

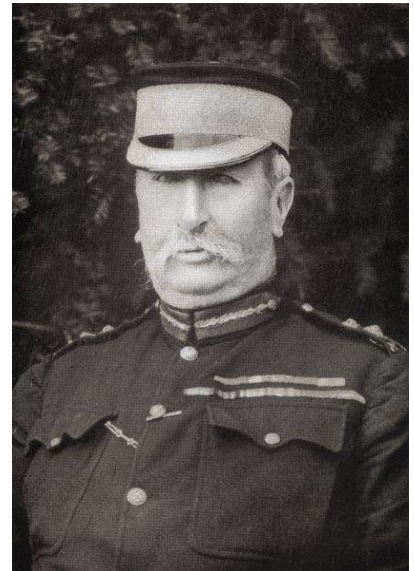
Mid Month Visit – June 2022

I am busy working on a tour for later this year where a family are coming from the U.K. to trace their Great Grandfather's footsteps during the South African War (1899-1902). It has become a very interesting project as the family have an indication, from records gathered, where he was during the War – not day by day, but enough to work out locations and engagements with the Boers.

The tour will start in Natal, where he was part of the force that relieved Ladysmith and he was then also part of the southern Relief Column, under the command of Colonel Mahon, which was formed in Kimberley to relieve Mafeking. After the Relief of Mafeking he spent the rest of his time in South Africa in the Western Transvaal, now North West Province.

The tour party will spend three days in Natal visiting the battlesites around Colenso and Ladysmith, with specific attention to the final movement of Buller's force, as their Great Grandfather was injured on 24 February 1900.

The family will not retrace his movements from Kimberley to Mafeking, as to get from Ladysmith to Kimberley would take a full day, and then from Kimberley to Mafeking another day, but will travel to Rustenburg to pick up on his movements during the Guerrilla phase of the war.



Picture: General Buller

After Mafeking was relieved, our man arrived in Lichtenburg in early June 1900, and the last entry in the 'diary' provided was 28 March 1901, so I will be covering almost a year of movements, during which time the British were chasing Generals de la Rey and de Wet and Commandant Liebenberg.

For those who don't know the area in which he was involved, the distances are as follows

- Krugersdorp to Rustenburg – ± 100 km (± 62 miles),
- Rustenburg to Potchefstroom – ± 150 km (± 95 miles),
- Rustenburg to Klerksdorp – ± 190 km (± 120 miles),
- Rustenburg to Ventersdorp – ± 110 km (± 68 miles), and
- Ventersdorp to Potchefstroom – ± 65 km (± 40 miles).

The Regiment to which he was attached spent time in all of the towns mentioned, as well as Krugersdorp, and from the details provided, was never at one place for longer than a month.



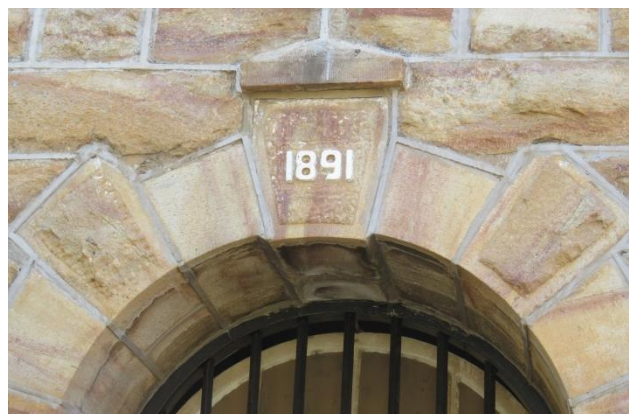
The engagements with the Boers covered Dwarsvlei (where he was injured for the second time during the war), Vlakfontein, Frederikstad, Tygerfontein, and other names of farms which don't exist today. Fortunately I have copies of maps dating back to 1900, so with a lot of searching I am able to put together a fairly accurate account of his movements. However, as many of you will appreciate, farm names were not unique, and there are many Nooitgedacht, Geduld, Witpoortjie, Rietvlei, etc. farms on these maps and accuracy might not be 100%.

In the last few weeks I have travelled to most of the above and have found that many of the names mentioned are now on private land and access is not possible. However, the touring party will be able to get a great appreciation of their Great Grandfather's movements from what has been put together. They might not be able to walk on the hill where he fought, but they will be able to view the area, and take photos of the battle terrain. They will also spend two nights at Kedar Lodge, close to Rustenburg, and this in itself is a must, as the Lodge houses one of the best collections of South African War (1899-1902) memorabilia in the country.

Having already visited Potchefstroom, last week I spent a day in Klerksdorp and found the time there most interesting.

The museum is housed in the old prison built in 1891, and unlike most buildings built in the late 1800's, it is well looked after.

The museum is not a 'Boer War' museum, but depicts the history of the town and the area around Klerksdorp.



Picture: The façade of the old prison

Original cells are being done up to house specific exhibits, and there is one where the tables and chairs used by the governments of the Transvaal and Orange Free State met in April 1902 to discuss the terms of a peace agreement, are exhibited.



Picture: Table and chairs used in peace negotiations



In the courtyard of the prison there is a display of wagons used during the period of the war. The Regiment in which our man served was mainly used to accompany convoys, and there is a wagon which is similar to the one he would have accompanied, and 'travelled' on.

The cemeteries in the town indicate where British soldiers were buried as well as those who died in the two concentration camps which were based in the town. In addition to graves from the above casualties, are four graves of Boers, executed for being traitors.



Picture: Signage in Klerksdorp with the Museum Curator alongside

'Our' man spent time in Klerksdorp and the old prison was used to house Boers captured during actions in the area. He was not involved in any action in Klerksdorp, but was part of a force that engaged the Boers in a small town, Hartbeestfontein. I unfortunately ran out of time and didn't manage to get there on this trip but I fully intend to return there before the start of the tour, as visiting this area will be a small detour on our way from Klerksdorp to Potchefstroom.

Many skirmishes took place in the area I have travelled, and in going through the Boer War Casualty roll, I am picking up casualties in these engagements, which are not listed in the information supplied by the family. I am also trying to get a Regimental History which indicates the history of the Regiment during the years 1899 to 1902, but am drawing blanks at the moment. My research and travels are taking me to interesting places and I am sure I will be able to add considerable value to the experience of the family who are coming out to trace their Great Grandfather's footsteps.

REMEMBER to keep an eye on our website (www.battletoursza.com) - for regular updates and news.

Allan Gordon