

## Mid-Month Visit / Newsletter – June 2025

Many of my past newsletters have made reference to casualty lists which I go through in great detail to try and verify battle casualties and check up on references found in battle reports, etc. The books I refer to are Steve Watt's, 'In Memoriam' and Alexander Palmer's 'The Boer War Casualty Roll (1899-1902)'. The latter is an 800-page book, with about 250 000 entries, and lists all casualties – killed, wounded, taken prisoner, missing, etc. As I have done on countless occasions, I have gone through the latter, all 800 pages, line by line, to extract casualties for the battles in which I have an interest.

The Battle of Bakenlaagte, fought on 30 October 1901, has become one of my current favourite battles. Wikipedia records – "*The Battle of Bakenlaagte in the Eastern Transvaal, South Africa, occurred on 30 October 1901 during the guerrilla phase of the Anglo-Boer war of 1899–1902. The battle saw the Eastern Transvaal Boer commandos of Generals Johan Grobler, Coen Brits, Piet Viljoen and Louis Botha attack the rearguard of Colonel Benson's much feared No. 3 Flying Column while it was in marching in formation to its base camp.*" According to my records, taken from Palmer's book, colonial casualties were 83 killed in action, 17 died of wounds, 149 wounded, and eight who died 'by accident' – and here is my dilemma.

The eight casualties that I have listed under 'accident' are all men who were with the East Kent Regiment, and I am really battling to find an account of the battle, attributable to records of this Regiment, or to an extract from a personal diary of someone who was there.



*Picture: A typical picture of soldiers of the East Kent Regiment during the Anglo Boer War*

Palmer's book, under the heading 'casualty', lists the men as having been 'Killed in Action'. Steve Watt however has a different story. Under the heading 'casualty', Watt records KAS, which when one accesses the index to the abbreviations, stands for 'Killed, accidentally shot'. When one goes to the 'reference' column against the names of the eight, Watt records 'shot himself' for seven of those entries and 'accidentally shot himself' for one.

I have a number of friends who have served in various defence forces, some from regiments in the U.K., and none agree with what Watt has recorded – all agree that a soldier's 'job' is to shoot the enemy, not himself. So, to 'complete the loop', I need to gain access to official records.

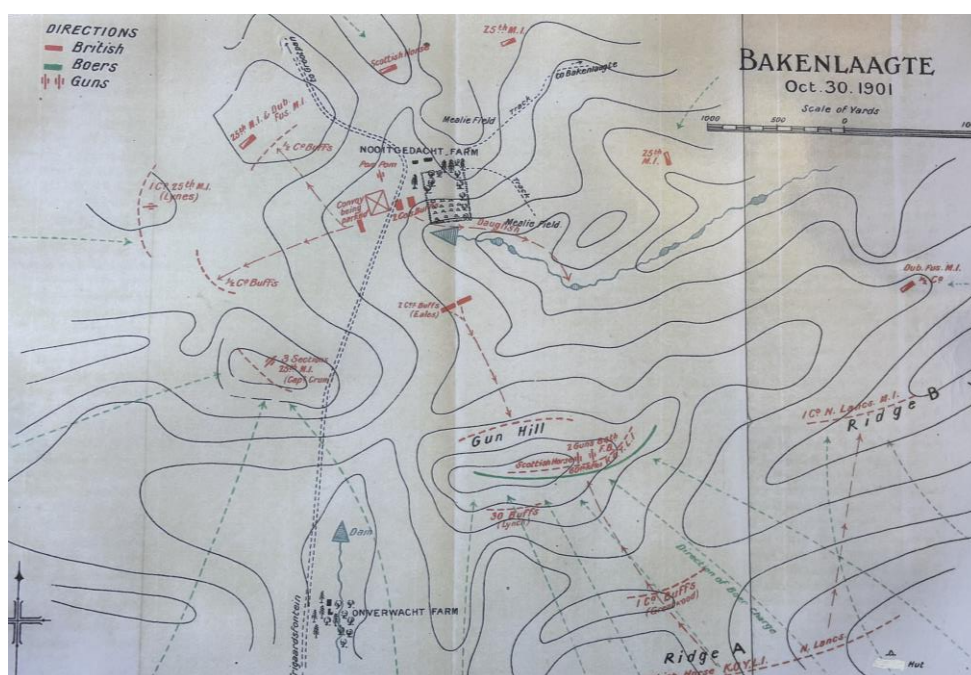
Steve Watt's book contains just under 25 300 records of deaths of colonial soldiers who fought in the Boer War. Of those, 77 have the abbreviation 'KAS', and of those 77, there are only two dates where there is more than one 'killed, accidentally shot' recorded. The first refers to the eight East Kent regiment soldiers on 30 October 1901, and the second refers to two Imperial Yeomanry, where the place of the accident is recorded as Curragh Ranges in the U.K., on 4 April 1902, with these two casualties being buried in the U.K..



And then, to make things even more confusing, Watt has a casualty code 'SUI' which stands for 'suicide'. He lists 58 soldiers who committed suicide. So, what I would like to know is – what is the difference between shooting oneself and committing suicide? The answer is hopefully in the records of the East Kent Regiment's account of the Battle of Bakenlaagte.

Palmer's book records suicides – Major R.L. Macgregor committed suicide on 2 April 1901 at Nooitgedacht (in the Eastern Transvaal) and is buried at the small British Cemetery at Airlie. Palmer's book (page 437) records – *"that MacGregor was temporarily insane and committed suicide."*

Any help in the Bakenlaagte/East Kent Regiment will be gratefully accepted.



Picture: A map of the Battle of Bakenlaagte

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**Allan Gordon**