

Dear relations, dear friends,

I trust this finds you well.

1. On my recent visit to Namibia I got **no closer to** finding out who repaired the **Otjimbingue graves**. One possible source can now be excluded: the 'Schutz' Truppen war-grave restoration unit. They told me it was not them. – The search goes on.

During September I once again had the opportunity to travel to Namibia. The immediate reason was to deliver a paper at the annual conference of the Aquaculture Association of Southern Africa, which was held in Swakopmund this year. This provided an opportunity once more to visit our 93 mother in Swakopmund. Unfortunately, since my return she had a fall and broke her wrist. Her lower arm is now in a plaster cast. Brother Immo and sister Heidi and I are naturally very concerned, not least because it is a long journey to get to Swakopmund.

Good fortune had it that Peter and Solveig Kjeseth joined me on the trip to Windhoek and from there back again. Peter and Solveig live in Fish Hoek near us. They previously taught at the Paulinum Seminary in Windhoek, the theological training institution in Namibia before they came to live here in the Cape. They are USA nationals and before Namibia's independence they supported the solidarity movement, as Lutherans, through National Namibia Concern (NNC), which grew out of the presence of Namibian students at Wartburg Seminary in Iowa. They also worked closely with Bill Johnson's Episcopal Church-people for a Free Southern Africa, and other anti-Apartheid organizations. Their families originally hale from Norway. Peter has a doctorate in Theology and taught ethics at the Paulinum. The Paulinum belongs to the early training institutions in Southern Africa where black students could attain an advanced education. Missionary Hugo Hahn who founded it in 1866 in Otjimbingue, was the colleague and contemporary of missionary Kleinschmidt.

The three of us had a great time together, each being interested in history, the complicated past that continues to burden Africa and the love of exploring new terrain and frontiers of the mind. All this was augmented with Peter preparing gourmet tidbits of food from the backseat of the car, to sustain us otherwise.

2. Our first night was spent at **Komaggas** where we were treated to the wonderful hospitality of Ds. Jetro Cloete. He and I had much to discuss concerning the first phase of our project: the fencing of the old graveyard

where missionaries Schmelen, Weich and many of their families lie buried. We are keen to use local skills and material if possible. Ds. Cloete is investigating. I am now keen to find the Weich family whose roots equally go back to this village. Missionary Weich succeeded Hinrich Schmelen here.

[Vignette: We ask the local grave digging team where and how best to get to the Schmelen grave. An old man with dark and wrinkled face, supporting himself with two walking sticks says: 'over there by the big tree, that is where all the Germans are buried. My grandfather also lies there.' He tells us that his mother is 101 years old. She is still a valuable source of knowledge, but we had no time to sit with her on this visit.]

As the old man walks with us he points to the shrubbery to our right. He says: 'if you look carefully you will see little mounds. These are unmarked graves. They belong to those who were not affirmed into the church and thus not allowed to be buried with the Christians.'

Poverty in Komaggas is on the increase, principally the result of the closure of the nearby coastal diamond mines, owned by the De Beers Company since the 1920's when diamonds were first discovered there. Kleinzee is the mine-owned town sixty kilometers to the west of Komaggas. Before 1920 the people of Komaggas took their livestock to the coastal strip during that part of the year when water and grazing in the hills of Komaggas becomes scarce. Since time immemorial the Khoi-Khoi had practiced this seasonal migration with their animals. But all this is no more.

Hinrich Schmelen was the first who complained to the Cape Governor that trekboere were impinging and taking land away from his community. Although beyond the boundary of the Cape Colony at the time, Cape Governor Cole sent a land surveyor to mark out the land that Schmelen thought should remain that of the community. A title deed was drawn up and the land was registered in the name of Komaggas' most prominent farmer, Kasper Cloete, the son of a Khoi mother and Dutch father, a survivor from a shipwreck at Port Nolloth.

