

## Newsletter

**August 2022**

The August 2021 Newsletter was fairly comprehensive and I will try and not repeat what was recorded.

**August 1900** saw the last set piece battle of the war – the Battle of Bergendal, which is also referred to as the Battle of Dalmanutha. About 5 000 Boers, under the command of General Louis Botha faced a British Force of around 20 000, led by General Buller, under the overall command of Lord Roberts. It was the last time the four Boer Long Tom guns were in action together, and along with lesser artillery, they faced 80 British guns. British casualties at the battle were 15 men killed, 12 who died of wounds received, and 135 wounded. Buller's advance on the position commenced on 21 August and in that time the British casualties were just under 400 in various engagements with the Boers – Geluk, van Wyk's Vlei and others.

Fifty kilometres to the east of the battle, at Waterval Onder, President Kruger, his government, and President Steyn of the Free State awaited news, hoping that it was going to be positive.

When news reached them that the Boers were retreating, they departed for Nelspruit.

General French occupied Waterval Onder on 30 August, and released over 2 000 British PoWs who were being held at a camp a few miles from the town.



*Picture: President Kruger's House in Waterval Onder  
– now the Krugerhof Museum*

The other major engagement during the month was the Battle of Elands River, or Brakfontein. The battle, which turned into a seige saw the British garrison, of mainly Australian and Rhodesian troops, surrounded by the Boers under the command of General de la Rey. It lasted from 4 to 16 August, during which time 22 men were killed and a further 57 injured. Almost all the livestock at the garrison were killed by the continuous bombardment of the Boers. A magnificent Monument to the animals was recently unveiled on the site of the battle.

**August 1901** started with Lord Kitchener, who was now in overall command of all British Forces in South Africa issuing his 'Banishment Proclamation' on 7 August, which, amongst other things, threatened everyone who was 'fighting' against His Majesty's forces, that unless they surrendered before 15 September, they would be permanently banished from Africa, and the maintenance of

supporting their families, would be for their account. The Boers referred to these proclamations as 'paper bombs'.

President Steyn's reply was a detailed one. A paragraph of his reply is included in the book 'The Great Boer War' by Byron Farwell (page 340) and reads – *"Our country is ruined; our hearths and homes wrecked; our cattle are looted, or killed by the thousand; our women and children are made prisoners, insulted, and carried away by armed natives; and many hundreds have already given their lives for freedom of the fatherland. Can we now – when it is merely a question of banishment – shrink from our duty?"*



With reference to the above book, I think the story which follows is worth recording (page 349) – *"Torture can be mental as well as physical, of course, but the only recorded incident of the deliberate infliction of mental anguish is the story told by Captain James Seely (later Lord Mottistone), who apparently never felt that he had done anything reprehensible."*

The story continues ...

*Picture: Captain James Seely*

*"He had ridden all night with 20 men to capture Boers who he had learned were at a farm owned by a man named Greyling in the Orange Free State. He surrounded the farm and 3 Boers rode out; all of them managed to escape. After a futile pursuit, he led his troopers back to the farm, now occupied only by a boy, Jappie, his mother, and two sisters. Singling out the boy to question, he demanded to know where his father had gone. All of his questions were met with silence; the boy refused to talk. Determined to break him, Seely ordered up a firing squad, stood him in front of it, and threatened to order it to shoot; still the boy refused to betray his father. In the face of such resolution it was Seely who broke, called off his bluff, and shook the boy's hand, telling the terrified mother that she had a son to be proud of, one it had been a privilege to meet. Then he mounted and rode off with his men. Telling the tale in later years, he wrote: 'As long as I live, I shall never forget that wonderful moment when love of a father, home and country triumphed over certain death. Never shall I forget the expression on the face of that Boer lad when, lifting his head, he said to me with glistening eyes: I shall not tell!'"*

Most Australians who come to South Africa, with an interest in the South African War (1899-1902), want to visit the grave of Breaker Morant. The story goes that, on 23 August 1901, the Bushveldt Carbineers executed eight prisoners and then murdered a German Missionary, the Reverend Heese, as he was suspected of being a witness to the executions. Breaker Morant and Lieutenant Handcock were arrested whilst serving with the Bushveldt Carbineers, and court-martialled for war crimes – one of the first such prosecutions in British military history. Morant was executed by firing squad on 27 February 1902.

An interesting non 'Boer War' related story from the month of August:

- on 29 August 1848 Boer and Brit had their first real battle north of the Orange, on the farm Boomplaats. This was in response to the British annexation of the area in February 1848.

Although the British were victorious, and managed to drive the Boers back across the Vaal River, their 'recorded' casualties were three times that of the Boers. The British force was led by the then Governor of the Cape Province, Sir Harry Smith, while the Boers were led by Andries Pretorius.

The town in the Free State, Harrismith is named after the Cape Governor, the town, Pretoria is named after Andries Pretorius, and Ladysmith in KwaZulu Natal is named after the Governor's wife.



*Picture: Sir Harry Smith*

During the two August months of the South African War (1900 & 1901), seven V.C.'s were awarded:

**1900**

Pvt. W. House	Royal Berkshire Regiment	Silkaatsnek
Sgt. B.T.T. Lawrence	17 <sup>th</sup> Lancers	Essenbosch Farm
Sgt. H. Hampton	Liverpool Regiment	van Wyk's Vlei
Cpl. H J. Knight	Liverpool Regiment	van Wyk's Vlei
Pvt. W.E. Heaton	Liverpool Regiment	Leeukloof Farm
Pvt. A.E. Durrant	The Rifle Brigade	Bergendal

**1901**

S.Maj. A. Young	Cape Police	Ruiter's Kraal
-----------------	-------------	----------------

## Victoria Cross of the Month

### Sergeant H. Hampton – 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Liverpool Regiment



Harry Hampton was born in Richmond, Surrey, on 14 December 1870.

