors.²⁷

South Africa was not unaffected by the *Lusitania* tragedy. Except for the fact that many English-speaking South Africans still felt emotionally attached to Britain, which many of them still considered 'home', it was also reported that two of the victims of the disaster were South Africans, namely Cathie Dougall of Pretoria (the talented daughter of one of the sisters of the well-known Afrikaans poet and newspaper editor, Eugène Marais) and Alec Stuart of Germiston.²⁸ There were anti-German riots in England, Canada, Australia, the USA²⁹ and also across South Africa, particularly in the towns and cities which had substantial English-speaking populations, including Johannesburg, Pretoria, Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and Kimberley.³⁰ The sinking of the *Lusitania* was considered "an everlasting infamy"³¹ and according to most English-speaking South Africans, the huge death toll justified violent retaliation. Emotionally-charged reporting in English newspapers fanned the flames of protest. In Durban, *The* [Natal

26 D Preston, *Wilful murder...*, pp. 406-407; TA Bailey and PB Ryan, *The Lusitania disaster...*, pp. 10-11, 14-25, 96-113.

27 N Cawthorne, *Shipwrecks: Disasters of the deep* (London, Arcturus Publishing Limited, 2005), pp. 3, 131-133; BH Liddell Hart, *History of the First World War* (London, Cassell, 1970), p. 106; *Volksblad*, 16 March 2015; *The Friend*, 14 May 1915; *Het Volksblad*, 14 May 1915; V Alhadeff, *South Africa in two world wars: A newspaper history* (Cape Town, Don Nelson, 1979), p. 35. See also FSPA, Accession A.298: Various intercepted German telegrams, 10-15 May 1915; and W Mills, *Road to war: America, 1914-1917* (New York, Howard Fertig, 1970), pp. 162-191.

28 *The Friend*, 11 May 1915; LE Brink, "Die lewe, werk en invloed van F.V. Engelenburg in Suid-Afrika (1889-1938)" (PhD, North-West University, Vaal Triangle Campus, 2015), p. 340.

29 FSPA, Accession A.298: Telegram No 191, 15 May 1915. See also D Hickey and G Smith, *Seven days...*, pp. 267-270; D Preston, *Wilful murder...*, pp. 304-309.

30 For more details about the riots, see T Dederling, "Avenge the *Lusitania*': The anti-German riots in South Africa in 1915", *Immigrants & Minorities*, 31(3), 2013, pp. 266-272; LWF Grundlingh, "n Aspek van blanke Suid-Afrikaanse groepsverhoudinge tydens die Eerste Wêreldoorlog: Anti-Duitse opstande, Mei 1915", *South African Historical Journal*, 12(1), 1980, pp. 70-77; LE Brink, "Die lewe, werk en invloed van F.V. Engelenburg...", pp. 340-341; *The Friend*, 10 May 1915, 18 May 1915; *The Bloemfontein Post*, 14 May 1915; *Het Volksblad*, 18 May 1915; *De Vriend des Volkes*, 20 May 1915; *The Natal Witness*, 19 May 1915; P Thompson, "'Wipe out the Vons!' The Pietermaritzburg Vigilance Committee and the sinking of the *Lusitania*, May 1915", *New Contree*, 74, December 2015, pp. 90-111.

31 *The Friend*, 10 May 1915.

Mercury] *Pictorial* referred to the sinking as an act of “murder” and “a crime against the laws of nations, of humanity, and the Deity cold-blooded savagery displayed by the Kaiser’s assassins...”³²

Johannesburg, which was by then South Africa’s largest English-speaking city, took the lead when German-owned businesses and properties, including German-owned hotels and beer halls, were attacked and set alight on 12 May. No less than 51 properties in the city centre were burnt down completely.³³ In Durban a mass protest meeting was organised for Monday 17 May, but before that took place, the port city was racked by serious rioting and much concomitant destruction. Rioting broke out late on the afternoon of 13 May and continued throughout the night of 13-14 May, as well as on the evening of 14 May. During these anti-German demonstrations a large number of buildings belonging to Germans were set alight right across the city and in many instances completely destroyed, including shops, bars and hotels. In some instances, the property of Germans who were loyal to the South African government, was also destroyed, including Germans whose son(s) had joined the Union Defence Forces and who had fought against the German forces in German South-West Africa.³⁴

The fierceness and violent nature of the anti-German protests were unexpected and took Bloemfontein by surprise, but many residents sympathised with the underlying anger that triggered the violence. English-speakers were also dismayed with the Botha government’s initial inaction on the question of the internment of German citizens or so-called ‘enemy subjects’.³⁵ The pro-British Bloemfontein newspaper, *The Friend*, therefore warned that a “...wave of indignation and bitterness is spreading among the English-speaking people in this country...”³⁶

Bloemfontein’s local newspapers, including *The Friend* and *The Bloemfontein Post*, which were both pro-British, *De Vriend des Volks*, a sister publication of *The Friend* and a supporter of the Botha government, and *Het Volksblad* (previously *Het Westen*), a pro-Afrikaner newspaper which supported General JBM Hertzog’s National Party, reported in great detail on the Johannesburg riots. *Het Volksblad* was the only paper that was openly sympathetic to the

32 *The [Natal Mercury] Pictorial*, 14 May 1915.

