A BOER WARGAME OUT OF RUSSIA

AND SOME MORE GAMES BASED ON THIS WAR

Article by Fred Horn

MORE THAN A YEAR AGO,

in early 2019, I was lucky to find this game on an Internet-auction site and was able to buy it for a relatively cheap price. It was clear the other bidders didn’t have any idea what kind of game was being offered, but I recognized it immediately.

The name of the game, Südafrikanisches Kriegsspiel, written in German and Cyrillic, seems out of step with the subject matter of the game—South African War Game.

Mr. Thierry Depaulis, the famous French game scholar cleared up what was written on the box. The Cyrillic text is Russian, and the title reads: Южно-африканская война (South-African War).

The signature reads, as far as I can determine,

Lit. K de Kasteldi, B.O. 6 din.37 SPB

or

Lithography C. de Casteldi [address?], St. Petersburg.

SPB is the usual (Russian) abbreviation for St. Petersburg.

Thus, we are dealing with a Russian manufactured game that was also aimed for the German speaking market.

Thierry added the comment: It looks like the ‘GIOCO DELL’ORSO’ from Piedmont.

Südafrikanisches Kriegsspiel written on the box cover and game board; Game pawns
The black pawn (Boer) is placed at the Center; the three yellow pawns (English) are randomly placed on other empty spots. The Boer has the first move. The goal of the English is not to have the Boer occupy the Center again, but rather to immobilize him on a spot on the outer ring. If the Boer is able to occupy the Center, it has won the game; if the Boer has one free move after the English’s 30th move, he has also won.

Mr. Ulrich Schädler provided an article on this game (in German called Bären-Spiel) with two different start positions:

"Schema von "Il Gioco dell’Orso" (Bären-spiel). Dargestellt sind zwei mögliche Ausgangspositionen für den Spielbeginn: Drei Jäger (weiss) jagen einen Bären (schwarz), indem sie versuchen, ihn ein-zukreisen, bis er nicht mehr ziehen kann. (Nach C. und L. Gavazzi, Giocare sulla pietra, 1997)."

"Scheme from "Il Gioco dell’Orso" (Bear Game). Two possible starting positions for the start of the game are shown: Three hunters (white) chase a bear (black) by trying to surround it until it can no longer move. (According to C. and L. Gavazzi, Giocare sulla pietra, 1997)."

The goal in this version of the game is to immobilize the Bear anywhere on the board. Here are the Italian rules for the game:

One player moves the Bear and the other three hunters must stop the beast in order to prevent it from making any move; players take turns moving a pawn from one intersection to another. Since sooner or later the hunters succeed in their intent, two heats are needed to play a game; in the second they swap roles and the one who has lasted the longest in the role of the Bear wins. To avoid deadlocks, if the bear is not caught within 50 moves, the round is stopped.

Notice the Bear has to stay “free” for more than 50 moves of the “Hunters!” But this time it cedes a “draw.” And the outline track (for counting the number of moves?) has only 45 squares.
INTERMEZZO!

The German BAREN-SPIEL and the Italian GIICO DELL’ORSO games have a strong resemblance to a game from the 1920s (maybe earlier?): Het Nieuwe Spel “WU-LU”—(The New Game of Wu-Lu)

And, although the board looks very similar, the start position of the pawns and the goal of this game is completely different.

The 'encircling' of an enemy pawn results in a capture and removal of this pawn from the board. When three enemy pawns are captured, the capturing player wins!

WU LU
GAME RULES

- WU LU is played with 6 pawns for each player.
- These 6 pawns are placed in front of the player, sitting left and right, on the board upon the six indicated points at their side.
- Alternately each player moves in his turn one of his pawns to an adjacent free point in any direction, but jumping is not allowed.
- Players try to capture an opponent’s pawn by encircling it with 3 or 4 of its own pawns, so the opponents' pawn can no longer move. This pawn is captured, is out of the game, and removed from the board.
- A player with only 3 pawns left on the board loses the game.

The game is played on a slightly different board with one more circle than the original game.

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In the (Dutch) rules it also states:

Be careful! When trying to capture, one can be taken by surprise. The most valuable points are those on the second line.
I found the game of WU-LU a long time ago in the Dutch flea market “WATERLOOPLEIN.” In the years thereafter, I have tried to get more information about the game and its origin. But to my disappointment, no one has had any clue, only that it looks like an English manufactured game.

On the backside of the Dutch rules is printed the company—Perry & Co’s., well-known in Holland as an import firm which also ordered games from England and Germany. They added Dutch rules into their boxes and the sleeve here was printed by the firm Holdert & Co.

N.B.
The board, the small box, and the pawns used look similar to the materials manufactured for games from the first part of the 20th Century. Thus, my thought of a game from the 1920s could be incorrect resulting in an earlier dating.

Founded in 1852, and continuing into 1905, the Dutch periodical Kinder Courant, was a special newspaper published for children. Educational articles and interesting facts were the bulk of its content, but at times more fun-like articles were included, like puzzles and small entertaining stories.

