

***The Eikenhof link to the great Boer Commander
Danie Theron
Not war, but love brought Commandant Daniel
Johannes Stephanus Theron to Eikenhof***

Although we have not quite fathomed the link between the Greyling, Neethling and Kamffer families, our research into the history of Kommandant Piet Kamffer has lead us to other interesting historical findings.

The Neethling family owned a large portion of what is today Eikenhof. Christiaan Neethling is widely acknowledged as the founder of Eikenhof. The little cemetery on the Jackson's Drift side of the Eikenhof four way stop (corner of the M28 and R554) was their family burial site. It was his daughter, Hannie that brought Danie Theron to the area.





From top left, clockwise - Danie Theron, Hannie Neethling, Hannie's Mother and her father
Christiaan Neethling

Danie Theron was born in Tulbagh in the Cape on the 9th of May 1872. The cottage in Church Street is now a B&B and historical museum. Young Danie was educated by his stepbrother, who was a teacher. He lived in the Orange Free State before moving to the Transvaal as a child. He later became a citizen of the Transvaal (Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek). He was an attorney, with his practice based in Krugersdorp. He became involved in politics and was a supporter of General Piet Joubert, although being very loyal to President Paul Kruger. When Money Penny, the Editor of The Star, wrote derogatory articles about President Kruger and the Boers, Danie Theron went to see Money Penny and insisted that he retract his words. When Money Penny refused, Theron beat him up. His fine was quickly collected and paid by his fellow countrymen. Theron also infiltrated The Rand Club to gather information about the Reformers and the planned Jameson Raid.



In Eikenhof, he became known as the young man who had fallen in love with Hannie Neethling. Tragically both Hannie and her sister died after contracting pneumonia. Both daughters were buried in the family cemetery at Eikenhof. Danie Theron planted cypress trees on her grave. Unfortunately the trees had to be removed when they became infected with a virus a few years ago. It is sad that the little cemetery is private property and therefore no public funds may be spent to maintain or upgrade the site where one of the great heroes of the Boer war lies buried. Some of our local ward members did manage to raise sufficient funds to have a wall built around the cemetery.

During the Anglo Boer War he was frequently in this area. His scouts caught wild horses at Olifantsvlei and they collected flour from the mill at Eikenhof. He regularly visited Hannie's grave; and it was during one of these visits that they fought a group of English soldiers close to the Neethling homestead.

On 25 February, 1900, during the Battle of Paardeberg (not our local Perdeberg Mountain) Captain Danie Theron bravely crossed the British lines and entered Cronje's laager in an effort to co-ordinate a breakout. Theron, initially travelling by bicycle, had to crawl for much of the way, and is reported to have had a conversation with British guards before crossing the river. Cronje was willing to consider a breakout, but felt it necessary to put the plan before a council of war. The following day, Theron sneaked back to De Wet at Poplar Grove and informed him that the council had rejected the breakout. Most of the horses and draught animals had been killed, and the burghers were worried about the safety of the women and children in the laager. Additionally, officers had threatened to stay in their trenches and surrender if Cronje gave the order to breakout. On 27 February, despite a passionate plea to his officers by Cronje to wait just one more day, Cronje was forced to surrender. The humiliation of surrender was made worse because this was Majuba Day.

This was one of the main turning points of the war for the British.

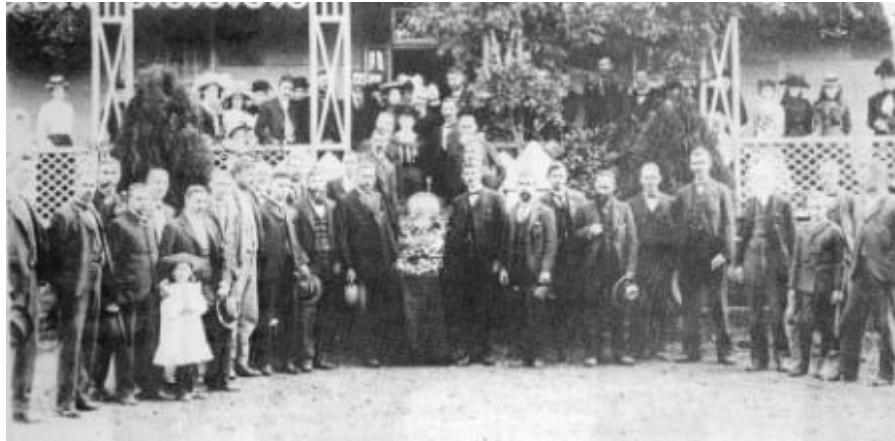
On 2 March a council of war at Poplar Grove gave Theron permission to form a Scout Corps, consisting of about 100 men, to be called the “Theron se Verkenningskorps” (Theron’s Scouting Corps), and subsequently known by the initials TVK. Curiously, Theron now advocated the use of horses rather than bicycles, and each member of his new corps was provided with two horses. Koos Jooste was given command of the Cycling Corps.