33 *Het Volksblad*, 14 May 1915; *The Bloemfontein Post*, 13 May 1915; *The Friend*, 13 May 1915; *The [Natal Mercury] Pictorial*, 21 May 1915; *The Natal Witness*, 18 May 1915.

34 *The [Natal Mercury] Pictorial*, 14 May 1915, 21 May 1915, 28 May 1915; *The Natal Witness*, 15 May 1915.

35 *The Friend*, 13 May 1915.

36 *The Friend*, 13 May 1915.

German cause. The big question on 13 May was what Bloemfontein's reaction would be. According to *The Bloemfontein Post* the "... general expression of opinion [in Bloemfontein] is satisfaction at what had been done [in Johannesburg]..." and it posed the following question: "Is Bloemfontein to fall into line with other large and important centres and voice its protest by public meetings or more violent means?" The paper asked some Bloemfontein citizens their opinions on this and, true to Bloemfontein's tradition of resolving issues by peaceful means, no violence was expected. A male resident stated that "Bloemfontein has been dilatory in this respect, and apparently no one wishes to take the lead", while another was of the opinion that "People here are too apathetic, as a whole, to take any decisive step in which there is an element of danger".³⁷ Although an air of uneasiness could be sensed in Bloemfontein's streets on 13 May, nobody suspected any trouble to the extent of what had happened in Johannesburg the previous day. But apparently, Bloemfontein's anger at the *Lusitania* tragedy and the South African government's inaction on the enemy subject issue was still simmering. Not for long, though, because that night it resulted in a violent outburst.³⁸

"Night of broken glass": The riots of 13 May 1915

Thursday 13 May 1915 was Ascension Day (and consequently a national religious holiday in South Africa, as was or is the case in several other countries).³⁹ According to some reports, there happened to be an informal gathering of young white men at President Brand's statue in front of the Government Building in President Brand Street around midday. (The consulted sources make no reference to any black or coloured participants.) It is not clear what was discussed or what decisions were taken during that gathering. The rest of the day was peaceful until about 19:00, when a crowd of young men "in khaki and civilians"⁴⁰ gathered at the railway station. When the clock struck 19:30 one of them shouted "Come on, *kêrels!*"⁴¹ and the crowd started to move down Maitland Street⁴² – the city's main street – towards the city centre. By then, other townsfolk were also gathering in

³⁷ *The Bloemfontein Post*, 13 May 1915.

³⁸ *Het Volksblad*, 18 May 1915.

³⁹ Anon., "A history of public holidays in South Africa" (available at <http://www.westggsa.blogspot.co.za/2007/12/history-of-public-holidays-in-south.html>, as accessed on 26 January 2016), pp. 1-2.

⁴⁰ *The Bloemfontein Post*, 14 May 1915.

⁴¹ *The Bloemfontein Post*, 14 May 1915; 'Kêrels' an Afrikaans word meaning 'men'.

⁴² Today known as Charlotte Maxeke Street.

Maitland Street and an “unwonted liveliness” was observed among those who were present. Spontaneous shouts of ‘Rule Britannia’ and ‘God save the King’ could be heard. According to *The Friend*, it was clear that “something out of the common”⁴³ was about to happen when a sizeable crowd started to move to the Dalldorf Brothers department store. The police, who expected trouble, followed them and prevented them from forcing open the shop’s front door. Thwarted in their efforts, a big portion of the crowd broke away and headed to Fichardt’s in Upper Church Street.⁴⁴ There was no violence until someone threw a stone at one of the store’s huge display windows. The sound of the shattering glass appeared to be the signal the crowd had been waiting for.⁴⁵

According to *The Bloemfontein Post* the crowd’s “plans had been laid carefully in advance” and their splitting up in two groups – one group staying behind at Dalldorf’s and the other group moving to Fichardt’s – was aimed at dividing the police’s attention. At Fichardt’s, all hell broke loose when the crowd started to pelt the building with stones, aiming for the windows. According to *The Bloemfontein Post*’s reporter the “stoning waxed fast and furious”⁴⁶ and in a short time most of the shop’s windows were reduced to smithereens. While the stoning was in process, the crowd’s numbers were strengthened by a contingent of soldiers from the Tempe military base. When the soldiers, some of whom were based in Bloemfontein temporarily, heard about the riots, they came armed with sticks, axe handles and whistles. They came to support the crowd not only in spirit but also in practical ways, and they soon “took charge of operations”.⁴⁷ The soldiers considerably swelled the ranks of the rioters while the police, under the command of Lieut-Col GS Beer, then Acting Deputy Commissioner of Police in the Orange Free State, were far outnumbered. The police battled to protect Fichardt’s against the onslaught of “an uncontrollable mob”.⁴⁸ Amidst the chaos Arthur Fichardt, one of the managers of the family business, arrived on the scene and attempted to address the crowd. Barely audible amidst the noise, he tried his best to explain that his firm was not German. (His father was born in Germany in 1834 but settled in Bloemfontein as a businessman in 1853, and married a lady from the Cape Colony. In 1897 Arthur married a daughter of the well-known Bloemfontein newspaper editor and influential political adviser, Carl Borckenhagen). The

43 *The Friend*, 14 May 1915.

44 Today known as OR Tambo Street.

45 *The Friend*, 14 May 1915; *The Bloemfontein Post*, 14 May 1915.

