

DENEYS REITZ

a talk presented on 19 July 2018 to the Friends of Smuts House
BY NICK COWLEY

Deneys Reitz is perhaps best known today for his book 'Commando' (pic1). It is a South African classic, a truly wonderful account of the Anglo-Boer War from the perspective of an ordinary fighter in the Boer ranks, but one with extraordinary literary gifts – gifts well beyond his years, as Reitz was only 17 when the conflict began and 20 when it ended. I'll be drawing heavily on his book and its rich store of anecdotes, amplifying where necessary, as I describe for you how the precocious teenager experienced the war that shaped the future of our country. The war was the backdrop for what I believe Reitz saw as the most vivid and intense part of his life, and for this reason I'll be devoting more than half of my talk to his part in it, and the rest to his remaining 40-odd years, which were eventful and significant, but not quite as compelling as those action-packed 33 months at the end of his teenage years.

Deneys Reitz (pic2) came from what we might call the Boer aristocracy, and had a streak of cosmopolitan sophistication from the start. He was born in Bloemfontein in 1882, the son of the then president of the Orange Free State Republic, Francis Reitz, while his mother was a Thesen, from the Norwegian family well known at Knysna. He tells us that as a boy he and his brothers enjoyed a 'Tom Sawyer-like existence'. The phrase is revealing of both the mental and physical advantages in his upbringing: he learned to ride, swim, fish and shoot at a very early age, and went on long camping and hunting expeditions across plains teeming with game; but he was also brought up reading classic English-language literature, obviously including Mark Twain. At twelve, as part of the presidential family, he went on a European tour of the Netherlands, Belgium, England and Scotland – the last reflecting a strong affinity, because his father and grandfather had both studied in Scotland, his grandfather had met Sir Walter Scott and the family read almost every evening from Scott's novels. This wide reading would exhibit itself at some strange junctures in Deneys's life, as we will see; and of course his command of English went a very long way beyond mere bilingualism.

When the Anglo-Boer war arrived in 1899, the 17-year-old Reitz was actually too young to fight; but by that time his father was State Secretary of the ZAR, or Transvaal republic and they were living in Pretoria, so the teenager simply went to President Kruger himself (pic3), who growlingly pulled the necessary strings while stipulating to young Deneys that he had to take out at least three rooineks, as that was the ratio by which the Boers were outnumbered. Reitz was enrolled in the ZAR forces, and a few days later boarded a train for the Natal border, as part of the Pretoria Commando. A typical Boer commando looked like this (pic4)

His first taste of action was a small skirmish near Dundee, which saw the Boers forcing a British detachment to surrender. Two of his observations are immediately worth noting: he was disappointed that the enemy troops were wearing drab khaki, not the bright scarlet coats that he'd seen on his trip to Britain, which somehow made the war less glamorous; and

secondly that he went out of his way to chat to any of the captured British troops who wanted to talk, as he would do throughout the war.

Reitz was with the Boer forces for the entire Siege of Ladysmith, but the one major Natal battle he took part in was the most terrible and confused of the war – the one on top of Spion Kop in February 1900. He was among the Boers and Brits who both lay pinned down by each other's fire an entire day and both retreated down the slopes overnight – but with the dawn he was among the first Boers who reclaimed the summit. With a truce called, Reitz helped the British stretcher bearers, many of them Indians, remove their dead and wounded (*pic5*) – and so, though he doesn't mention it, might well have seen the then Mohandas Gandhi. He probably didn't see another seminal figure of the 20th century, Winston Churchill, who was at Spion Kop as a courier but not on the crest; (*pic6*) however, Reitz had met him some two months ago in Sunnyside, Pretoria, where he was on home leave and Churchill was briefly a prisoner in Boer hands, with Reitz's father censoring his newspaper dispatches.