He joined the King's Liverpool Regiment at Aldershot in March 1889 and served in the West Indies and Nova Scotia from 1891 to 1897.

He then came to South Africa and served through the Siege of Ladysmith. He came under fire during the support of the Wagon Hill defenders.

After the siege he took part in the advance into the Transvaal with the 1<sup>st</sup> Mounted Infantry Company of his regiment.

General Buller left the Middleburg area and advanced north to reach van Wyk's Vlei on 21 August 1900. They were subjected to the fire of the Bethal Commando from trenches on both sides of the ravine.

*Picture: Sergeant Harry Hampton V.C.*

#### Citation:

On 21<sup>st</sup> August 1900 at van Wyk's Vlei, Sergeant Hampton, who was in command of a small party of Mounted Infantry, held an important position for some time against heavy odds, and when compelled to retire, saw all his men into safety, and then, although he had himself been wounded in the head, supported Lance Corporal Walsh, who was unable to walk, until the latter was again hit and apparently killed, Sergeant Hampton himself being again wounded some time after.

*(London Gazette – 18 October 1901)*

The following day General W. Kitchener attacked the Boers on the right flank and forced them to withdraw.

Sergeant Hampton was decorated by King Edward VII at St. James Palace. His was one of three V.C.s won by his Regiment in three days. Hampton became a Colour-Sergeant and Sergeant Instructor of musketry before being discharged on pension. He had a son and a daughter.

Hampton was killed by falling against a passing steam train at Richmond, London on 4 February 1920 and was buried there in a pauper's grave, although he was given a military funeral.

Some allege that he committed suicide.

In 1986 a local policeman located his grave and a headstone was erected.

It is believed that Hampton's distraught widow burnt his medals.



*Picture: Headstone in memory of Harry Hampton V.C.*

(Acknowledgement – Ian Uys)

## Anniversary of the death of Lieutenant-General Sir Jacob Louis van Deventer – 17 August 1922

Jacob Louis van Deventer was born in Ficksburg in the Orange Free State on 18 July 1874. After completing his schooling he joined the ZAR Staats Artillerie and saw action against the Jameson Raiders in 1896.



At the time of the start of hostilities of the South African War (1899-1902) he was present at Kraaipan where the first shots of the war were fired.

After Kraaipan he moved, as part of General de la Rey's commando to south of Kimberley, and was present at the Battles of Modder River and Magersfontein.

van Deventer remained with de la Rey through the battles in the Magaliesberg and was at the resounding victory at Nooitgedacht, and at Vlakfontein.

Late in June 1901 he joined up with Jan Smuts, who was planning his 'invasion' into the Cape.

*Picture: Sir Jaap van Deventer*

To quote from the book 'General Smuts and his long ride' by Taffy and David Shearing (page 20) – *"He chose Jaap van Deventer, a professional soldier, as his 2 IC. Formerly a lieutenant in the Staats Artillerie, he had fought under General Piet Cronje, was friendly, quiet, but very firm and strict. The British recognised him as a bold, enterprising and capable leader and quite the leading spirit of all the commandos under Smuts."*

van Deventer operated in the Cape for the rest of the war, with considerable success in skirmishes which kept his commando supplied for needs. In the Book 'The Soldiers' by Willem Steenkamp (page 61) – *"Smuts and van Deventer made contact again in January 1902.....van Deventer had just laid violent hands on a British convoy headed for Calvinia. He had ambushed the convoy, and then when it had gone into laager for the night, he had led a raiding party which broke through the British lines on foot, and set fire to their wagons. Soon after Smuts' arrival, the last of the convoy surrendered, and van Deventer's men set to work re-equipping themselves from the abandoned wagons."*

van Deventer was wounded at a farm called Windhoek about 120 km south-west of Calvinia on 25 April 1902, a week before the signing of the Peace Treaty. Steenkamp records (page 61) – *"Every soldier has the dread of being killed after seeing a long war through to its end; now it had almost happened to big, brave Jaap van Deventer. He did not die, however, but his throat was so damaged that for the rest of his life his voice was nothing more than a choking rasp."*

In 1910 at the formation of the Union of South Africa van Deventer accepted an appointment in the new Union Defence Force. At the outbreak of World War One he was stationed at Upington and helped quell the 1914 Rebellion where a number of Boer leaders refused to go to war with Great Britain and rebelled against the Government of the day. He then spent the rest of the war in East Africa, eventually commanding all forces in the region once Smuts had been summoned to Europe. For his services, van Deventer was knighted – becoming as he preferred, 'Sir Jaap'.

van Deventer retired from military service on 1 January 1920 and went back to his farm, but in January 1922 he was appointed as a part-time inspecting officer of the Active Citizen Force. He was recalled to service later that year to assist in suppressing the Rand Miners revolt and commanded forces in the area between Germiston and Benoni.

On 17 August 1922 he died of heart failure at the age of 48 whilst travelling by car at Silkaatsnek, near Hartbeespoort Dam, the scene of two battles during the South African War (1899-1902). Could he have been at either of these battles 22 years earlier?

'Jan Smuts – Memoirs of the Boer War' by SB Spies and Gail Natrass records (page 29) – *"Some remarkable men served under Jan Smuts in the Cape Colony : Jaap van Deventer was to receive a knighthood and to be Commander-in-Chief of Allied Forces in the East African campaign during World War 1."*



*Picture: A group of soldiers of the Allied Forces during the East African Campaign*

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

**Allan Gordon**