

## Mid-Month Visit – April 2023

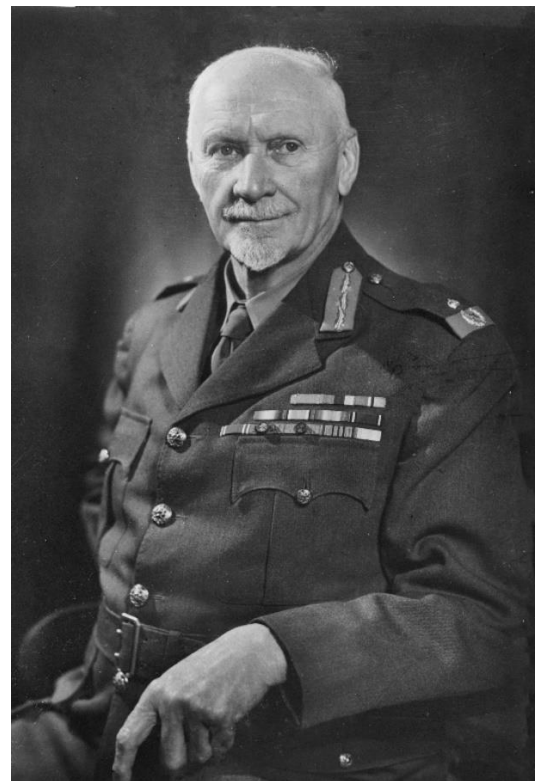
I was going to wait a week before I wrote this newsletter, as next Saturday I will be spending the day in Balmoral (Mpumalanga), but, having received the following reply to my March 2023 Newsletter – *"I have a few thoughts about the medals, pomp and accolades that the British heroes achieved in this war. I do not have a drop of 'Boer' blood in my veins but I'm just wondering about what recognition the brave men that put their lives at risk, and some lost it to defend their families and homeland"*, I have decided to write the following.

It is not related to a visit in any way but explains the history of the medals which were awarded to Boers who fought in the South African War (1899-1902) – medals which only came into being nearly 20 years after the end of the war.

Early in my medal collecting 'career' I was led to believe that Jan Smuts instigated the striking of medals to the Boers – when he was present at the signing of the Peace of Versailles, at the end of the First World War, all the delegates in attendance were well-decorated with medals, except for the South Africans.

That got Smuts thinking about awards to the Boers who had so valiantly fought to save their Republics.

This proved not to be the case, but it was a good story whilst it lasted.



*Picture: General Jan Smuts with his array of honours*

In 1913, Colonel Skinner, who was Commandant of the newly formed Military School in Bloemfontein, noticed that the officers attending a course, who had fought valiantly for the Boers during the South African War (1899-1902), had no medal ribbons to display, whereas many of the officers, who had served on the British side, were all decorated. Colonel Skinner made representations to Defence Headquarters to have this omission rectified but, due to the outbreak of the First World War, nothing was done about the matter until 1920.

In December 1920 three 'recognitions' to Boer veterans were officially gazetted – the ABO, or Anglo Boere Oorlog Medalje, for ordinary Burghers, the DTD or Dekorasie voor Troue Dienste for



officers, and a ribbon for anyone who was wounded during the war – Lint voor Wonden or LVW. Application forms for any of these had to be completed by interested parties – either living or direct descendants of those who had died during, or after the war – before 1920. Information required on the application form included name and address, commando in which the applicant served, details of action in which the claimant was involved, date when taken prisoner (if applicable), date when wounded (if applicable), and signatures of two witnesses – preferably officers under whom the applicant had served. Remember, this was nearly 20 years after the end of the war. Many officers had since passed on; many burghers were not interested in reliving their experiences; many Boers had turned against their fellow countrymen due to events prior to World War I (the Rebellion) and did not want to serve the ‘crown’ between 1914 and 1918; and many just wanted to get on with their lives and not be reminded of what had happened 20 years before.



*ABO Medal*



*DTD Medal*

Wikipedia records the following in relation to the awards – *"instituted in terms of Government Notice no. 2307 dated 21 December 1920, and published in the Union of South Africa Government Gazette of 24 December 1920. It was a retrospective campaign medal for Boer veteran officers and men, who served in the combat forces of the South African Republic and the Orange Free State during the Second Boer War between 11 October 1899 and 31 May 1902 and who remained in service of the Republican forces until 31 May 1902, without surrendering or taking either parole or the oath of allegiance prior to 31 May 1902."* This regulation restricted the awards to South African citizens and excluded men such as foreign volunteers who had fought on the Boer side. In later years the original conditions were set aside which resulted in medals being awarded to the men who had fought in foreign commandos, such as the Scandinavians, the Irish, the Russians, the Dutch, and many others.



Henk Loots, the 'doyen' of medals issued to the Boers wrote the following in an article on the awards to the Boers – *"The award of the DTD was discontinued on the 31<sup>st</sup> December 1946, with a total of 662 issued, the last of 1 060 Wound Ribbon Certificates was approved in November 1949, and a final batch of 12 ABO medals was issued in 1982. In total some 14 600 ABO applications were received, of which approximately 13 800 were approved; in comparison, there were 12 times more Queen's South Africa Medals (177 000) issued on the British side."*



*Picture: An example of a QSA issued to the British forces*

Henk also wrote a lengthy article for the Military Medal Society of South Africa Journal in March 1989, and I quote one of the relevant paragraphs – *"Burghers who were strictly excluded from receiving the ABO medals were those who went over to the English side and served in units such as the National Scouts, the Orange River Colony Volunteers, the Farmers Guard, etc."*

These awards seemed to be of little interest to medal collectors other than South African collectors and could be bought at 'affordable' prices. However, an Auction some years ago, where descriptions of battles in which Boers were involved, opened the eyes of many 'foreign' collectors, who could now pair up Brit and Boer, who fought in the same battle. This has resulted in many medals, awarded to Boers, more than doubling in price. A just reward, more than 100 years on, for those who fought for what they thought was a just cause.

**REMEMBER** to keep an eye on our website ([www.battletoursza.com](http://www.battletoursza.com)) - for regular updates and news.

**Allan Gordon**