(*Pic7*) After the war in Natal ended with the Relief of Ladysmith, Reitz embarked on an odyssey that took him thousands of kilometres the length and breadth of South Africa, mainly on horseback though often on foot, during which time he managed to take part in several significant battles very far apart. If you see me gesturing in the air, it's on an imaginary map of the country, which Reitz will criss-cross for the remainder of the war. From Natal, he initially went in stages to Pretoria, one step ahead of the advancing British juggernaut; then after the fall of the capital, headed east to find his father and President Kruger, who were running a sort of fugitive mobile government and had with them the Transvaal treasury, which supposedly became the Kruger Millions - and he found them at Machadodorp. Soon afterwards, not far away near Belfast, he took part in the Boers' last stand in a pitched battle before turning to guerilla warfare (*pic8*), - which we call the Battle of Bergendal or Dalmanutha: we've probably all seen this monument from the N4 highway – the kids always say it looks like a space rocket, and have to be briefed to show respect. Reitz came close to the border with then Portuguese Mozambique before turning north. The Lowveld made a deep impression on him, as a direct quote from his book shows: "Our road ran through the Sabi low country, teeming with big game...By day great herds of zebra, wildebeest and sable stood fearlessly gazing at us, and at night lions prowled roaring around our camps....to me this journey through a strange and remote region was full of fascination....our way leading by Graskop and Pilgrim's Rest amid mountains and forests and gorges more beautiful than any I know of in South Africa." This lasting fascination with the Lowveld would have a great effect later in his life, as we'll see.

Meanwhile, the war continued. Reitz now doubled back westwards some 300 kilometres to Warmbaths, now Bela Bela, where General Louis Botha was re-organising the Boer forces for the guerilla war, and joined a unit that pushed further west to the Magaliesberg. Here he found himself serving under the most formidable Boer general of all (*pic9*), Jacobus Herculaaas - the name means Hercules – de la Rey – the Lion of the Western Transvaal, who in the 21st century could still stop braaivleis conversations with that catchy but controversial song resurrecting him. Under De la Rey and General Christiaan De Wet, Reitz was part of a Boer force that overwhelmed a British convoy on the south side of the Magaliesberg, in what we call the Battle of Nooitgedacht – the last major Boer victory of the war.

It was after this battle that Reitz happened to walk past two lightly wounded British officers who were awaiting evacuation cheerfully enough – the Boers had no facilities for holding prisoners. One of them said to the other: "Here comes a typical young Boer for you". Finding he could speak English, they asked Reitz why the Boers were continuing with an unwinnable war. He astonished them by replying with a reference to one of the then most popular English novels 'David

Copperfield', "You see, we're like Mr Micawber, waiting for something to turn up". The gobsmacked English officers burst out laughing, and one said to his companion "I told you this was a funny country, and now here's your typical young Boer quoting Dickens".

Reitz yo-yo'd east and west across the Transvaal again, then spent the next year or so traversing most of the Western Transvaal and then his native Orange Free State. For several months he was still under the command of De la Rey; Reitz greatly respected the doughty warrior, but saw a flaw in the constant presence at his side of a self-proclaimed prophet known as 'Siener' van Rensburg (*pic10*). Reitz thought him a charlatan, and tells a story debunking him with relish. A brilliant twin-tailed comet or meteor was seen in the sky once night; and Van Rensburg proclaimed that its double tail formed a V, which he said stood for Vrede, meaning peace was at hand. But in fact the Boers were being increasingly harried by the ever growing British forces in the area, and one of the men as sceptical as Reitz piped up, "No, Mr Van Rensburg, that V must stand for Vlug" – meaning flight.

Reitz was later without affiliation to any fixed unit in the haphazard Boer organization, until one day in mid-1901 he came across a not too dated newspaper, which brought him up to date on recent events, including the invasion of the Cape Colony by a number of Boer forces. Reitz – always eager to travel - decided there and then to find and join such a force. To telescope events, he crossed the Orange River near Zastron and entered the north-eastern corner of the Cape Colony, near present-day Lesotho, where he found a Boer commando under none other than the erstwhile ZAR State Attorney turned senior Boer general, Jan Christian Smuts (*pic11*). Reitz, who had known Smuts as a colleague of his father's, would follow his commando, though often separated from them, clean across from the east to the west in an invasion which is one of the most interesting and least well known episodes of this war.