46 *The Bloemfontein Post*, 14 May 1915.

47 *The Friend*, 14 May 1915.

48 *The Friend*, 14 May 1915.

crowd, however, refused to listen; he was heckled and mocked; his car was pushed away, and eventually he had to flee under a rain of stones.⁴⁹

Image 1: The damaged store of Ivan Haarburger



Source: National Museum, Bloemfontein (NM no 3718).

Arthur Fichardt's hasty and humiliating departure was met with enthusiastic approval from the crowd. It was considered a 'victory' and they celebrated it with the singing of patriotic songs, including the popular 'Tipperary'. Neither Lieut-Col Beer nor Arthur Fichardt's appeals could calm down the crowd. In fact, it spurred them on. Seizing the moment, three young men clambered up a nearby telegraph pole and triumphantly 'hoisted' a Union Jack. Again, there was an overwhelming roar and then a strange lull, as if the crowd was waiting for further instruction. Someone from the crowd suggested Moritz Levisseur's⁵⁰ coal and cement business on the market square (later named Hoffman Square) as the next target, but it was pointed out that two of his

49 GPJ Trümpelmann, "Fichardt, Carl Eberhard", WJ de Kock and DW Krüger (eds), *Dictionary of South African biography* 2 (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1972), pp. 234-235; *The Bloemfontein Post*, 14 May 1915; *The Friend*, 14 May 1915; *De Vriend des Volks*, 17 May 1915; *Het Volksblad*, 18 May 1915; K Schoeman, *Bloemfontein: Die ontstaan...*, p. 241.

50 Moritz Levisseur was Sophie Levisseur's husband.

sons were fighting in the war for the Allied powers. Then, from somewhere in the crowd a voice roared "The German Club!".⁵¹ Led by the whistling soldiers, a big crowd made for the well-known landmark in Fountain Street. Because of the German Club's symbolic meaning, it was vigorously attacked. A crowd of well over a thousand people were already present at the club when the rioters arrived there. Most of them were curious onlookers who did not actively participate in the violence, but they incited those who did. Without much effort, the rioters managed to force their way into the club.

Outside, two fires were started and eyewitnesses later testified how books and furniture came hurtling through broken windows and into the eager hands of those who were feeding the flames. Satisfied that the building's contents had been destroyed, the rioters went inside and set the building alight. At this stage Bloemfontein's fire brigade arrived on the scene, trying to prevent the fire from spreading to the neighbouring buildings. Headed by Fire Master W Lacey Savage, the firemen managed to quench the fire with their hoses, but they could do little to calm down the crowd. The rioters were further incited when a protester got hold of German flags, which were then set on fire.⁵²

Realising the situation was getting out of hand, Lieut-Col Beer and a number of policemen, as well as members of the Bloemfontein Civilian Training Association⁵³ who supported the police, once again tried to intervene by threatening the instigators with arrest, but to no avail. Until then the police had put up a brave effort to protect German properties, but it became increasingly difficult because the rioters started playing cat-and-mouse with them. By continuously breaking up into several smaller groups, the rioters made it impossible for the police to resist all of them at the same time. Emboldened by their 'success' at the German Club, the excited⁵⁴ rioters were bent on attacking more properties and they headed back to Maitland Street. Overwhelmed by the sheer numbers, the police were unable to prevent the different groups from attacking Ivan Haarburger's music store, E Hoehne & Co.'s bicycle and motorbike shop, WJ Glietenberg's optometrist practice and the Belgian consulate (In the light of the fact that anything foreign was regarded as a potential enemy of the state, the Belgian consulate was also targeted). The modus operandi was the same in all instances: first the windows

51 *The Bloemfontein Post*, 14 May 1915.

52 *The Friend*, 14 May 1915; *The Bloemfontein Post*, 14 May 1915; *De Vriend des Volks*, 17 May 1915; *Het Volksblad*, 18 May 1915; K Schoeman, *Bloemfontein: Die ontstaan van 'n stad...*, p. 241.

53 *The Friend*, 2 June 1915.

54 According to *De Vriend des Volks* the crowd was "door het vuur opgewonden", that is "excited by the fires".

were smashed (this time not with stones but with sticks and axe handles); then the contents of the buildings was carried out into the street and set alight. The scattered gangs soon regrouped again to discuss their next target. Someone mentioned that the Bloemfontein Hotel had a German owner – a fact which, according to the rioters, made the property eligible for attack. A fairly big crowd rushed off to the hotel and forced their way into the bar, which was completely ransacked and liquor bottles, including prized Johnnie Walker whisky, smashed and their contents poured out into the street.⁵⁵

Image 2: Fichard's store after the rioting



Source: National Museum, Bloemfontein (NM no 3357).

The next target was the Dalldorf Brothers department store in Charles Street, which was already broken into earlier that night, but abandoned when the police showed up. This time the rioters were determined to cause considerable damage. Again, the soldiers took the lead and started bonfires near the building. As was the case at the German Club, the crowd divided into two teams: one passing on goods and the other one receiving and burning them. The fire brigade rushed to the scene, but the firemen were thwarted in their efforts as the rioters started to cut the fire hoses. *The Friend* reported that “no fewer than 27 lengths of hose”⁵⁶ were cut during the course of the evening to prevent the firemen from extinguishing the flames. The fire brigade eventually managed to put down the flames, but Dalldorf's was almost completely

⁵⁵ *The Friend*, 14 May 1915; *The Bloemfontein Post*, 14 May 1915; *De Vriend des Volks*, 17 May 1915; *Het Volksblad*, 18 May 1915; T Dederig, “Avenge the Lusitania!...”, *Immigrants & Minorities*, 31(3), 2013, p. 270.