In its 1900-1901 Issues—Nos. 49, 50, 51; and 52—four individual “Plates” were included. Each “Plate” represented one quarter of a game board. Children could then assemble the sections together, as well as color them, to get a nice playing game board, especially when glued onto a thick cardboard backing.

The combined images show a picture of a ‘Pack of Boers’ in full fight against the English. I hand-colored and glued together my “Plates” to achieve a nice game board to play on.

The images of the four parts (shown below) were provided by puzzle historian and fellow AGPI member Geert Bekkering. One of his current goals is to make a complete overview of all the Plates added to Kinder Courant newspapers.
Rules were published in the “4th Plate” issue on page 208.

ONZE PLAAT

Dit spel kan slechts door 2 personen worden gespeeld, die elke een kamp A. en B. betrekken met 9. kinder van elkander te onderdeelen soldaten. In 't midden van het spel bevindt zich het kopje, om welk het kopje te bezoeken. De soldaten moeten van uit het kopje dan iets van een vierkant eischen en daarna dit in alle richtingen geschud, waarbij de soldaten in een rij van de laatste rits in de voorste komt te staan. Ten aan de kamp mag geen soldaat zonder zijn egen soldaat阵地, alleen op het kopje ook over vijandelijke. Gelukt een soldaat op het kopje plaats dan de tegenpartij een soldaat verliezen, echter mogen alleen die soldaten daarvan genomen die zich niet op het kopje bevinden. Het kan echter slechts vijandelijke gebouwen dat deze soldaten door vijandelijke worssen en in de kopje dan geplaatst, daar de veroverende part slechts vier soldaten over het kopje te bezoeken.

(N.B. In reference to my colored board, not the real text! — F.H.)

The soldiers are required to move each turn out of their camp, one square in each direction. A soldier can jump over one of his own color if the square directly behind it is empty. Multiple jumps in one turn are allowed, which means a soldier on the last row comes to the front. Up to area of 'het kopje,' players are allowed to jump over soldiers of their own color, but within the boundaries of 'het kopje,' (the 10 colored squares and those in between — F.H.) one can also jump over enemy soldiers. Jumping over an enemy soldier gives the right to capture an enemy soldier which is not standing on one of his own colored squares in 'het kopje.' A capture is possible only five times by one of the players because for the other, "losing party," there remains only four soldiers which is not enough to occupy its own five squares in 'het kopje.'

As is often the case with the printed rules in the Kinder Courant, they are not the best. First the language being used (older Dutch) has to be interpreted, and secondly the writer expects the reader is smart enough to know what he, the writer, is talking about.

N.B. This abstract strategic game could have been a lot more interesting if the number of squares to reach 'het kopje' were much lesser. F.H.

The same playing system is used in a game from the National Army Museum in London:

**THE WAR GAME**

with BOBS* in the Transvaal

Board game, printed cardboard, c. 1900, (missing components).

The score sheets (sic. has to be three parts of a "race-track" — F.H.) include vignettes and references to the Boer War (1899-1902) battlefields and other locations, including Pretoria, Kimberley, Mafeking, Modder River, Ladysmith, and Bloemfontein.

*BOBS refers to Field Marshal Frederick Sleigh Roberts, First Earl Roberts (1832-1914), commander of British forces in South Africa.

The best known game about the Boer Wars is based on a Gebr. Koster print relating to the first war from December 1880 to March 1881. However, this Goose-like game does not draw upon a strategic component.

**QUESTION DU TRANSVAAL**

The French also used the name TRANSVAAL for a period puzzle.
I will close the article with a strategic game named TRANSVAAL. This photograph of the game box top comes from the book *Great Board Games* by Brian Love:

**TRANSVAAL**

According to him, the game was: “...printed in Bavaria at the turn of the [19th] century and imported into France with the imprint of Saussine Editions Paris.

The graphic illustrates a battle between the two opposing forces in the Boer War—the troops of Great Britain (on the right)—and the two Boer allied armies, the troops of the South African Republic (the Transvaal) with the troops of the Orange Free State (on the left).

The game commemorates the siege of Ladysmith, a town in the Transvaal in which the British were besieged for 118 days by the Boer Allies for a period of four months in 1899.”

The game itself is the ‘normal’ Asalto* with 24 Boers attacking the ‘Fort Ladysmith’ occupied by 2 English “Red-Necks.”

Editor Note: “Wikipedia describes *Asalto*, also known as the Assault Game, German Tactics or Officers and Sepoys, as a board game for two players in which one player, playing as the officers, attempts to defend a fortress from their opponent’s invading rebels. The game is a variant on the Fox and Geese theme, and is commonly played in Germany, France, and England.”

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In some way I do know more about this conflict (the Boer War) because my own grandfather fought against the “Red-Necks” (the English) as a volunteer in the Boers’ army!