

Biographical Service No. 1.

FIELD-MARSHAL THE RIGHT HON. J.C. SMUTS,

O.M., P.C., C.H., K.C.

Prime Minister, Minister for Defence and External Affairs.

Jan Christian Smuts was born on May 24, 1870, on a farm near Malmesbury, 30 miles north of Cape Town. He was the second son of a well-to-do Dutch farmer and his French Huguenot wife.

Strictly brought up, he was at first delicate and shy, but soon showed an astonishing capacity for study. Working his way to Victoria College, Stellenbosch, he studied literature, science and law and won a scholarship to Christ's College, Cambridge, where he took his law finals with a double first and was admitted to the Middle Temple.

He refused a Cambridge University professorship and returned to Cape Town to practise as a barrister. At first an admirer of Cecil Rhodes, the Jameson Raid made him a strong supporter of President Kruger and he moved to the Transvaal, where he became State Attorney in 1898, a few months before the outbreak of the Boer War.

After the fall of Pretoria, Smuts joined General de la Rey in the Western Transvaal and later made his name as a soldier by leading a commando across the Orange River into Cape Colony in a desperate attempt to rouse the Dutch in the Cape.

Smuts took part in the peace conference and after the war returned to politics, becoming the close friend and colleague of General Louis Botha, then Prime Minister of the Transvaal. After obtaining self-government from the new Liberal Government in Britain, the two statesmen worked hard to eradicate the ill-feeling still existing between the Boers and the British. Among other problems, Smuts had to deal with the claims of Indians who were already finding their way into the Transvaal.

In 1908 a South African national convention met in Durban and two years later the Act of Union was passed and Botha and Smuts became virtual rulers of all South Africa, Botha as Prime Minister and Smuts as Minister of Finance.

Between Union and the first World War, Smuts was largely occupied in reorganising the military system of South Africa and dealing with violent strikes in different parts of the country.

On the outbreak of war with Germany in 1914 a rebellion broke out in the Western Transvaal but was quickly suppressed by Botha and Smuts. Following Botha's successful campaign in South-West Africa, Smuts was given command of the Allied forces in East Africa, where weather conditions were appalling and tropical diseases rife.

In 1917 Smuts was called to England to attend the Imperial War Conference and Lloyd George invited him to join the British War Cabinet-- an unprecedented honour at the time. As a member of that body he organised London's air defences and addressed many meetings, putting fresh heart into people wherever he went. Facing an angry crowd of discontented Welsh miners at Tonypandy, he asked them to sing the songs of their people, saying he had heard the Welsh were the greatest singers in the world. Later he spoke simply to them and they returned to work satisfied.

Smuts visited Lord Allenby in the Middle East during 1918, and with the war over attended the Paris Peace Conference with Botha. The treaty of Versailles was a bitter disappointment to him and he said at the time that it could not bring any lasting peace to the world, but he strongly supported the principle of a League of Nations.

Shortly after the two statesmen returned to South Africa Botha died and Smuts became Prime Minister. More strikes on the Rand followed and racial differences made themselves felt once more. After a visit to Britain for another imperial conference, Smuts returned to South Africa to find rioting in progress in Johannesburg.

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He had to call out troops to smash an attempt at revolution.

Smuts's Government resigned in 1924 and was replaced after the general election by a Nationalist-Labour administration under General Hertzog, the Nationalist leader, who had broken away from Botha and Smuts in 1912.

While in opposition Smuts published his philosophical book, "Holism and Evolution", and spent much of his time on his farm near Pretoria. Later he again visited Britain, where he delivered Rhodes Memorial lectures at Oxford, presided over the centenary meeting of the British Association and was accorded many honours. He also went to the United States, where he was received by President Hoover at the White House.

In 1932 South Africa went off the gold standard and Smuts joined forces with his main political opponent, General Hertzog. This combination lasted until the outbreak of the second World War in 1939, when Hertzog tried to pass a motion for neutrality through Parliament. This was defeated and within two days Smuts became Prime Minister once more with a clear majority.

During the war Smuts not only extended and developed the country's fighting services but developed industries which played an important part in the Allied war effort. South African volunteers fought for their country in many parts of the world by land, sea and air, while numbers of British pilots were trained in South Africa. Smuts found time to make several visits to Europe and to attend the meeting at San Francisco which inaugurated the United Nations Organisation. In 1940 he was made a Field-Marshal of the British army - a unique distinction for one whose first military service had been fighting against Britain.

The coming of peace led to the intensifying of national movements in all parts of the world, notably India, whose leaders showed strong opposition to Smuts because he had not acceded to the demands of Indian extremists in South Africa. This attitude was mainly responsible for the rejection by the United Nations Organisation in 1946 of Smuts's proposal for the incorporation of South-West/.....

South-West Africa in the Union, which had been responsible for administering that territory by mandate from the League of Nations.

Shortly before the Boer War, Smuts married a former fellow-student at Stellenbosch, Sibylla Margareta Krige, and has two sons and four daughters. Mrs. Smuts worked energetically during World War II for the Gifts and Comforts Fund for South African troops, to whom she was affectionately known as "Ouma" (Grannie).

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