It was nearly aborted early on in the Dordrecht area, when Smuts himself went with three horsemen to scout a farm with the ominous name of Moordenaars Poort and came back many hours later alone and on foot – an enemy patrol had ambushed them, and only Smuts escaped, profoundly affecting South African history. Smuts lost his horse and saddle – and that saddle is today kept - anybody know? – here in the Big House museum. By huge coincidence, the enemy patrol, which Reitz generically calls British, was in fact part of a colonial militia commanded by Smuts's future neighbouring landowner here on this side of Irene – the diamond magnate Thomas Cullinan, who spent the war in his native Eastern Cape.

(*Pic12*) From there the commando, and Reitz individually, moved in a generally south-west direction across the vast Cape Colony. They had an epic journey of enormous hardships, sleeping rough in rugged mountains, often in the worst of weather, usually hungry and sleepless, avoiding the ubiquitous British forces and occasionally clashing with them. Of his many hair-raising adventures, I can only tell you a few.

To cross the first big obstacle, the Stormberg, while evading the British, they had to take their horses down a near-vertical slope in pitch darkness. By the time they'd crossed the next range, the Winterberg, their clothing, food, horses and weapons were so worn and depleted that Smuts decreed that they had to attack a small British camp to replenish. This happened near Tarkastad in what we call the battle of Elands River, in which the commando overwhelmed a British cavalry unit in their camp, the 17th Lancers. Reitz's usual post-battle sociability with the enemy won him a handsome reward here: a wounded aristocratic British officer, Lord Vivian, pointed to his bivouac tent and told Deneys to help himself, saying a gift was better than loot. Reitz says he entered the tent wearing a grain bag and rotting sandals, armed with a rusty old Mauser rifle and one clip of

ammunition; he emerged kitted out in a smart cavalry tunic, breeches and boots, with a new Lee Enfield rifle and two full bandoliers.

Later, in the heavily wooded Zuurberg mountains – whose scenic beauty Reitz had time to note - many of the hungry Boers devoured a type of cycad called Hottentotsbrood, deceived by its name; many of them, including Smuts, had to struggle on with severe food poisoning for several days. They came close enough to Grahamstown to drive its authorities to desperate measures; with very few regular troops left in town, schoolboy cadets at St Andrew's, Kingswood and other now famous schools were ordered to dig and man trenches; if Reitz had had to fight the schoolboys, he would have told himself that he was only 17 when he went to war.

Not much later the Boers could see the lights of Port Elizabeth in the distance, and speculated whether Smuts would attack the town and try to capture the harbour at which so many British troops were landing to torment them. Instead, Smuts told them they were heading for the far west of the Cape Colony, where there were more burghers of Dutch descent who might sympathise with them.

Pushing on westwards as the coast fell away to the south, in the vicinity of Oudtshoorn they had to cross the worst mountain range of all – the rugged Swartberg. It was here that Reitz and a small group he was then with, harried by British patrols, made a steep and treacherous descent into an almost inaccessible valley. His vivid narrative here deserves to be quoted: “a shaggy giant in goatskins appeared and spoke to us in strange outlandish Dutch. He was a white man named Cordier, who lived here with his wife and a brood of half-wild children, in complete isolation from the outside world..... “ After being entertained with goats' meat, milk and wild honey, they spent the night with what Reitz, well read as ever, describes as ‘this curious Swiss Family Robinson’. He doesn't name this remote spot, but we know where it was (*pic13*) and here's the oldest extant picture of a dwelling there, probably much like the one where they slept - can anyone figure out where it was? Gankaskloof, or Die Hel, which was only linked to the outside world by a gravel road in the 1930s.

