

# The Boer War Overview:

## Knowledge Organiser

**Introduction:** The Boer War (1899-1902) between the British Empire and Boer republics, Transvaal and Orange Free State, holds immense historical significance.

### Background and Causes:

1. **Mineral Discoveries:** The Witwatersrand gold rush of the 1880s and the diamond discoveries in Kimberley led to an influx of British settlers, drastically changing the demographic landscape and intensifying imperial interests.
2. **Imperial Expansionism:** The desire for control over South African resources, trade routes, and the Cape-to-Cairo railway fuelled British territorial ambitions.
3. **Political Friction:** The Boers' resentment of British rule after the First Anglo-Boer War (1880-1881) contributed to rising tensions, particularly over voting rights and British intervention.

### Outbreak and Phases:

1. **Boer Ultimatum:** Presented in October 1899, the Boer ultimatum demanded British troop withdrawals and non-interference in Boer affairs. When Britain did not comply, war ensued.
2. **Phase 1 - Boer Successes:** At the Battle of Colenso, the Boers skilfully used entrenched positions, employing sniping tactics and trench warfare to repel British advances.
3. **Phase 2 - British Counterattack:** Lord Roberts' "March to Pretoria" utilized superior British mobility and strategic railway networks to capture Bloemfontein, Johannesburg, and Pretoria.
4. **Phase 3 - Guerrilla Warfare:** Boer forces, adapting to guerrilla tactics, staged ambushes and raids, targeting British supply lines and communication networks.
5. **Phase 4 - Concentration Camps:** The British imposed a "Scorched Earth" policy, destroying Boer homes and establishing concentration camps to control civilian populations.

### Key Figures: British:

1. **Lord Kitchener:** As Chief of Staff, Kitchener implemented the blockhouse system, enforced scorched-earth tactics, and introduced concentration camps to quell Boer resistance.
2. **Lord Roberts:** Commanding British forces, he led the early phases of the war, focusing on rapid advances and capturing key Boer territories.

3. **Alfred Milner:** British High Commissioner, he championed British interests and contributed to deteriorating relations with the Boers.

#### **Boer:**

1. **Paul Kruger:** President of the South African Republic, he epitomized Boer nationalism, resisting British encroachment and fuelling anti-British sentiment.
2. **Louis Botha:** Transitioning from traditional warfare to guerrilla tactics, Botha's leadership was vital during the guerrilla phase and later the creation of the Union of South Africa.
3. **Christiaan de Wet:** A Boer guerrilla leader, his mobile warfare expertise inflicted significant losses on the British, highlighting the challenges of countering guerrilla forces.

#### **Impact on Britain:**

1. **Casualties:** Over 22,000 British soldiers died, largely due to disease, with a significant number wounded.
2. **Financial Strain:** War expenses totalled about £220 million, straining Britain's economy and increasing public debt.
3. **Public Sentiment:** Initial patriotic fervour waned as the war continued, with mounting criticism of British strategies and tactics.

#### **Media and Propaganda:**

1. **Press Coverage:** Prominent newspapers like "The Times" and "The Daily Mail" provided extensive and sometimes sensationalized coverage, shaping public opinion.
2. **Visual Media:** Illustrated magazines such as "Black and White" featured detailed sketches and photographs that brought the war's realities to the public.

#### **Social Consequences:**

1. **Concentration Camps:** The British-operated concentration camps saw appalling conditions and disease outbreaks, leading to an estimated 27,000 Boer civilian deaths.
2. **War Weariness:** Prolonged conflict and casualties fuelled anti-war sentiment, prompting calls for negotiated settlements.
3. **Women's Roles:** Women participated as nurses, relief workers, and peace activists, defying traditional gender roles and contributing to changing societal norms.

#### **End of the War:**

1. **Treaty of Vereeniging:** Signed on May 31, 1902, the treaty marked the war's end, granting limited self-governance to the Boer republics under British sovereignty.

#### **Long-Term Impact:**

1. **Union of South Africa:** The war's aftermath led to the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, consolidating British colonies and Boer territories.
2. **Afrikaner Nationalism:** Boer resentment fuelled Afrikaner nationalism, influencing later apartheid policies and political developments.

#### **Legacy:**

1. **Cultural Impact:** The war's traumatic experiences reverberated in literature, art, and collective memory, contributing to narratives of sacrifice and resistance.
2. **Military Doctrine:** The Boer War influenced modern counterinsurgency strategies, emphasizing the challenges of unconventional warfare and occupation.

**Conclusion:** The British experience of the Boer War encompassed multifaceted dimensions, from evolving military strategies to ethical controversies. This intricate conflict serves as a microcosm of colonial tensions and imperial aspirations, shaping British perceptions, military doctrine, and the trajectory of Southern African history.