Theron achieved certain notoriety in his remaining few months. The TVK was responsible for destroying railway bridges, and captured several British officers. As a result of his endeavours, a newspaper article on 7 April, 1900 reported that Lord Roberts had labeled him “the chief thorn in the side of the British”, and had put a bounty on his head of £1 000, dead or alive. By July, Theron was considered such an important target that Theron and his scouts were attacked by General Broadwood and 5 000 troops. A running battle ensued, during which the TVK lost eight scouts killed, and the British lost five killed and 15 wounded. Theron’s catalogue of deeds is vast considering how little time he had left. Trains were captured, railway tracks dynamited, prisoners freed from the British jail; he had earned the respect of his men and his superiors. They set free approximately 70 Boers who had been jailed at VanWyksrust prison; they derailed an armoured train at Kliprivier station and got enough rations, arms and ammunition to carry on fighting.

On 4 September 1900, in the Gatsrand area, near Fochville, Commandant Danie Theron was planning an attack with General Liebenberg’s commando on General Hart’s column. Whilst out scouting to discover why Liebenberg was not at the agreed position, Theron ran into several members of Marshall’s Horse. During the resultant fire fight, Theron killed three and wounded the other four. The column’s escort was alerted by the firing and immediately charged up this hill, but Theron managed to avoid capture; finally the column’s artillery, six field guns and 4.7 inch naval guns, were unhitched and the hill bombarded. The legendary Republican hero, only 28 years old, was killed in an inferno of lyddite and shrapnel. The British patrol buried him in a shallow grave nearby. Eleven days later he was exhumed by his men and reburied on the Wolfaardt’s farm at Elandsfontein.

Three years after his death, in 1903, he was again exhumed and reburied in Eikenhof next to his beloved Hannie Neethling. He had always expressed his desire to be buried near his deceased fiancée should he die in the Anglo-Boer War. The headstone was erected by his comrades after collecting money from their meagre resources after the war, and bears the following inscription: (translated)

He's not here; yet still he leads them: The young warriors of many battles.



Danie Theron's Re-burial in 1903



Commandant Danie Theron's death earned him immortal fame in Afrikaner history.

On learning of Theron's death, De Wet said: "*Men as lovable or as valiant there might be, but where shall I find a man who combined so many virtues and good qualities in one person? Not only had he the heart of a lion but he also possessed consummate tact and the greatest energy ... Danie Theron answered the highest demands that could be made on a warrior*"¹. South Africa remembered its hero by naming their School of Military Intelligence after him.

Locally he is honoured and remembered in the Laerskool Danie Theron (both the old school at Eikenhof, and the new school in Kibler Park), and the Danie Theron Nederduitse Gereformeerde Church. A piece of bomb shard similar to the one that caused his death was displayed at the primary school in Eikenhof for many years. Both the local primary school and church were named after him. The Danie Theron Laerskool first occupied a small corrugated iron building before moving to a brick building, and then in the 1980's moved to much larger premises in Kibler Park.





From top left, clockwise - The first school, the first brick school, Danie Theron Laerskool in Eikenhof and the first class of 1893



The Danie Theron School in Eikenhof and the Danie Theron NG Kerk in Tedderfield

Translation of an article that appeared in Die Burger, September 2nd, 2000 by John Stephens
"Brave Boer's last wreath for his Hannie Neethling"

Eikenhof is situated south of Mondeor where the old Johannesburg - Vereeniging road crosses the Klip river. This was the farm of Oom Christiaan Neethling. He was the Volksraad member for Heidelberg in the old Zuid- Afrikaanse Republiek.

Oom Christiaan moved northwards from Stellenbosch during the 1880's. He repaired wagons in Kimberley for a short while and then went further northwards. He then bought his farm next to the Klip river. Here he planted his bag full of acorns which he had brought with him from Stellenbosch. This was the start of Eikenhof! (Court of Acorns!)

During the 1970's I was doing research on Danie Theron, the famous scout, and wanted to find out more about Eikenhof, where Danie Theron is buried. I was referred to Oom Christiaan Neethling. Not the first Christiaan Neethling but his brother's son. He was a child during the Anglo-Boer war and 78 years old at the time of my visit.

We visited Eikenhof together whilst he was reminiscing. He took me along, effortlessly, to the yesterdays of this farm. What a pity that these kind of memories are so seldom recorded whilst the source is still alive."