The title deed provided protection for nearly 100 years – and then came the curse of the diamonds. The deed, it appears, has disappeared and the coastal strip became a high security area that no one without the mine's permission was allowed to enter. With their livelihoods now impaired the people of Komaggas accepted work with the diamond mines. Every day buses of workers would collect people here and take them to work to what were their former goat and livestock pastures.

Then came the global recession of 2008 and the rich of this world bought fewer diamonds. Simple: de Beers (part of the Oppenheimer empire) retrenched the workers, the majority of whom come from Komaggas. But de Beers retains the land concession - in case the mine is to be re-opened some day. For now the coastal strip remains fenced and no one can get to it – other than the owners and bosses who hunt and fish from exclusive dwellings – all top secret.

The Komaggas community has engaged the services of the Legal Resources Centre, a not-for-profit (NGO) who are looking into the prospects for the Komaggas community to make a land-claim. This is great if it succeeds but it will take time and a positive outcome is not easily attained.

Solveig, Peter and I head back to Springbok via Nababeep to continue our journey. Here the Namaqualand daisies are still in full bloom. What a bonus!

3. Next destination is **Bethanien**, eight hours of driving time for us, several months of travel for Schmelen in his day. We thought to take the short way from Gruenau to Seeheim on the Luederitz road, a dirt road that suffered greatly from last season's rains. When it got dark the many unexpected furrows across the road made this part of the journey somewhat unpleasant, especially when the road seems endless – and without any other traffic and no lights or people in sight you keep wondering whether you lost your way.

Visit to Chief David Frederik, in Bethanien, 3 September 2009.

Three stories:

Herero and Nama uprising and resistance 1904 – 1909.

1. At a particular point in time the German 'Schutz' Truppe had occupied the town of Bethanien; the soldiers camped in the gardens of the mission station where the trees offered shade and the fountains offered plentiful water. Six men from the village were arrested and imprisoned by the occupation army. Their sentence included providing labour in the mission gardens. It was through this work that they came across unattended German guns. Being committed to escape and support the insurrection, they hid the guns and wait for a suitable moment when to break free. They were found out however and the six men were sentenced to death. A tree in the nearby riverbed served as a gallows. For the next hundred years the pieces of wire to which the nooses were attached reminded the local people of the executions. Every year they got together around the tree to pay their respects to the six sons who died. Then, quite recently, a road grader pushed over and up-rooted the tree. Locals took the stump to the house where the elders hold their meetings. There it stands in the yard as a reminder, without plaque or inscription – just a memory where the elders tell the next generation on traditional and festive days what happened under this tree a little more than 100 years ago. Orally history is transmitted from one generation to the next.
2. Chief Frederik, the grandfather of the present Chief David Frederik had signed a non-aggression agreement with the German military intruders. But Chief Frederiks' brother Cornelius was not inclined to submit and recognised the strategic advantage to join the uprising started by the Hereros and then the Witboois. The Colonial rulers could thus not rely fully on the loyalty of the !Anam of Bethanien as Cornelius went to mobilize men to join the rebellion. Chief Frederick tells how the local Rhenish missionary (could it be Missionary Wilhelm Peter?) called a

prayer meeting in the two-towered church, next to the Schmelen house, 'to which should come all men, including the boys who had passed the rights of passage into adulthood'. Those loyal to the Chief attended. The service and prayers lasted for several hours. Unbeknown to the men and whilst they prayed, the Schutztruppe soldiers visited every homestead to search for and confiscate all weapons. German artillery was brought to point at the church from all directions. The women gathered at the place where today stands the new stone church. The men inside could eventually hear their prayers and their wailing. The women assumed their men would all be shot. At one point the German military commander entered the church to address the men whilst the missionary slipped away silently. The commander called on Chief Frederick (senior) and pointed the tip of his sword under the Chief's chin and asked: Which authority do you obey? The Chief replied: 'The authority of the Lord' – and somewhat more vaguely, 'and that of those who run the affairs of men on earth'. The Commander replied, still holding his sword under Frederik's chin: 'You have today saved your life and that of the men here with you'. It can be surmised how this humiliation was felt by the men in the church and by the women outside the church. The complicity and apparent betrayal of the missionary receives special mention to this day.