Once across the Swartberg, they pushed westwards, and the closest they came (here) to Cape Town was Riebeek Kasteel – can anyone guess why? Yes, and Smuts tapped his father for funds, more like a university student than a general in the field. From there, not venturing closer to Cape Town, they moved northward roughly along today's N7 road towards Clanwilliam. With the British less pervasive in this area, they had time for a little fun. Reitz tells us that somewhere near Clanwilliam, Smuts ordered all his men who'd never seen the sea in their lives to report to him; about sixty men reported, and Smuts then led them to the coast at the mouth of the Olifants River. The landsmen fell silent on seeing the vast expanse, then all rushed forward and galloped their horses into the waves. Reitz writes that the excited Boers shouted “‘The sea, the sea’, like the Greek soldiers.” (*pic14*). This throwaway allusion once again shows the breadth of his reading – it refers to an incident recorded by the Ancient Greek historian Xenophon, who describes how a Greek mercenary force that had marched right across Asia Minor from present-day Iran finally reached the Mediterranean coast, and seeing this familiar element at last, likewise yelled in their tongue ‘The sea, the sea!’. No, Reitz couldn't read Classical Greek – unlike Smuts, who, as you may know, had to write an entrance exam in it for Cambridge having never studied the language in his life; he locked himself in his rooms for a week before the exam and then came top in the Cape Colony! Reitz wasn't in quite that league: he must have read Xenophon translated into English, or maybe Dutch or German.

(Pic15) Smuts's Boer landsmen exuberantly rode their horses into the sea; this picture is actually of Australian mounted soldiers in the First World War, but it must have looked much the same. Reitz jokingly asked a local fisherman the way to England; he told him they were going to ride across the sea and take London the next day. Some days later, they told the story to Commandant Manie Maritz, a somewhat controversial figure who'd been leading a separate Boer force near the West Coast. Maritz responded with a sea story of his own: two of his men had been riding on the beach near Lamberts Bay when they saw a British cruiser just offshore; they daringly fired at it with their rifles, but the bullets merely spattered on the ship's armour. The British crew began to train one of their ship's guns on the Boer horsemen, who then thought it wiser to scarper inland. They returned to Maritz's force boasting that they'd fought the only naval action of the Anglo-Boer war!

(Pic16) From this area Smuts and his commando, including Reitz, moved further north into Namaqualand, as he wanted to target the three copper-mining sister villages of Springbok, Concordia and O'okiep, all close together. They took Springbok and Concordia easily, but O'okiep – then the biggest of the three – held out. Reitz was sent by Smuts to call on the garrison to surrender: he was told "Surrender be damned" by a bunch of 'Brummagem boys' - anyone here from Birmingham? So Reitz's war ended as it had begun, with a siege – he'd come a long way from Ladysmith to O'okiep - for by now it was May 1902, and a message came under a white flag from Kitchener to Smuts, bidding him to the peace talks in Vereeniging, with the necessary safe conduct and transport provided. Smuts, knowing Reitz's father would be at the talks, chose Deneys to come along as his Orderly. This post gave him some trouble with the strict hierarchic protocol of the British military, as they decided an orderly was a batman with a lowly rank, and placed him in an open cattle truck with the luggage at the end of the train! Learning who Reitz was, the British fortunately then decided he was more like Smut's chief-of-staff, a post of commissioned rank – which Reitz describes as a record rapid promotion! He spent the rest of the journey in far greater luxury than he'd enjoyed for the past 32 months in the veld.

Reitz was duly re-united with his father, who was still the State Secretary of the beleaguered ZAR, and took part in the peace negotiations and final signing of the treaty at Melrose House (pic 17). In this historic painting, Francis Reitz is the last Boer standing, with pen in hand; you may recognise near him Botha, Delarey, and at the top left corner De Wet next to a glowering Kitchener and satisfied Lord Milner. Deneys, who'd waited on the sidelines during these high proceedings, then went with his father to Balmoral in what is now Mpumalanga to convey the news of the Boer surrender and help demobilize the commando with which Francis Reitz had been serving. There followed a rough ceremony under a bushveld tree at which the Boers had to hand in their rifles and sign an oath of allegiance to the British Crown. Francis Reitz, a doyen of both Boer republics, refused to sign, and therefore had to go into exile. Deneys tells us he had no strong convictions on the matter, but felt he had to stand by his father - one wonders if he would had signed had his father not been present. Be that as it may, he too was deported, and ended up eking out a living as a transport driver in Madagascar. This was perhaps the worst year of his life, as he was sick with malaria or dengue fever for much of the time, and never took to the island. He did, however, manage to write down his memoirs of the war, initially in Dutch, which would become the book 'Commando'. He kept in touch with Smuts, and when a letter arrived from the lady of this house, Tannie Issie, suggesting he return home, accept the new dispensation, and live with them, he decided to accept. Racked with fever on his way home, he passed out at Pretoria station, where fortunately somebody recognized him and brought him to the Smuts home – not yet the Big House, as this was 1903 and they moved into it in 1909.

