

The *Morgenster* Morkels

Pt. 5. The *Rome* Morkels and the two military cousins Lt. Col Ralph Morkel & Sgt Ralph Morkel

The second son of Willem MORKEL and Isabella Zeederberg, Roelof Abraham MORKEL (e2) was named after his maternal grandfather, R.A. Zeederberg. He married Hendrina DU PLESSIS and they had thirteen children, of whom ten reached maturity. Seven remained unmarried (1).

- a1 Philip MORKEL 1677 – 1735 x Catharina PASMEN 1691 - 1764
- b3 Willem MORKEL 1718 – 1788 xx Helena Catharina MALAN 1759 - 1825
- c6 Daniel Johannes MORKEL 1764 – 1825 xx Maria Dorothea LOUW 1775 - 1807
- d9 Willem MORKEL 1803 - 1876 x Isabella Margaretha ZEEDERBERG 1809 - 1886
- e2 Roelof Abraham MORKEL 1833 – 1877 x 1857 Hendrina Maria Frederica DU PLESSIS.**
 - f1 Maria Christina Wilhelmina MORKEL 1858 - 1943
 - f2 Willem MORKEL 1860 – 1949 x Frederika Andrietta POTGIETER**
 - f3 Sibella Margaretha MORKEL 1862 – 1911 x Gerhardus Jacobus VISSER
 - f4 Charles Jacobus du Plessis MORKEL 1863 - 1916
 - f5 Roelof Abraham Zeederberg MORKEL 1865 – 1866 (died 5 months old)
 - f6 Roelof Abraham Zeederberg (Ralph) MORKEL 1867 - 1932**
 - f7 Henrietta Maria Johanna MORKEL 1868 - ? x John Abraham LOUW
 - f8 Grace Susan MORKEL 1870 – 1951
 - f9 Jan Frederik Munnik (John) MORKEL 1872 - ?**
 - f10 Marius Daniel MORKEL 1874 – 1940
 - f11 Francois Pieter Gerhard (Frank) MORKEL 1876 - 1920
 - f12 & f13 Twins died with their mother 13 October 1877.

Those featured in this story are marked in blue.

The family farmed at *Rome*, which was hived off from the old family farm *Onverwacht* in 1828. It is said that the name came from seven small hills on the farm (1,2). I have my doubts – the farm land is quite flat except for part of it which borders a prominent, but single hill, *Skurwekop* formerly *Schaapenberg*. In recent times the homestead has been modernised into a B&B hotel on the outskirts of Somerset West.

We have information about three sons – Willem, Ralph and John. All three served in the armed forces, in Bechuanaland,(Botswana) Mashonaland (Zimbabwe) and later during the Anglo Boer war of 1899 – 1902, where they fought on opposite sides. Willem served with the Boer Commandos while Ralph and John were longstanding members of the British forces and when the war broke out, served with the British troops.

We also include a few paragraphs on another military Ralph Morkel born 1873, and who served with the Boer forces and later with the South African army in Namibia WW I. They were two cousins with the same name, Roelof Abraham Zeederberg Morkel. We tell of the military history of Sergeant Ralph, born 1867, f6 above and then Lt. Col Ralph who was the son of Willem (Dooley) Morkel.

Willem MORKEL 1860 – 1949 x Frederika Andrietta POTGIETER (1,p36).

If it were not so serious, one would want to smile at Willem being accident-prone. During the Anglo Boer War he neglected to disarm a captive British officer and was wounded in the back. Finally, in 1949, being deaf, he did not hear an approaching tram and was run over and killed.

In 1890, at the age of 30, Willem was a Bechuana Scout under Sir Frederick Carrington in the war against the “Korannas”. In 1891 he went to Johannesburg here he met his future wife, Frederika Andrietta POTGIETER, an eighteen year old school teacher from Humansdorp, Cape. He became an overseer for the Symington Coach Services, operating between Johannesburg and Natal. By 1898 he was sanitary inspector in the Mine Sanitary Department under Sir Drummond Dunbar.

When the Anglo Boer war broke out, he left early January 1900 for the front where he joined the Boer forces under General Gravett of Germiston. He left his wife and a baby daughter behind in Johannesburg. He fought in the battles at Groot Rivier and Rensburg siding still under General Gravett who fell later in action.

At Bronkhorst Spruit under General Boshoff he failed to hear the order to retreat when the Commando was attacked by superior British forces. He had a British officer as prisoner of war with him, who inadvertently had been allowed to retain his revolver. Morkel made a dash for a nearby Kopje, and ordered the prisoner to follow him. Instead, the fellow drew out his revolver and shot Willem Morkel in the back, and made good his escape. The bullet passed under his shoulder, penetrated his chest and then into the ground. Fortunately his brother-in-law “Potgieter” who had ridden back to rescue him, appeared on the scene, hauled upon his horse and rode to safety.

He survived his wound, and was later taken prisoner at Magaliesberg in early 1902 and sent to Ladismith, Natal. From there he was sent to India where he was held for thirteen months. During the winter season the Boer prisoners were sent to the Himalayas to escape the devastating heat. He was finally repatriated to South Africa and spent most of his active life in transport.