⁵⁶ *The Friend*, 14 May 1915.

destroyed. According to *The Bloemfontein Post*, “the premises presented a scene of desolation that beggared description”.⁵⁷

Image 3: Dalldorf's department store in East Burger Street



Source: National Museum, Bloemfontein (NM no 3356).

Image 4: Rubble in front of Dalldorf's department store



Source: Free State Provincial Archives (VA no 02136).

⁵⁷ *The Bloemfontein Post*, 14 May 1915.

The crowd was still not satisfied with what they had achieved and soon considered their next target. Any property that belonged to “Germans or supposed Germans”⁵⁸ became a likely target. Adendorff & Co., which belonged to JR Adendorff, was next in line, but it was spared after some bystanders noted that although the owner had a German-sounding surname, he actually belonged to an “old South African family”.⁵⁹ The ringleaders were not happy with the decision, though, and to break the impasse it was suggested that German residents’ houses should be attacked. This suggestion was, however, turned down. Someone then shouted that the properties that were already attacked should be revisited.⁶⁰

Urged on by the ringleaders, among them two boisterous women, the rioters first returned to Fichardt’s where more display windows were smashed, and then went to the Bloemfontein Hotel. At the hotel the crowd was met by a sizeable contingent of policemen who managed to prevent them from entering the building. The rioters then, once again, returned to Fichardt’s where more fires were lit. Because most of the police were still occupied at the Bloemfontein Hotel, Lieut-Col Beer and the remaining policemen were completely overwhelmed. At that stage Fire Master Savage and his men arrived on the scene. In a desperate attempt to subdue the unruly crowd, a battle-weary Mr Savage ordered the firemen to turn the fire-hoses on the crowd. The cold water seemed to have the desired effect, because the drenched crowd members began to disperse. Some went home, but most – including the ringleaders – went to the market square where the night’s events were concluded with three cheers and the singing of “God save the King”.⁶¹

“A shame-faced city”: The aftermath

The next morning, Friday 14 May 1915, Bloemfontein’s residents were greeted by streets strewn with glass shards and burnt-out debris – the remnants of Bloemfontein’s “night of broken glass”. *The Bloemfontein Post* described the city centre as “a scene of indescribable chaos and ruin”.⁶² Although the

58 *The Friend*, 17 May 1915.

59 *The Friend*, 14 May 1915.

60 *The Friend*, 14 May 1915; *De Vriend des Volks*, 17 May 1915; *Het Volksblad*, 18 May 1915; GPJ Trümpelmann, *Deutsches Schaffen im Oranje-Freistaat...*, p. 27.

61 *The Friend*, 14 May 1915; *The Bloemfontein Post*, 14 May 1915; *De Vriend des Volks*, 17 May 1915; *Het Volksblad*, 18 May 1915; K Schoeman, *Bloemfontein: Die ontstaan van 'n stad...* p. 241; LWF Grundlingh, “'n Aspek van blanke Suid-Afrikaanse groepsverhoudinge...”, *South African Historical Journal*, 12(1), 1980, p. 74.

62 *The Bloemfontein Post*, 14 May 1915. See also *The Friend*, 15 May 1915.

ringleaders were mostly soldiers who were not Bloemfontein citizens, a large crowd of citizens were not only sympathetic, but by their presence gave the leaders moral support. Bloemfontein's long-time residents were exposed to a side of some townfolk which they had not witnessed before. The events left most of them ashamed and disillusioned. *The Friend* aptly described Bloemfontein as "a shame-faced city"⁶³ and *De Vriend des Volks* got the impression that "De stad scheen zich te schamen over de daad van de avond te voren..."⁶⁴

Members of the German community, many of whom lived in the suburb of Hilton, were greatly disturbed and traumatised by what they referred to as the "Lusitaniaunruhen" (The *Lusitania* unrest).⁶⁵ When asked for his comment, a visibly shaken Mr JW Dalldorf could say no more than "What can one say?"⁶⁶ Owing to the extent of the damage done by the rioters, Dalldorf Brothers was soon after liquidated. Arthur Fichardt was in no better state and he felt "great injustice" that his family's firm had been attacked. He considered himself South African but still he was stoned in the town of his birth. In his reaction a stunned Mr Emil Hoehne pointed out that he had not only become a so-called *burger* (citizen) of the Free State 25 years earlier, but had also fought for his adopted country in the Anglo-Boer War. Yet, despite Mr Hoehne's sacrifices and the fact that he had been a British subject since the war, he "... had been despoiled".⁶⁷ Notwithstanding the damage caused by the rioters, most German businesses reopened again, including Mr Hoehne's. Indeed, of the approximately £16 980 of damage done to property in Bloemfontein, about £700 was damage to the property of Germans.⁶⁸

In reaction to the riots, the Bloemfontein Town Council held a special meeting at 11:00 on the morning of 14 May. The purpose of the meeting, which was attended by the Mayor, Clr PJ Faure, and seven other councillors – including Ivan Haarburger – was to condemn the riots and also to arrange

63 *The Friend*, 15 May 1915.