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Reitz was nursed back to health by the Smutses, and stayed with them for three years (*pic18*); in his mid-20s he'd already lost most of his hair, as you see. He also studied law like his father; and by 1908 he was back in his native Free State, now the Orange River Colony, practising law in the small town of Heilbron. The name means 'healthy spring', but in August 1914 it suddenly became a very unhealthy place for Reitz. The reason was that the new Union of South Africa's decision to join the First World War on the British side had triggered what we call the Boer Rebellion, the uprising by Afrikaners who saw it as an opportunity to throw off the British yoke and restore their lost republics. Heilbron was a hotbed of the rebellion; and Reitz, as the most prominent loyalist in the area, one day received word that a band of rebels were on their way to seize and perhaps shoot him. Reitz made an escape worthy of later cowboy films: he leaped onto horseback, galloped to the railway line with the rebels thundering behind, and sprang from his horse onto a moving train – perhaps his wide reading had included some early Wild West novels!

Reitz soon found himself in charge of a loyalist unit fighting the rebels, his first military command. When he heard that government forces had used motor cars to chase down the famous former Boer general Christiaan de Wet at the head of horse-mounted rebels, Reitz expressed sadness, less at De Wet's capture than at seeing the end of a great and picturesque era of Boers waging war on horseback.

Reitz then moved on to the international Great War: (*pic19*) his second book would later recount his role in it. Serving under Smuts again, he was with the Union forces that invaded German South West Africa. He tells us the German commander at Windhoek, seeing the agile South African horsemen – many from Boer backgrounds - harrying his troops from all directions, complained 'This isn't war; it's a hippodrome' – which Reitz possibly saw as the real last hurrah for Boer horse-mounted warfare. He then followed Smuts to East Africa, a tough campaign where he was on the staff and saw little combat. In 1917 he asked to go to Europe, and joined the terrible conflict on the Western Front for the final year of the war. By now a Major, he commanded first an English unit from Shropshire, then the Royal Irish Rifles. This was at a time of mounting tension in Ireland itself; and Reitz more than once had to defuse clashes between his men, from the Catholic South, and other troops from the Protestant North or Ulster, often called Orangemen in a mocking reference to an earlier Dutch king of England. Reitz thought it more prudent not to tell them he came from the Orange Free State, ultimately named after the same Dutch royal house.

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His last command was as Colonel of a Battalion of the Royal Scots Fusiliers – a distinction he shared with - anybody? – Churchill. Reitz found with English, Scottish and Irish troops alike, even those from the countryside, that, with his Boer background, he had a great deal to tell them about bushcraft, bivouacking in the open and the like. It was for this sort of reason that, despite his senior rank, he opted to go and locate a pesky well-concealed German machine gun nest for himself instead of entrusting the task to any of his Scots. He was badly wounded as a result, while earning what he says was his only military decoration, which he calls the 'Bronze Sprig'. I cannot find any such award among British, South African, French or Belgian decorations, and wonder if this was a bit of typical Reitz humour, suggesting he never was decorated. Be that as it may, he spent some time in hospital and then returned to the Fusiliers, by now near the hotly contested town of Cambrai, in the second week of November 1918 – just in time for the Armistice, which forcibly impressed Reitz, like every other soldier in the field, with that almost surreal, eerie quiet when the guns fell silent.

Back in South Africa after the war, he resumed his legal career and also entered politics, of which more in a moment. Not yet married, he found himself one of the cleverest and most driven women in South Africa (*pic20*). Leila Agnes Buissiné Wright, here seen in later life, grew up in Cape Town and

won a scholarship to Newnham College at Cambridge, where she graduated with an MA in history, and then returned home to lecture at UCT. She also became a determined activist for women's rights, especially their right to vote and rights within a marriage – while herself marrying a trained lawyer: she met Deneys Reitz when he came to Cape Town as part of Parliament, and they were married in 1920. More of Leila later.