His life ended on a rather tragic note. He was knocked down and killed by a Trolley Bus at Varney’s Corner, Green Point on 27 January 1949, aged 84 years. It appears that he was safely across the road, but turned back to fetch his dog which strayed from his side. Owing to his extreme deafness he failed to hear the bus.

Roelof Abraham Zeederberg (Ralph) MORKEL 1867 – 1932 Jan Frederik Munnik (John) MORKEL 1872 - ?

British war medal enthusiast, Peter Weedon (3) found a medal awarded to Sgt Ralph Morkel. We exchanged emails resulting in the story of Ralph and his brother John. Thank you Peter, for permission to use parts of your article and photos of the medal, prepared for The British Medals Forum (4).

R A Morkel was a member of the Bechuanaland Border Police before he attested for the British South Africa Company Police on 10 December 1889. Consequently he was one of the 174 men of the British South Africa Company Police who escorted the Pioneer Column from Bechuanaland into Mashonaland during June and July 1890. Morkel served as the Orderly Room Sergeant of B Troop during the 400 mile march, his presence being confirmed by W Ellerton Fry, Lieutenant-Intelligence Officer of the British South Africa Company's Expeditionary Force. B Troop formed up to see the Union flag raised in what was to become Salisbury, Rhodesia, on 13 September 1890. Morkel was discharged on 31 July 1891 and later that year operated the post office sited at the Causeway in Salisbury.

Ralph Morkel was determined to protect his new country and enrolled in the Mashonaland Horse Volunteers on 15/12/1891 (LO 5/2/16). This volunteer unit was formed to replace the British South Africa Company Police. The strength was 500 men on its formation. Under the command of Major Forbes it was distributed as follows: - Salisbury 380 men; Victoria - 150 men and detachments at Mazoe, Hartley Hill and Manica. The artillery troop under the command of Captain Lendy consisted of 44 officers and men and was stationed at Salisbury. In emergencies this unit could be supplemented by a burgher force of some 1,500 men who were liable for service in time of war (5).



Sgt. R.A. MORKEL Umtali Volunteers

Photos Peter Weedon (3)



Obverse



Reverse

Having left the MHV, Morkel signed up again, this time to B Troop of the Rhodesia Horse Volunteers, regimental number 61, on 29/5/95. The unit was raised in April 1895 and disbanded on the 25th March 1896. Some 600 men enrolled in the force but at the outbreak of the rebellion in 1896 they were scattered all over Matabeleland. Some of the men were murdered and others took refuge in the laagers at Belingwe and Gwelo. About 500 were mustered in Bulawayo (6).

During the Mashona Rebellion of 1896 he rejoined the colours as a Sergeant in the Umtali Volunteer Corps. Having received the 1896 medal, Morkel should have exchanged it in 1926 for an undated medal with the clasps Mashonaland 1890 and Rhodesia 1896. His address in the medal roll is given as Rome, Somerset West CC. It is not clear whether Morkel was one of the 50 men of the Umtali Volunteers who remained in the town or who accompanied Colonel Alderson's column into Mashonaland. The campaign claimed the lives of 150 Europeans with a further 70 wounded.

On 25 June two Mounted Infantry companies under the command of Colonel Edwin AH Alderson of the Royal West Kent Regiment had arrived in Beira, originally destined for Matabeleland. These companies were diverted to the Mashonaland crisis where they pursued a 'commando' styled mounted campaign (which appears to have its roots in southern Africa) against rebel strongholds, relieving them of their grain and cattle. Alderson's Mounted Infantry initiative was described as 'highly mobile and pugnacious' comprising brisk scorched earth forays intent on destroying pockets of rebel resistance and capturing their grain supplies and livestock, obviously aimed at bringing their logistical support structure crashing down (7).

Along with his brother John, Ralph Morkel enlisted in the Western Province Mounted Rifles during the Boer War. He attested in Cape Town on 12/01/1901 (or Malmesbury 20/05/1901), giving his occupation as a farmer, regimental number 418 (8). He rose to become Quarter Master Sergeant in (MacDonald's) Squadron, Cape Colonial Forces and is entitled to the QSA with Cape Colony clasp. John's enlisted in Clanwilliam with regimental number 423, and was posted to J Squadron WPMR (8).

When the second invasion of Cape Colony took place in December 1900 several new bodies of volunteers or irregulars were raised at Cape Town, among others the Western Province Mounted Rifles. As soon as a squadron was ready it took the field, because the enemy in the first week of January 1901 had reached within a day's ride of Cape Town. During January and February the corps was constantly in action. In a telegram from Clanwilliam, dated 31st January, the Press Association correspondent remarked that a detachment under Lieutenant Hellawell had driven 150 Boers from the Pakhuis Pass.

Throughout 1901 and 1902 the corps did an immense amount of arduous work in the extreme south-west of the Colony. They were often far from support and in a district much favoured by the enemy, and one almost impossible for regular troops. The corps had endless little engagements, frequently involving sharp casualties, and if they had a good many patrols captured this may be attributed to their being more than usually split up into little detachments at the request of the officer who commanded the district. A part of the corps were for a time in Colonel Capper's column. A patrol on 4th August 1901 made a smart capture of 7 prisoners, 70 horses, and 1000 rounds of ammunition.

