

## **HERO OF THE ANGLO BOER WAR – GENERAL JAMES BARRY HERTZOG**

Judge James Barry Hertzog was an outstanding academic who became famous for his daring and resourceful leadership of the Boer forces during the Anglo Boer War. In 1924, he was elected Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa and remained in office for, a record, 15 years.

### **James Barry**

Born, 3 April 1866, in Groenberg, near Wellington in the Cape, the 7<sup>th</sup> child in a family of 13 children, he was named James Barry after his godfather, who had been delivered through caesarean section by the famous English doctor James Barry (who pioneered the first successful caesarean section, where both mother and child survived. Dr James Barry was later discovered to be a woman who had posed as a man throughout her life, as women were not allowed, at that time, to be doctors).

### **Christian Upbringing**

He was brought up in a God-fearing home where Biblical principles were taught to apply to every area of life. Financial hardships forced his family to move from the Cape to Kimberley, when he was 6-years old, and he was exposed to the rough, drunken brawling of the prospectors and miners in an urban area. When he was 12-years old, his family moved to Jagersfontein, where his father prospered with a butchery and bakery.

### **Love for History**

Barry Hertzog, as he came to be known, thoroughly enjoyed reading and was fascinated with history. He found inspiration in the Scottish wars against the English, which inspired his Afrikaans patriotism further. Barry Hertzog became increasingly disillusioned by the treatment of Afrikaners by the British government and attempted to challenge this injustice through the study of Law.

### **Judge Hertzog**

Like three of his brothers, Barry Hertzog studied at Stellenbosch University. He graduated with a BA in Law in 1889, and travelled to Holland, where he obtained his Doctorate in Law by 1892. As an Advocate in Pretoria, Hertzog enjoyed such success that, within three years after his return from Europe, he was appointed Judge in Bloemfontein to the Orange Free State High Court. At age 29, he was the youngest judge in the country.

### **Anglo Boer War**

Four years later, as the Anglo Boer War erupted, he requested President Steyn to relieve him of his judicial duties, that he might fight for his Fatherland. Hertzog was first requested to school the Boer Commandos in International Law and the Rules of Warfare.

### **Sunday Ceasefires**

In the early days of the Anglo Boer War, there was much use of the flag of truce and frequently Boers and Brits agreed to cease fire on Sundays. They enjoyed concerts, meals, dances and church services together during cease fires on Sundays, such as during the siege of Mafeking.

### **Independent Spirit**

Hertzog noted that the Afrikaans farmers, accustomed to working on their own, were often poor team members and worse when formed into large commandos. Many were unwilling to cooperate, or obey orders. Having studied the tactics of Frederick the Great, and Scottish freedom fighters, Hertzog persuaded the Orange Free State leadership to divide the Boer Army into mobile

Commandos and to dispense with the electing of officers, as that seemed to promote the popular and easy-going, who generally failed to enforce discipline.

### **Bold and Decisive**

Hertzog was appointed Secretary of the War Council and Prosecutor for the Western Division. In November 1899, Hertzog was part of the force that seized Barkly West, where he proclaimed Griqualand West as Republican territory. Hertzog organised supply lines and played an important role in the Battle of Modderivier. His bold and decisive actions on the battlefield deeply impressed his men. As one observed: *"When his eyes flash then it is time to make yourself scarce, for he will not be intimidated – not by a show of force, not by curses, not by muscle, or by a bellicose attitude. The biggest burger, who might be a foot taller than he, trembles when the judge is angry. Many a Free Stater who has neglected his duty, has felt the tense power of this lean man. But all agree that he is a first class fellow."*

### **Discipline Demanded**

Hertzog succeeded in instilling a high level of discipline into his commandos, which greatly enhanced their fighting abilities. He told the half-hearted to return home, rather than continue unwillingly on Commando. *"He would brook no slackness and demanded, and got, complete obedience from his burgers."*

### **Taking the War to the Enemy**

As Judge Hertzog played a more and more decisive role in the war, the War Council appointed him to General in June 1900. Hertzog biographer, Justice Van der Heever, claims that General Hertzog was the originator of the guerrilla tactics which characterised the second phase of the war. Hertzog spearheaded the drive into the Cape, where he penetrated as far as Lamberts Bay and exchanged shots with a startled British ship – the only naval action of the war. His men also occupied the large British railway centre at Touwsrivier, barely 200km from Cape Town.

### **Persevering on Foot**

When his horse was sick, Hertzog travelled on foot, beside his horse, all the way across the Karoo to Calvinia, which he seized, 10 January 1901. Towards the end of the war, General Hertzog was appointed Second in Command of Orange Free State forces under Commander in Chief, General Christian De Wet.

### **Resolute in Negotiations**

General Hertzog took a strong stand at the Vereeniging Peace Talks and firmly maintained that unless the British conceded the need for compensation for the destruction of their farms and accepted that Dutch be taught in public schools, there would be no peace. After the war, Hertzog played a major role in rebuilding the ruined country.

### **Rebuilding the Country**

In 1907, as the Orange River Colony gained self-government, Judge Hertzog joined the cabinet as Attorney General and Director of Education. His insistence that Dutch be taught alongside English in the schools, met bitter opposition. He was appointed Minister of Justice in the Union of South Africa, from 1910-1912.

### **From Opposition to Government**

In 1913, his opposition to the pro-British Imperialism policies of Prime Minister Louis Botha, led him to resign from the South African Party and form the National Party. He led the opposition to the governments of Louis Botha and Jan Smuts. Hertzog championed the Afrikaner cause. During the First World War Judge Hertzog advocated neutrality. In the General Election of 1924, his National Party defeated the South African Party of Jan Smuts and led the country for the next 10 years. In 1934, the National Party and South African Party merged to form the United Party with

Hertzog as Prime Minister and leader of the new United Party. This was in response to the economic depression.

### **South Africa First**

In 1928, Prime Minister Hertzog introduced the new South African flag and in 1930, gave women the vote. In 1925, his government replaced Dutch as the official language with Afrikaans. He was responsible for implementing the policy of bilingualism in South Africa, where equal recognition would be given to both English and Afrikaans. On principle, Prime Minister Hertzog opposed South Africa's involvement in the Second World War and was deposed by the United Party Caucus in favour of Jan Smuts, in order to lead South Africa into war.

### **Memorial Removed**

A statue of Prime Minister Hertzog was erected in 1977 on the front lawns of the Union Buildings. In 2013, this 4m statue was removed to make way for a 9m high statue of Nelson Mandela.

### **Steadfast Patriot**

At the funeral of James Barry Hertzog in 1942, Justice F.P. Van den Heever declared: *"The world is poorer by the passing of a staunch, indomitable fighter, but also a fine character and loving personality and an unforgettable national hero."*

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