Reitz moved from war back to law, and his post-war legal career went so well that in 1922 he set up his own law firm – no prizes for guessing its name. Deneys Reitz Inc prospered from the start, as we'll see later. Reitz also took to politics, siding with his mentor Smuts, then Prime Minister, and his South African Party. The cartoonist Boonzaaier (*pic20a*) drew him, capturing his energy and humour. Reitz was soon promoted to the cabinet as Minister of Agriculture, which also covered Land Affairs. His most lasting achievement was to negotiate the purchase from farmers in the then Eastern Transvaal of land for the Kruger National Park. This had a significant effect on his private life: he developed the fascination with the Lowveld region that he'd first conceived during the Anglo-Boer War, and this led him to buy a farm for himself close to the Park but not required for it, near the present-day Orpen Gate. (*pic21*) Though the terrain, seen here, couldn't have been less like a royal palace estate in eastern England, he gave it the grand name of Sandringham, and thereafter took his family there for holidays most years. Today, it's the Sandringham Private Nature Reserve.

Once out of cabinet when Smuts lost the 1924 election, Reitz found a new political reason for visiting the Lowveld frequently: he stood in 1929 for the constituency of Barberton, then sprawling over a huge area beyond the town. Two good stories illustrate the challenges of election roadshows in the region at the time. Once, Reitz and a companion were driving on a country road to a campaign meeting, when an aggressive-looking lion blocked their way. Unarmed, they had to stop and let the lion glower at them for some minutes, until – perhaps deciding it didn't like the taste of politicians – it slunk off. When Reitz addressed the meeting later, he started by telling the audience he'd already met one of his potential constituents who had clearly disapproved of him – but luckily this one wasn't on the voters' roll! On another occasion, he went to a deep rural valley to canvass the votes of an isolated Afrikaner, or Boer, community for whom, like the family at Gamkaskloof three decades earlier, time had stood still. Their leader addressed him in High Dutch, which they still used for formal occasions, and began with the pointed question: under which generals had the candidate fought during the late war? Reitz named Botha and Smuts, getting a lukewarm reaction, but then was very hesitant to mention any of the British top brass – until the questioner added "But did the candidate also fight under De Wet and Delarey?" Reitz then knew which war was meant and could answer truthfully, Yes.

Reitz was convincing enough to be elected as MP for Barberton in 1929 and again in 1934, when he returned to government as part of the newly formed United Party – the same one some of you may remember as the Official Opposition up to the 70s.

He became a cabinet minister again, serving in various portfolios until the fateful year of 1939, when the Union Parliament voted narrowly to join the Second World War on the British side. With Smuts as Prime Minister again, Reitz became Deputy Prime Minister. This was especially important during the war years, because Smuts was often in England as Churchill's virtual deputy, leaving Reitz in temporary charge of the Union of South Africa – the pinnacle of his career. (*Pic23*) One way to solve a tough political problem at that time was to put it in your pipe and smoke it. From today's perspective, his most significant act in that office was a 1941 meeting with a delegation from the ANC, then neither militant nor banned, and led by Mr Xuma – spelt with an X, not a Z. The meeting was cordial, and Reitz agreed with the black leaders on two ideas decades ahead of their time – that the pass laws should be abolished, and that representation of Africans should be extended. Reitz

agreed to take up these points with Smuts when wartime circumstances permitted, potentially altering the history of our country. Circumstances never did permit: Reitz's health began to fail, soon afterwards; he left government in 1943, and was handed a plum job at the nerve centre of the war, as the Union's High Commissioner in London. He went out of his way to visit any of the South African military he could find in Britain, (*pic24*), including this tour of a South African warship that had docked in Portsmouth.