3. After the above incident Cornelius Frederick gathered 300 men and they formed a guerilla army to challenge the occupiers for two, maybe three years. When the uprising was suppressed in other parts of the Colony, Cornelius and his men were sent an invitation, apparently to negotiate a truce. In a kloof near Berseba the men met their adversaries. The Schutztruppen commander invited each of the Bethanien men to present their gun, not to hand it over, but to take down the serial number. The alleged reason was to present the list of serial numbers 'to the German Kaiser' but the more practical reason was that those whose rifles were found in combat again after this moment, would face the wrath of Colonial authority. But Cornelius had made a fatal tactical error. They were surrounded by troops and forced to lay down their arms. Each man was handcuffed and all taken to Shark Island, the notorious prison island just across the bay from Luederitz. The Bethaniers lost proportionately more people through exposure, hunger and being shot, than others who rose up. Eduard Frederik, also of the Chief's family, was at the time of the uprising an ox-wagon driver for the Germans between Luederitz and Keetmanshoop. Secretly he took messages from Shark Island to Bethanien, notably also to report about the people who lost their lives.

Klaus Dierks, in *Chronology of Namibian History*, confirms point 3 above with the following comments: In February 1905 Christian Goliath of Berseba who was an ally of the Germans, tried in vain to persuade Cornelius Frederiks to hand himself over. This happened at Chamasis, west of Berseba. In March Frederiks was eventually compelled to give in and hand himself over to Richard Volkmann of the Schutztruppe. This was at a place called Heikoms. Fredericks died in 1907 as a prisoner on Shark Island and his beheaded body was used by ethnologist Eugen Fischer to advance his German race theories.

The present day leader of the !Aman, Chief David Frederick, the man I was interviewing, has organized remembrance days at Shark Island. In recent times the German Ambassador also attended these commemorations. Reparations are being demanded from Germany as well as the return of 47 heads of people decapitated at that time and taken to German museums and universities. Neither has been forthcoming to date.

I wrote about my meeting Chief Frederick and the above events in a previous Newsletter. My intention was to get further detail and to narrow down time, place and circumstance. I am keenly aware of my shortcomings on Namibia's history and my lack of training as a historian, but equally I want to write down what the older people of this former Rhenish sphere of influence say, remember and convey orally. If it is not committed to paper it might not survive another generation.

After leaving Chief Frederick I was curious what the 'other' side says about the Nama resistance to German Colonial rule. I bought and read a booklet with the title "Liebes Vaeterchen" (Dear little Papa) by Oberleutnant Erich von Schauroth published in Windhoek (2008) by a publisher with the name of Glanz & Gloria. It contains his letters as a senior 'Schutz' Truppen commander to his father and in this private correspondence often critical of his superiors.

Having read these accounts I will never view the south of Namibia in the same way after my newly acquired knowledge. Place names and riverbed crossings have taken on a whole new dimension when you realize what intense drama took place in these parts a hundred years ago. Countless battles took place in stony hills and ravines where contending with the absence of water, sound knowledge of the terrain and resilience to heat were the main determinants that influenced each encounter. For three years heroic guerilla armies pinned down the German Colonial troops. No doubt there was heroism on the German side also – but righteousness and honour belongs to those who fought for their freedom and their land and in the end, lost it.