64 *De Vriend des Volks*, 17 May 1915. "The city seemed to be ashamed of the actions of the previous night ..." (Free translation.)

65 GPJ Trümpelmann, *Deutsches Schaffen im Oranje-Freistaat...*, p. 27; D du Bruyn (Personal Collection), interview, AD Hoehne (daughter-in-law of E Hoehne, Bloemfontein), 10 June 2016.

66 *The Bloemfontein Post*, 14 May 1915.

67 *The Bloemfontein Post*, 14 May 1915.

68 D du Bruyn (Personal Collection), interview, AD Hoehne (daughter-in-law of E Hoehne, Bloemfontein), 10 June 2016. For a table indicating damage done to property in mid-May 1915 in the major centres in South Africa, see LWF Grundlingh, "'n Aspek van blanke Suid-Afrikaanse groepsverhoudinge...", *South African Historical Journal*, 12(1), 1980, p. 75. According to this table, the total damage amounted to £676 314 (Johannesburg £338 597; Durban £201 764; Cape Town £46 726; Pietermaritzburg £19 282; Bloemfontein £16 980; Port Elizabeth £11 535), of which damage to non-German property amounted £524 006.

a special public meeting for the citizens of Bloemfontein in protest of the *Lusitania* tragedy.⁶⁹ Regarding the riots, Mayor Faure expressed his dismay concerning the “unfortunate happenings in the city” and he condemned the “considerable damage”⁷⁰ that was done to the properties of certain citizens. It was also decided that the Mayor would be in charge of the arrangements for a public meeting that was to be held in the Grand Theatre that same evening.⁷¹ During an ordinary meeting of the Council held on 17 May, the Council passed a resolution which expressed its:⁷²

...abhorrence of the dastardly crime committed by the enemy in the sinking of the ‘Lusitania’ with non-combatants on board, and which resulted in the drowning of so many women and children, desires to give expression to its heartfelt sympathy with the relatives of the victims.

According to the minutes of the meeting the resolution was accepted unanimously with the “Councillors upstanding”.⁷³

The Grand Theatre was filled to capacity during the protest meeting that was held there on the evening of 14 May. The majority of the crowd were outspokenly pro-Britain and there was an urgent demand for the ordinary cloth which decorated the stage to be replaced by a Union Jack. The meeting, which was of “an extremely enthusiastic nature”,⁷⁴ was addressed by amongst others, the Administrator, Dr AEW Ramsbottom, and the Chief Justice, Sir Andries Maasdorp. All the speakers condemned the riots in the same strong terms as the sinking of the *Lusitania*. Although the public condemnation of the riots was met with approval, the loudest cheers were heard when Dr Ramsbottom announced that the Botha Government had decided to intern all ‘enemy subjects’, that is “all able-bodied German and Austro-Hungarian males, whether reservists or not, residing in the Transvaal and Orange Free State”.⁷⁵ Thus, adult male enemy subjects were instructed to report to the Bloemfontein Magistrate Office on 17 May.⁷⁶ All naturalised British subjects

69 *The Bloemfontein Post*, 14 May 1915.

70 FSPA, Municipality of Bloemfontein, MBL 1/1/1/18: Minutes of a special meeting of the Town Council, 14 May 1915, p. 452.

71 FSPA, Municipality of Bloemfontein, MBL 7/16 (newspaper clippings & notices), Notice: Loss of Lusitania – public meeting of citizens of Bloemfontein, 14 May 1915, p. 46.

72 FSPA, Municipality of Bloemfontein, MBL 1/1/1/18: Minutes of an ordinary meeting of the Town Council, 17 May 1915, p. 453.

73 FSPA, Municipality of Bloemfontein, MBL 1/1/1/18: Minutes of an ordinary meeting of the Town Council, 17 May 1915, p. 453.

74 *The Friend*, 15 May 1915.

75 *The Friend*, 15 May 1915. See also *The Bloemfontein Post*, 15 May 1915 and LWF Grundlingh, “n Aspek van blanke Suid-Afrikaanse groepsverhoudinge...”, *South African Historical Journal*, 12(1), 1980, p. 80.

76 For more details of the instruction, see *The Bloemfontein Post*, 15 May 1915.

were exempted, except when their conduct had justified internment. For Bloemfontein's German community this decision signalled the start of "eine schwere Zeit"⁷⁷ and the days that followed were, in the words of Trümpelmann, "Angstvolle Tage".⁷⁸ Some Germans left Bloemfontein, and those who remained, kept a low profile. Among the Bloemfontein citizens who were interned in terms of this instruction were the Rev Schneider of the Lutheran Church, and the German owner of the Bloemfontein Hotel.⁷⁹

There was a marked difference in the reactions of Bloemfontein's Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking populations to the riot. This was particularly evident in the sentiments expressed in the many letters written to the local newspapers. While many English-speakers condemned the riots and considered it a "disgrace [to] the British name",⁸⁰ some readers, including one who wrote under the pseudonym "Sympathiser", were uncertain: "While everyone condemns the occurrences, still, as far as I can gather, everyone to a greater or lesser extent admits inwardly that it has in a manner been forced upon the public". Many other readers, however, were unashamedly outspoken in their anti-German sentiments:⁸¹

Every German is at present our enemy and past events have revealed only too plainly that all Germans, whether fighting against us in the field or secretly behind naturalisation papers, are imbued with the same diabolical feelings towards us.