The corps were for a time commanded by Major R C Master of the King's Royal Rifle Corps, and afterwards by Captain C H Rankin, 7th Hussars. One of the most notable things done in the western district was the successful defence of Tontelbosch Kolk, the Boer force in the neighbourhood being stated by Lord Kitchener to be about 1000 strong. The garrison, which was partly composed of men of this corps, made use of their cover most expertly, and during the siege the WPMR only lost 2 killed and 3 wounded (9).

Ralph Morkel's last known military service was as a Lieutenant in the Central South African Railway Volunteers c1908. He died 10/02/1932 and remained unmarried.

He saw service in seven separate units :

Bechuanaland Border Police
British South Africa Company Police
Mashonaland Horse Volunteers
Rhodesia Horse Volunteers
Umtali Volunteers/Rifles
Western Province Mounted Rifles
Central South African Railway Volunteers

Peter Weedon.

May 2011

Lt. Col. Ralph (Roelof Abraham Zeederberg) MORKEL 1873 – 1926, of Krugersdorp, Transvaal, married to Grace GILLITT

Ralph was the 7th son of William(Dooley) Morkel and should have been placed in Part 3 of our series on the *Morgenster* Morkels, but with the same name and both in the military, they are discussed here.

He was born in Somerset West on the farm *Rome*. He moved to the Transvaal and worked for his grandmother's family, the Zeederbergs, in their mail coach business. When the Anglo-Boer war started, he joined a Boer commando which served first with general Snyman and then with general Piet Cronje. In the middle of the fighting he married Grace Gillitt of Emberton, Natal.

From 1902 when peace was restored, he joined the cartage department of what then was called Central African Railways, covering the Transvaal and Orange River Colonies. He was first stationed at Pretoria and in 1906 moved to Krugersdorp, where he was elected President of the West Rand Rugby Club due to his prowess in that game (1, p48).

From his obituary (1, p25).

Lt. Colonel Ralph MORKEL the well-known railway cartage contractor, was on holiday with his wife at Somerset Strand, when he died suddenly aged about 60. He and his family were among the best known of the elder residents of Krugersdorp, and much sympathy was extended to his widow, son and daughter. In the great War, Luit. Col. Morkel served as a Transport Officer in South-West Africa (Namibia) and East-African campaigns.

André T. Morkel

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Sources and Notes

- (1) P.W. Morkel, 1961. The Morkels. Family History and Family Tree. Published privately.
- (2) Peggy Heap. 1970. *The Story of Hottentots Holland*. A.A. Balkema. Cape Town.
- (3) Emails from Peter Weedon. British collector of War Medals.
- (4) The British Medals Forum – British, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, Indian, South African and all Commonwealth Medals. <http://www.britishmedalforum.com/>
- (5) <http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol012es.html>
- (6) <http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol014ng.html>
- (7) <http://bsap.org/hiscampaigns.html>
- (8) http://www.genealogyworld.net/boer/western_m.html
- (9) [http://www.angloboerwar.com/south-afric ... ted-rifles](http://www.angloboerwar.com/south-afric...ted-rifles)
- (10) <http://www.rhodesia.nl/hoste.htm>

Appendix

Morkels who served during the Anglo Boer War of 1899 – 1902

Morkels fought on both sides of the Anglo Boer War. Some, living in the British controlled Cape Province were in the British military in Bechuanaland and Mashonaland during the 1890s. When the ABW broke out, they continued to serve in the British forces. Other Morkels lived in the Boer republics such as Transvaal and went on Commando for the Boer side.

I compiled the following list from the sources I have. There would have been others as well.

On the British side:

Sgt. Roelof Abraham (Ralph) Morkel 1867 – 1932 (See above)
Jan Frederik Munnik (John) MORKEL 1872 - ? (See above)
Carolus Frederik Morkel 1870 – 1924 (1, p48)

On the Boer side:

Willem MORKEL 1860 – 1949 POW India (See above)
Daniel Gustavus MORKEL 1876 – 1947 POW Bermuda (See “*Morgenster Morkels Pt1*”)

Four brothers: (See “*Voorburg Morkels Pt2*”)

Hendrik Johannes (Harry) MORKEL * 2.7.1876 –
William Somerset (Sommie) MORKEL 1879 - 1921 POW St Helena
Gerhardus Maritz MORKEL 1878 – 1955
Stephanus Kimberley (Steve) MORKEL 1881 - ?
(Douglas Francis Theodore (Dougie) MORKEL would have been too young to join up.)

Served during World War I

(See “*Morgenster Morkels, Pts1, 3, 4 and 5*”)

Daniel Gustavus MORKEL 1876 – 1947 (Pt1)

Three brothers:

William (Dooley) MORKEL 1864 – 1926 (Pt 3)
Paul Andries MORKEL M.B.E. 1868 - ? (Pt4)
Lt. Col. Ralph MORKEL 1873 – 1926 (Pt 5)