Three remarkable guerilla leaders stand out in this combat: Morenga (I have just re-read the historical and fine novel by Uwe Timm – not available in English as far as I know), the Morris brothers and Cornelius Frederick. From my knowledge of guerilla and liberation wars, up to recent times, these three resistance armies are deserving of far greater recognition than they have been accorded, not simply because they secured many victories but also because of their honourable conduct. For example they formally (in writing) declared war on their enemy, they generally buried the dead of their opponents and they would send a messenger with a white flag to the enemy after battle to give permission to the 'Schutz' Truppe to collect their injured without being fired upon. As von Schauroth repeatedly writes in his letters: 'This is an honourable and worthy opponent'. He has high respect for the marksmanship, the capacity to lay ambushes, their ability to survive in arid terrain and their resilience whatever the odds. Their ability to retreat on tactical grounds and to disappear into the night without trace he views as one of the greatest

strengths. In his concluding letter he says of Morenga, who was eventually arrested in the Cape by Colonial British troops and handed over to the Germans: 'He deserves to be treated properly'. – Alas he was not. And do not think of von Schauroth as a secret admirer of his enemy; he sees himself as a professional soldier, there to defeat an opponent, and his letters are equally peppered with disdain for his opponent.

About Morenga's death (the spelling of his name differs in the literature):

"On 04.05.1906 Marengo surrendered to the British Cape Police after being defeated by Captain Bech's troops (*Schutztruppe operating inside the Cape colony!*) in the battle of Van Rooyvley in the Cape Colony, with a loss of 23 of his soldiers. He was transferred by the British to the railhead at Prieska and from there to Cape Town, to the Tokai prison*. In June 1907 the British in the Cape Colony released Jakob Marengo from Tokai prison in Cape Town. He was instructed to report to the Civil Commissioner at Upington where he was ordered not to cross the border into German South West Africa. In spite of this order Marengo crossed into SWA at Gamsib Ravine (probably during July or August 1907). On 26.08.1907 Captain von dem Hagen co-ordinated the German troops with the British ones in Cape Town. It was decided to mount a common action against Marengo on 01.09. In order to prevent Jakob Marengo from uniting his forces with those of Simon Koper of the !Khara-khoen. On 20.09.1907 the unified German-British efforts were eventually successful. Jakob Marengo was killed in action by a South African patrol under the command of Major Elliot in Eenzamheed in the Cape Colony. (From Biographies of Namibian Personalities by Klaus Dierks)

- *Tokai prison seems to be the same prison that is today known as Pollsmoor, where Nelson Mandela and others were held toward the end of their sentences. Eerily, this prison is also in our immediate neighbourhood".
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- My reading was all the more animated by having access to copies of the "Kriegskarten von Deutsch-Suedwestafrika, 1904" (War maps). I have been to Pella and Pella drift but I had no idea how many battles and skirmishes took place on the Namibian side of this former river crossing. Up-river from the border crossing at Violsdrift/Noordoewer is Ramansdrift, another site of many battles and once the locality of a "Kaiserliches Postmat". The battles raged in the ravines of the Fish River, at Ai-Ais, Kochas, Alurifontein, the Loewenfluss, the Aub River and the Karas mountains.

The following are poignant extracts (roughly translated) from a letter written by von Schauroth on 21 September 1905 at Sandfontein. Apparently a campaign had been launched from Keetmanshoop in the direction of the Fish River, more precisely to a place called Kochas.

Toward the evening we visited the grave of Trotha (a nephew of General von Trotha who was killed during the campaign), which the Hottentots had arranged quite nicely from stones and wooden beams.

They then got information about a heavy battle at Keidorus. And he writes:

Not far from Auchab we came across the Native (Eingeborene) sent by Rosenthal. His German was limited, all he said was "Hauptmann dead, the doctor dead, the Oberleutnant kaput, the Feldwebel dead..."

If we had to, we would get lost in these mountains and eventually die of thirst. But the quite remarkable sense of direction and excellent tracking abilities makes this an impossibility for Hottentots....So that most of the engagements are, on the part of the Hottentots, rearguard battles executed in masterly fashion.

Against the Hottentots we only scored small victories in the beginning, when they still operated in passable terrain. Since they moved into the stone wilderness, we have not had any real successes. The Hottentot has learned a lot! Highest esteem!