The Afrikaans-speaking inhabitants of Bloemfontein, on the other hand, mostly sympathised with the Germans. Not only were many of them against South Africa's involvement in the war, but they had also been confronted by a wave of British patriotism. This happened to be even more intense in pro-British Bloemfontein where tensions between the two language groups had increased during and in the wake of the Afrikaner Rebellion of 1914-1915, when some 11 500 disgruntled Afrikaans-speaking men took up arms against their lawful government in an ill-fated revolt that was soon put down by the government forces.⁸² Tensions reached breaking point during the trial

77 GPJ Trümpelmann, *Deutsches Schaffen im Oranje-Freistaat...*, p. 27. "A difficult time." (Free translation.)

78 GPJ Trümpelmann, *Deutsches Schaffen im Oranje-Freistaat...*, p. 27. "Anxious days." (Free translation.)

79 K Schoeman, *Bloemfontein: Die ontstaan van 'n stad...*, p. 242; GPJ Trümpelmann, *Deutsches Schaffen im Oranje-Freistaat...*, p. 27; D du Bruyn (Personal Collection), interview, AD Hoehne (daughter-in-law of E Hoehne, Bloemfontein), 10 June 2016.

80 *The Friend*, 17 May 1915; LWF Grundlingh, "'n Aspek van blanke Suid-Afrikaanse groepsverhoudinge...", *South African Historical Journal*, 12(1), 1980, pp. 78-79.

81 *The Friend*, 18 May 1915.

82 T Dederling, "Avenge the Lusitania'...", *Immigrants & Minorities*, 31(3), 2013, pp. 260-261. For more details about the rebellion, see LJ Bothma, *Rebelspoor: Die aanloop, verloop en afloop van die Boereopstand van 1914-*

of the rebels, including the well-known Boer general Christiaan de Wet. The so-called 'Treason Trials' started on 7 June 1915 in the Supreme Court in Bloemfontein.⁸³

Bloemfontein's Afrikaans-speaking residents showed little enthusiasm for the war and they viewed the anti-German riots as a disturbing expression of British imperialist aspirations. Many questioned General Botha's public support of the British war effort and for them, his military campaign against the Germans in German South-West Africa was the last straw.⁸⁴ Therefore, it comes as no surprise that most readers of *De Vriend des Volks* (a local Dutch newspaper) and most of all *Het Volksblad* expressed their support for the German victims of the riot in no uncertain terms. *Het Volksblad* and its readers compared the Germans' situation with their (the Afrikaners') own situation of the not so distant past:⁸⁵

Soos dit eenmaal met die naam van 'Boer' was, so is dit nou met die naam van 'German'. Daar is geen billikheid, geen menselik gevoel teen individue te bespeur. Die feit dat hulle Duitsers is, is voldoende.

A reader of *Het Volksblad*, who wrote under the pseudonym "Afrikaner", compared the *Lusitania's* death toll with the death toll of the Anglo-Boer War's concentration camps:⁸⁶

Wat is wreder – de konzentratie kampen waarin de duizenden vrouwen en kinders der Afrikaners werden geplaatst en omkwamen, of het torpederen van een boot met een paar duizend niet-strijdenden, die behoorlik gewaarschuid en aangeraden waren een neutral schip te kiezen als zij de blokkade lijn toch wilden passeren?

1915 (Langenhovenpark, LJ Bothma, 2014); H Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a people* (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 2003), pp. 379-384; DJ Langner and AWG Raath (eds), *Die Afrikanerrebelleie 1914-1915* (Pretoria, Kraal Uitgewers, 2014).

83 *The Bloemfontein Post*, 7 June 1915; *De Vriend des Volks*, 10 June 1915; K Schoeman, *Bloemfontein: Die ontstaan van 'n stad...*, pp. 237-238; AH Marais, "Die politieke uitwerking van die verhouding..." (PhD, UOFS, 1972), pp. 516-521. For more on the rebel trials in Bloemfontein, see FSPA, PRG1/7: Rebel prisoners: Particulars re:– (sic).

84 T Dederling, "Avenge the Lusitania!...", *Immigrants & Minorities*, 31(3), 2013, pp. 260-261.

85 *Het Volksblad*, 28 May 1915. "As it used to be with the name 'Boer', so it is now with the name 'German'. There is no fairness, no humanity towards individuals. The fact that they are Germans is enough." (Free translation.)

86 *Het Volksblad*, 1 June 1915. "What is more cruel – the concentration camps in which thousands of women and children were placed and perished, or the torpedoing of a ship carrying thousands of non-combatants who were fully warned and advised to rather choose a neutral ship to sail past the blockade line?" (Free translation.) See similar letter in *De Vriend des Volks*, 27 May 1915.