I was about eight years old when the Anglo-Boer war started. Our farm was situated next to Eikenhof, on that side."

"Danie Theron was an attorney in Krugersdorp and cycled to Eikenhof over weekends, to visit Hannie. He was engaged to her. She was very musical as she had studied music and singing at the Rynse Instituut in Stellenbosch. Oh, it was lovely when after huisgodsdien (evening worship) in the evening we stood round the small organ singing whilst Hannie was playing the organ. We sang Netherlands-, English-, German- and Afrikaans-songs. We sang polyphonously (many-voiced). Till Tannie Neethling sent us to bed. She was a difficult Tannie. Those were lovely days.

"We walked around the old homestead, built of stone, with its dilapidated stoep. People were still living in the house. In front of the house stood a massive old acorn tree. Here Oom Christiaan stopped. He put his hand against the rough bark of the old tree and slowly looked up to the green foliage above.

"Here, under this tree, Hannie and Danie sat courting. I can still see them now. It feels like it was yesterday." He paused a moment and then pointed to a flat terrain a little way from the house. "And there was the tennis court. We weren't actually the woodsmen and backvelder the opposition liked to make us out to be, you know. Here Danie and my nephews and nieces played tennis on the week ends. It was here that Hannie and her sister, Etta, played tennis one Saturday afternoon and started feeling bad after the game." "They both died the following Friday as a result of pneumonia. Just like that."

"I can recall that Danie was shattered and after the funeral just turned around and walked away into the veld. Gone. Later he planted small trees which still grow around the grave of Hannie and Etta."

"When the war broke out, all the men were away on commando. We, however, saw Danie from time to time. Mostly at night. He attacked the jail up the road, next to the river, one night, and set all the Boer prisoners of war free. And did the people of this region enjoy this!"

"One evening I was visiting my aunt and them here. We were in that room. And Oom Christiaan pointed to a window, and somebody knocked on the window. The Tannie opened the window. It was Danie Theron. He and the Tannie spoke softly at the window for a while and then disappeared in the dark. When she turned around there were tears in her eyes. She said Danie came to ask her to please make a wreath for him and to hang it on his and Hannie's old acorn tree, the next evening. The next day was 29 August 1900, exactly two years to the day that Hannie died. Danie was to fetch the wreath that night and to put it on her grave. But he didn't come. The wreath was there again on the next evening but again wasn't collected. The Tannie made another one the next evening and hung it on the tree, but it also was left hanging on the tree."

"We only received the news days later. Danie and his scouts had to check a British column of one thousand men with four cannons, who were on their way to attack General De Wet at Frederickstad. Things went awry. Danie was killed in action on 4 September on the Gatsrand when he tried, with his Mauser, to attack a whole British army on his own. He was 28 years

old. He made his comrades promise that they would bury him next to Hannie in case he died. On 10 March 1903 his wishes were fulfilled when he was buried next to her in the cemetery at Eikenhof. On his tombstone is engraved:



Niet hier. (Not here)
Nog steeds voert hy hen aan. (He still leads them on)
De jonge stryders van so menig slag. (The young fighters of many a skirmish)
Aan de spits der helden sal hy staan. (He'll be at the head of these heroes)
Wanneer verrysen sal de lang verbeide dag. (When the long awaited day comes.)

Oom Christiaan smiled. "The Khakis became more and more hard boiled in these days. One day an officer just walked into the house as if it belonged to him. Tannie Neethling was in her kitchen. She had a big container full of eggs next to her."

"When he ordered her to fry these eggs for his troops she gave him one look and took the whole container full of eggs and smashed it to the floor. She never took any nonsense from nobody, Mate. If this episode was the result, I do not know, but shortly afterwards the British arrived with wagons and we had to pack our things. Off to the concentration camp."

"It was a very slow journey. We young ones sat on the wagon talking. But very soon we were bored and began to sing. We liked to sing. Hallelujah hymns. Also English songs. 'What a friend we have in Jesus', many-voiced like our mothers taught us. Then we saw the old English soldier who was walking next to the wagon, with tears in his eyes also singing along, whilst he was staring in the distance. We didn't understand this. You are Christians. I am a Christian. It is so wrong.', he said and kept on walking. 'It is so wrong.'

Oom Christiaan said that that soldier gave him hope for the future of our land.

(Taken and translated from: Sieketroosters, by Bertrand Retief)

References:

1. Fransjohan Pretorius, life on Commando during the Anglo Boer War 1899 – 1902.

2. D.R. Maree, Bicycles in the Anglo-Boer War of 1899 - 1902, Military History Journal, Vol. 4, No. 1 of the South African Military History society
3. Pieter G. Cloete, The Anglo-Boer War: a chronology

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