

The Man behind the Medal

Nicolaas Jacobus Johannes Jooste

Anglo-Boer War Medal



For me, as a Medal Collector and Tour Guide, one of the most rewarding aspects of these activities, is getting someone, who at first is a little apprehensive about coming on a tour, and who has little or no knowledge of medals, and who then becomes totally absorbed in the subject at the end of a day's excursion. One of my early Magaliesberg tours produced such an outcome. The gentleman was very interested in coming along, however his partner was not all that keen. Sanity prevailed and she came along. This is the story of N.J.J. Jooste – her Great Grandfather.

Nicolaas Jacobus Johannes Jooste was born on 23 June 1873.

The family history, written in the early 2000's record him as having served in the Winburg Commando, however the Anglo-Boer War Medal Roll (for the Boers), compiled by Don Forsyth, has only one Burger by the name of Nicolaas Jacobus Johannes Jooste, and he served with the Heidelberg Commando.

In June 1899, having heard a speech by Paul Kruger, that after a meeting he (Kruger) and Lord Milner had recently had, the outcome of which was that there was no possibility of war, Jooste and Sophia Maria Visser decided to get married. A few months later they were separated by war.

Jooste served under General Cornelius Johannes Spruyt at the Battle of Paardeberg, and together with Spruyt and 12 other 'Heidelbergers', Jooste was captured by the British on 21 February 1900.



On their way to Cape Town as Prisoners of War, Spruyt managed to escape, however he was later killed in action on 20 July 1901.

Jooste was sent to St. Helena as a Prisoner of War. He was part of the first shipment of Boers – 514 in number – who arrived there on 10 April 1900. General Piet Cronje and his wife were also amongst the first shipment. Another Boer General, Ben Viljoen arrived at St. Helena on 25 February 1902 after his capture by the British. Over the course of hostilities over 6 000 Boers were housed on the island and conflict between those who were prepared to sign the 'Oath of Allegiance', and those who were not, forced the authorities on the island to form separate camps.

A quote from the family history – *"Nicolaas J.J. must have fared badly during his two years on St. Helena as did many of his compatriots. When Sophia Maria met him at the railway station she could scarcely recognise him as he was now seemingly an old man in a long coat.*

Back in South Africa Jooste felt unable to sign the oath of allegiance to the British throne, and like many others, left with his wife to start a new life in Argentina.

Soon however, Sophia Maria fell pregnant with their first son, Gerhard Petrus, and they returned to South Africa for him to be born in 1904 in their native land."



Picture: Nicolaas and Sophia on their way to Argentina

Jooste tried his hand unsuccessfully as a farmer in the Winburg district of the Orange Free State. The farm was appropriated by the Government in 1918 and now lies beneath the Erfenis Dam – which today is a dam and nature reserve. This was followed by a move to Cape Town where he was employed as a book dealer. This too proved to be unsuccessful and he returned to Winburg to once more try his hand at farming. In the early 1930's, having been declared insolvent, he moved to Pretoria where he worked as an Estate Agent. This venture too resulted in failure. His family member records – *"It seems likely that the pattern of failure which characterised the life of Nicolaas J.J. can be attributed to his experience of the Anglo-Boer War, a setback from which he was never able to recover."* Nicolass Jacobus Johanes Jooste died on 5 November 1944.



However, it is my privilege to record that despite the disadvantaged start they had in life, through all the family failures and disruptions, his three sons prospered and two of them certainly made an impact on the landscape of South Africa's progress and prosperity.

His one son, G.P. Jooste was an International Ambassador to Washington and London, eventually serving under Pik Botha at the United Nations.

Another of his sons, Marius Jooste was one of the founders of Perskor.



Picture: G.P Jooste in his time as International Ambassador to Washington

So, not only did this tour unearth a medal, which might have gone un-noticed in the 'tidying up' of family 'junk' ...
... it has sparked an interest in matters associated with the Boer War, St. Helena, and a hand-carved wooden tobacco jar – which was something which was 'just there' in the family's 'hand me downs'.



Picture: The 'hand-carved wooden tobacco jar'

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