And on 4 October 1905 he writes: ... Morega is positioned with 700 guns at Heirachabis where he has taken (from the Colonial authorities) 10 laden transport wagons and now has sent us his written declaration of war. This is how far matters have drifted. An opponent who constantly secures small successes against transport convoys, patrols, etc and who now is stronger and more audacious than ever. Things cannot continue like this. We encircle a stone wilderness the size of the Riesengebirge (mountains in Germany), without water and roads with 4-500 men and then want to catch these masters of the Kleinkrieg (guerilla war). Our troops, half dead with their clothes in tatters, occupy vacated positions whilst the band has long found another spot, without us knowing.....

It is striking that there is nothing that commemorates these heroic fighters in the locally and in the local languages of Afrikaans and English, either in written word or any other type of commemoration. Am I wrong?

Southern Namibia is not just a desolate semi-desert. Through this letter I want to tempt the reader, when next you travel here, to think of it as a terrain where extra-ordinary human drama took place, from the time the first missionaries, traders, mineral explorers and adventurers arrived. There is such a great need to re-write the history of this area and its people. Instead there is a plethora of books in local bookshops that tell of the German and then the South African Defence Force heroics.

[Vignette: I speak to a motorbike rider at a guesthouse in Keetmanshoop who tells me that he always wanted to see this wonderful Namibia again. The last time he was here was as a South African soldier trying to capture Swapo's PLAN fighters. He is heading to Ovamboland where his unit was stationed. I try and tell him about the current Minister of Fisheries in Namibia whose family was killed by SADF soldiers and who seeks today to

build bridges between erstwhile enemies. My story makes little impact. He says: You know what we called our comrades who would AWOL from the South African Defence force camps in Ovamboland? We called them Ovambopiele, (penis's) because what they wanted to do was rape some local women. He surmises that this must have resulted in mixed-race children. - Remorse, wrongdoing? I see none.]

Since returning from Namibia a most exciting and fortuitous meeting between Kenneth Makatees and myself took place. Kenneth's roots also go back to Komaggas – and more significantly we are related! And this is how: Hinrich and Zara had three daughters and one son. Hanna (born 1817) married Heinrich Kleinschmidt in Komaggas and Frederika (born 1819) married Christian Bam, seemingly also a brother to Hinrich's second wife. It is through Frederika that we are related to the Makatees family. Kenneth is enthusiastic to explore all this further and we have agreed soon to visit Tulbagh/Saron to try and trace the place where Zara lies buried and secondly we intend to spend time in Komaggas, where the Makatees still have a home, and we intend to interview people with the objective to create a familytree (similar to the one that exists through the Hanna connection and that I offered to send you) from Frederika onward. Intriguingly the Makatees family moved to Swakopmund when the Roessing mine opened there in the 1970's and Kenneth's father got work there. Kenneth's mother is a pensioner and lives in the Welwitschia retirement home in Swakopmund. And he visits his mother there on a regular basis. Our mother lives in the Lions Retirement Home but the two ladies had no idea there was this connection. Small world isn't it?

This is a good note on which to end this letter. I trust that my explorations into the history of the land where our roots run deep, is of interest to you.

Your responses and reflections are as always welcome.

With all good wishes,

Horst.

Should there be non-historians amongst my readers who want to read more about the events made mention of in this letter, I refer you to the book, also accessible on-line:

Chronology of Namibian History From Pre-Historical Times To Independent Namibia

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Second Edition 2002

und auf deutsch: "**Chronologie der Namibischen Geschichte**":

Chronologie der Namibischen Geschichte Von der Vorgeschichtlichen Zeit zum

unabhängigen Namibia (2000)

Klaus Dierks

I S B N 99916-40-41-X HC (Namibia) I S B N 99916-40-39-8 CC (Namibia) I S B N 3-933117-52-6 (Germany)

Zweite überarbeitete und erweiterte Auflage 2003: 688 Seiten
Zu beziehen: Klaus Hess Verlag, Göttingen/Deutschland