“The whole thing was regrettable”: The hearing and the trial

A total of 32 people were summoned to appear in the Bloemfontein Magistrate Court on a charge of public violence – thirty men and two women. The men were: Joseph Adami, Jan Johannes Bezuidenhout, William Morton Bower, Thomas Collis, Jacobus Johannes Christoffel de Winnaar, Hamilton Eckstein, John Gillies, Alfred Hansen, Clarence Hattingh, Charles Edward Heath, Harry Hill, George Henry Hughes, John Percy Hyde, Cyril Jones, Stavros Manidis, Brian Dermott McDermott, John McGregor, Peter du Toit Meyer, Henry Nelson-Rolls, John Parkin, William Patmore, Alick Bendhoff Ross, James Smith, John Timmins, Piet Francois van der Walt, Alfred William Waller, Charles Williams, Robert Stephen Williamson, Charles Wood and Alick Yazbeck; the two women were Lilian Elizabeth Batty and Maria Coetzee.⁸⁷ If the names as such are taken as yardstick, it seems as if 25 of the men were probably English-speaking, four Afrikaans-speaking, and one probably of Greek origin, while one woman was probably English and the other Afrikaans. On 28 May 1915, 29 men⁸⁸ and two women appeared before Magistrate GF Fleck in a court that was packed to capacity. Owing to the number of people involved, the main objective of the hearing was to subject the accused to preparatory examination in order to determine who should be committed for trial.⁸⁹

During the preliminary hearing which lasted five days, a number of detectives and policemen were called to testify, including the Head Detective, Gerald Collins Ashman (Constable Ashman was posted to the Bloemfontein branch of the South African Police in 1903. He later joined the Criminal Investigation Department, also known as the C.I.D.).⁹⁰ On the first day Ashman testified that Williams and Collis were the two ringleaders. “They seemed to be in command”, he said. Ashman also told the court that when he confronted Williams and urged him to desist, Williams replied: “How would you like it to have a child drowned in the Lusitania?”⁹¹ Ashman also identified Nelson-Rolls as the one who suggested the attack on Haarburger’s shop. When Ashman warned Nelson-Rolls that it would be a mistake to attack the shop,

87 FSPA, Bloemfontein, Magistrate of Bloemfontein, Criminal Record Book, LBL 1/1/2/1/10: Case no. 1317.

88 John Parkin did not show up on the first day of the hearing and a warrant for his arrest was issued.

89 FSPA, Bloemfontein, Magistrate of Bloemfontein, Criminal Record Book, LBL 1/1/2/1/10: Case no. 1317; *The Friend*, 29 May 1915; *The Bloemfontein Post*, 28 May 1915; *De Vriend des Volks*, 31 May 1915.

90 D du Bruyn (Personal Collection), interview, RC Ashman (grandson of GC Ashman, Bloemfontein), 14 June 2016.

91 *The Bloemfontein Post*, 28 May 1915.

the accused replied: "The name is good enough for me."⁹² In his testimony, Ashman also singled out the two women accused, specifically Batty. He told the court that Batty had been "working very hard"⁹³ at Dalldorf's. Ashman saw her casting mannequins on the fire, shouting "Nog een Duitser!"⁹⁴ (Another German!), as she threw each one on the burning heap. Coetzee also featured prominently, and apart from throwing objects on the bonfires herself, she encouraged the men with shouts of "Come on boys!"⁹⁵

During the following four days of the preparatory examination hearing, more policemen and detectives testified and more ringleaders were identified. A number of witnesses were also called by the defence. Most of the accused pleaded that they were mere spectators on the night of the riots and did not actively participate. On the third day, two of the legal representatives, Mr EE Watkeys and Mr JD Franklin, asked for the discharge of all the accused on the basis that the evidence did not prove the charge. Mr Watkeys argued that the charge, which was public violence, in Roman Dutch Law meant resisting the police with arms. According to him, this was not a case of public violence, because there was no resistance to the police. The magistrate, however, was not prepared to discharge all the accused. On the last day of the hearing, the magistrate discharged a total of eight accused due to a lack of direct incriminating evidence. In the case of five of the accused, namely Bower, Hansen, McGregor, Ross and Smith, the Attorney-General declined to prosecute because it appeared that they were not directly involved in the riots, but were mere onlookers. The rest of the accused were committed for trial, including Batty, Coetzee, Collis, Eckstein, Hughes, Hyde, Timmins, Van der Walt, Williams, Williamson and Wood.⁹⁶

The so-called 'Riots Trial' of the 19 accused was held on 15 September 1915 in the Bloemfontein Magistrate Court. Two of the accused, namely McDermott and Timmins, were absent because they were fighting in the war for Britain. The rest appeared before Magistrate Rowan,⁹⁷ who stood in for Magistrate Fleck, who was out of town. Some of the witnesses who testified during the preparatory examination hearing, were asked to testify again, including Head

92 *The Bloemfontein Post*, 28 May 1915; *The Friend*, 29 May 1915. See also *De Vriend des Volks*, 31 May 1915.

93 *The Friend*, 29 May 1915.

94 *The Bloemfontein Post*, 28 May 1915; *The Friend*, 29 May 1915; *De Vriend des Volks*, 31 May 1915.

95 *The Friend*, 3 June 1915.

96 FSPA, Bloemfontein, Magistrate of Bloemfontein, Criminal Record Book, LBL 1/1/2/1/10: Case no. 1317; *The Bloemfontein Post*, 2 June 1915, 3 June 1915, 4 June 1915; *The Friend*, 3 June 1915, 4 June 1915, 5 June 1915, 10 June 1915; *De Vriend des Volks*, 3 June 1915.