The next winter in England, the fifth of the war, was a very cold and wet one, and sadly the weather was too much for his now fragile health. Reitz died in London in 1944. Remember he loved the Lowveld: his ashes were buried in this lush glade on the slopes of Mariepskop (*pic25*), a wooded eminence near the Blyde River Canyon that would later host a radar station. As you see, there are three plaques on this mound in the glade, and we'll look more closely at them (*pic26*). The Latin on the top plaque describes Deneys Reitz as "a vigorous and brave man who had no fear of death". Directly underneath is the plaque of his younger son, Claude Michael, who died tragically young as a pilot. I hear mental cogs whirring, as mine did, at the words 'South African Air Force' and '1952', but, no, he didn't go to Korea – he was killed in a mid-air collision over Barberton, where his father had once been the MP.

We return now to Leila Reitz (*pic27*), who, you'll recall, was a noted women's rights campaigner. She became co-leader of the South African suffragette movement – the 'Saffragettes' as someone dubbed them. Less militant than their English sisters, they eventually prevailed when the Union of South Africa enacted votes for women in 1930. This of course also meant women could now sit in Parliament; and Leila herself was elected as South Africa's first woman MP in 1933. She represented Parktown in Johannesburg, where the couple lived when they weren't in Cape Town, up to 1943, when she followed her husband on his appointment to London. After his untimely death, she returned to her native Cape Town and retired from public life, although she continued to involve herself in many causes up to her death.

Her plaque (*pic28*) - the one set slightly apart from the others – has Latin phrases noting that her MA was from Cambridge and her qualities of humanity and wisdom. It is strange to find the old society custom of styling a woman with her husband's first name as well as surname, as late as 1959 and especially for such an independent and liberated woman; perhaps she still wanted to be associated with Reitz for posterity. The marriage seems to have been happy; and in public life the Reitzes certainly made what today we would call a 'power couple'.

Deneys Reitz left a wide legacy. (*Pic29*) The small town of Deneysville on the shores of the Vaal Dam is named after him – anyone been there? The town was built in the 30s around the Reitz family's old hunting lodge in the northern Free State, seen here, which, after a couple of makeovers, is still in use today as the St Peter's United Church. There was even a move to name the Vaal Dam itself Lake Deneys, but with our South African habit of speaking of 'dams' rather than lakes or reservoirs, this never happened; however, the idea lives on with the Lake Deneys Yacht Club at Deneysville.

His law firm became one of the so-called Big Five in South Africa (*pic30*). It lasted 89 years up to 2011, when it was absorbed by the international firm, Norton Rose, which later became Norton Rose Fulbright. The Deneys Reitz Law Library still exists in their South African premises in Sandton, and it still houses many books that once belonged to Reitz.

(*Pic31*) Not merely a reader, he wrote a trilogy of books about his life. You'll note that the second and third books have titles evoking his people's Voortrekker heritage, probably with some nostalgia.

'Commando', as I said earlier, is in a class of its own, but the other two books are highly readable and almost as full of memorable anecdotes.

(Pic32) To conclude: can we agree with Smuts's eulogy of Deneys Reitz, in which he called him a 'great South African'? I think so: he worked for reconciliation of South Africans all his life; he made huge contributions to both our wildlife conservation and our equally globally respected legal system; he had humour and humanity, mixing easily with peasant or prime minister alike; and he wrote one of our most compelling books. To conclude on a light note, as he would have liked, I think there can have been few people with whom one would rather spend a night around a campfire, listening to all his true stories. Thank you.

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Incidents of this kind happened more than once during the Anglo-Boer War, possibly due to a sense of fair play, sportsmanship and respect for one's enemy that the Late Victorian soldier took from the cricket field to the battlefield. I'm going to take the excuse to recite two verses from a favourite Afrikaans poem, Ritrympie by Toon van den Heever. It describes a very similar scenario, but this time the British officer not only orders his men to hold their fire, but calls for 'Three cheers for the Boer'' and on the fourth 'hurrah' the Tommies throw their helmets up into the air, turning it yellow.

By this time, his clothes were in tatters and his boots had disintegrated. The latter problem was solved by the extreme kindness of a rural Boer they came across – a *takhaar* as Reitz calls him, using the Afrikaans word without a trace of the derision a word like 'hillbilly' might imply; for the man walked twenty miles to fetch a large piece of leather which he knew about, twenty miles back, and with his own hands made Reitz a stout pair of sandals from it.

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