97 In the consulted sources the initials of some of the people referred to in this article were not indicated.

Detective Ashman, Detectives Aubin, Dawson and Webb, Sergeant Wilding, and Constables Gatehouse, Louwrens and Marais. All the accused pleaded not guilty, except for Van der Walt, who pleaded guilty. Some of the accused had legal representatives, while others were unrepresented, including Du Toit, Gillies and Hill. Three of the legal representatives, namely Messrs Beyers, Jeffreys and Watkeys, asked for the discharge of their clients, or failing that, for leniency. In his judgement, Magistrate Rowan said that “the whole thing was regrettable, but the least said about it now the better”.⁹⁸ The magistrate found the accused guilty of public violence and stated that he based his arguments and sentencing on the practice of the courts in other South African towns and cities where rioters were charged and sentenced.⁹⁹ Except for Williamson, who was handed a sentence of £20 or four months imprisonment, the rest were handed a sentence of £2 or seven days imprisonment. The accused were given a month to pay their fines.¹⁰⁰ These sentences were light if compared with the sentences handed down to black and coloured people who in the course of years were found guilty of the crime of arson.

Conclusion

The sentencing of the accused in the ‘Riots Trial’ concluded what Magistrate Rowan called “a regrettable episode”¹⁰¹ in Bloemfontein’s history. The event left Bloemfontein’s residents, particularly the older ones who had been part of the community for decades, shocked, embarrassed and disillusioned. They were exposed to behaviour that had hitherto been unknown in Bloemfontein. Given Bloemfontein’s tradition of resolving issues by peaceful means, the violence of 13 May 1915 caused considerable damage to relationships. The indiscriminate attacks on German and presumed German properties and the blind hatred of Germans (whom the English considered a separate race group), negatively affected relationships which were already made vulnerable by the Anglo-Boer War. The already tense relationship between the English-speaking residents and the Germans was, for obvious reasons, dealt a serious blow, and the somewhat problematic relationship between the English-speakers

98 *The Friend*, 16 September 1915. See also *De Vriend des Volks*, 16 September 1915.

99 *The Friend*, 21 May 1915 and LWF Grundlingh, “‘n Aspek van blanke Suid-Afrikaanse groepsverhoudinge...”, *South African Historical Journal*, 12(1), 1980, pp. 81-82 for details of the sentencing of the accused of the Cape Town riots.

100 FSPA, Bloemfontein, Magistrate of Bloemfontein, Criminal Record Book, LBL 1/1/2/1/10: Case no. 1317; *The Friend*, 16 September 2015; *De Vriend des Volks*, 16 September 1915.

101 *The Friend*, 16 September 1915.

and the Afrikaans-speaking population became more strained. Because of the Anglo-Boer War and Germany's sympathy with the Boers during that war, the Afrikaans-speaking residents were in 1914-1918 mostly anti-war and sympathetic to the local Germans. Consequently, tensions increased and the so-called 'big family' of earlier days was not as close anymore. In some cases, the close relations of the past had frayed to breaking point.

In Bloemfontein, life soon returned to normal in mid-1915, although the country was still at war. After their successful campaign in German South-West Africa, the Union Defence Forces (UDF) were also deployed in German East Africa,¹⁰² in the Middle East and on the Western Front in Europe.¹⁰³ Several of the 254 666 UDF soldiers came from Bloemfontein, and of the 12 354 UDF soldiers who died in the Great War, at least 200 were from Bloemfontein: probably approximately 85% of them English-speakers and 15% Afrikaans-speakers.¹⁰⁴ The "war to end all wars" did not leave Bloemfontein untouched. From this study, it is clear that the sinking of a large passenger ship (RMS *Lusitania*) very far away from Bloemfontein, sparked serious riots in this Orange Free State capital city (as well as in other centres in South Africa, and across the English-speaking world), and the Great War thus also in this way affected places far away from the operational areas.

102 JJ Collyer, *The South Africans with General Smuts in German East Africa 1916* (Pretoria, The Government Printer, 1939); R Anderson, *The forgotten front: The East African campaign 1914-1918* (Stroud, Tempus, 2004); A Samson, *Britain, South Africa and the East African campaign, 1914-1918* (London, Taurus Academic Studies, 2006); H Schnee, *Deutsch-Ostafrika im Weltkriege* (Leipzig, Quelle & Meyer, 1919).

103 PKA Digby, *Pyramids and poppies: The 1st SA Infantry Brigade in Libya, France and Flanders 1915-1919* (Johannesburg, Ashanti, 1993); A Grundlingh, *War and society: Participation and remembrance. South African black and coloured troops in the First World War, 1914-1918* (Stellenbosch, Sun Press, 2014); I Uys, *Rollcall: The Delville Wood story* (Johannesburg, Uys Publications, 1991).

104 See names of war dead on the cenotaph, Hoffman Square, Bloemfontein. On 16 panels, the names of 154 traditionally English surnames are given, and 31 typically Afrikaans surnames, albeit people with traditional Afrikaans surnames are sometimes English-speakers, and vice versa. Nine other surnames are difficult to categorise. Furthermore, two panels have been stolen. Only the names of white combatants are recorded on the cenotaph.