

Newsletter

August 2023

As I have done for the past few months, I am quoting from selected headlines from the book 'The War Reporter – The Anglo-Boer War through the eyes of the Burghers', by J.E.H. Grobler. There are so many interesting stories in the book, that it is well worth having a copy – I am just quoting from a few summaries.

August 1900: from the Editor's Comments (page 93) – *"British forces have held the upper hand in the war during the past month: indeed their victory over Commandant-General Botha's main force at Bergendal (the British refer to the event as the Battle of Dalmanutha) earlier this week means that the Republican forces are once again in crisis. On the other hand, Chief Commandant de Wet's masterly outmanoeuvring of a huge force that was pursuing him, as well as General de la Rey's repulsing of a British army from Swartruggens earlier this month, considerably strengthened the morale of the Republican forces.*

The Boer cause is still far from lost. The British inability to destroy the Republican military forces has been proven over and over again in the past few months. They score one pyrrhic victory after the other, but in the meantime the Boers are regaining their moral ascendancy. De Wet's visit to Potchefstroom, where he encouraged the townspeople in a moving speech not to lose their confidence, is one example of this, while Lord Roberts' umpteenth proclamation, in which he threatens the Boers with harsh measures, proves that the celebrated Field Marshal is becoming desperate."

August 1901: from the Editor's Comments (page 121) – *"The major news this month is Kitchener's latest paper bomb. Having finally realised that they will never win the struggle against us on the battlefield, now the Brits are trying psychological warfare. We have bad news for them: this attempt will not work either. The Boer officers still in the field are not men who are easily frightened, and it is unthinkable now that any officer or government member will suddenly lay down his arms. Kitchener seems to be very slow to realise the unavoidable – and in addition, quite incapable of formulating logical proclamations.*

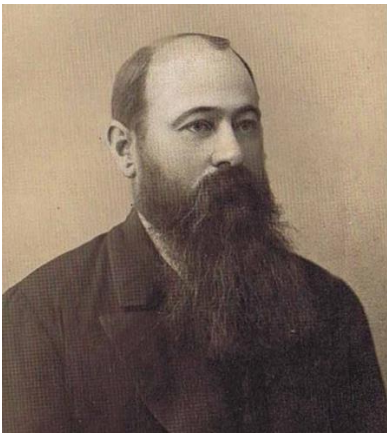


Picture: Lord Kitchener

President Steyn and State Secretary Reitz could not resist the temptation to reveal the weaknesses in his proclamation. The British commander will in the course of time realise that one cannot violate the truth and expect to force the Boers into surrender by threats."

The proclamation that is being referred to here was the proclamation which was issued by Kitchener, which addressed some of the supposed facts that:

- The vast majority of the civilian population is living in towns or camps under the control of the British, and
- The Boers who made up the fighting force were few in numbers and because of a number of facts, could not offer organised resistance to the British forces, and finally,
- The Boers who were fighting were the ones who were destroying property, and the final statement read ... All Boer officers who are still fighting, will, if they do not surrender by 15th September, be permanently banned from South Africa.



The Editor's Comments carried on – *"In the meantime, there have been numerous small skirmishes in which the Republican forces have managed to give a good account of themselves against the mass of the Khaki forces. Even though there are still a few lame and lazy burghers, the flame of our people's hopes and their determination are reaching new heights and we believe with President Steyn that justice will in the final instance be victorious."*

Picture: President Steyn

The skirmishes referred to above were mostly attacks on railway lines and on convoys carrying supplies, as this was really the only way that the Boers could get what they needed in the way of ammunition, foodstuffs, clothing and medical supplies.

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

1900

Pvt. W. House	Royal Berkshire Regiment	Silkaatsnek
Sgt. B.T.T. Lawrence	17 th 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
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Victoria Cross of the Month

Private W.E. Heaton – 1st Battalion Liverpool Regiment



William Edward Heaton was born in 1875 at Ormskirk, Lancashire. At age 25 he found himself serving as a private in the 8th (the King's Liverpool) Regiment.

The Battle of Bergendal would take place on 27 August 1900. As one of the preliminaries General Buller advanced to Geluk Farm on 23 August and found a ridge to the north occupied by the Heidelberg Commando. His artillery duelled with the Long Tom on the ridge and grievously wounded its artillery commander, von Dalwig.

Picture: William Edward Heaton V.C.

Two companies of the 'Liverpools' at the nearby Leeukloof Farm, eight miles south of Belfast, became cut off and were subjected to heavy rifle fire. They kept the Boers at bay until their ammunition began to fail and the Boers enveloped their flanks.

Citation:

On the 23rd August 1900, the company to which Private Heaton belonged, advancing in front of the general line held by the troops, became surrounded by the enemy and was suffering severely. At the request of the officer commanding, Private Heaton volunteered to take a message back to explain the position of the company. He was successful, though at the imminent risk of his own life. Had it not been for Private Heaton's courage, there can be little doubt that the remainder of the company, which suffered very severely, would have had to surrender.

(London Gazette 18 January 1901)

At dusk the two companies began retiring, covered by a few men. They lost 10 killed, 48 wounded and 30 missing. Meanwhile Buller had held his position on a ridge north of the farm.

Heaton was decorated in Pietermaritzburg by the Duke of Cornwall and York on 14 August 1901. He was later promoted Sergeant.

He died at Southport, Lancashire, on 5 June 1941, aged 66 years. His wife, Elizabeth, died in January 1953 and is buried alongside him. His medals belong to the King's Regiment and are deposited at the Liverpool Museum.



Anniversary of the death of Boer General Lukas Meyer – 8 August 1902

Lukas Johannes Meyer was born on 19 November 1846 in the Free State, and was the grandson of a Voortrekker leader of the same name. He spent his early life in Newcastle, Natal but at the age of 19 he moved and settled in Utrecht. At the age of 26 he was elected Field-Cornet of the district of Utrecht. He was involved in the 1st Anglo-Boer War (1880-1881), even though he wasn't a Transvaaler, and was seriously wounded at the Battle of Ingogo, which prevented him from taking part in the final Battle of Majuba.



After the war Meyer served as the magistrate of Utrecht.

He commanded a force of Boers from the district to help in a power struggle amongst the Zulus in Northern Natal, and as compensation, the Boers were given land by Chief Dinuzulu, which they declared the New Republic.

In 1884, he was appointed Commandant-General and Acting President of the New Republic and he took a leading role in obtaining British permission for the incorporation of the New Republic into the Transvaal Republic as the Vryheid district.

Picture: General Lukas Meyer

Meyer was in his 50's when the South African War (1899-1902) broke out, and being on the border of Natal he commanded the Boer Forces who crossed the border when war was declared.

He took part in the occupation of Dundee and the Battle of Talana, but then fell ill and handed over command to Louis Botha. Meyer returned to the battlefield, taking part in the Battle of Vaal Krantz just before the Relief of Ladysmith.

After the relief he was active in the Biggarsberg where he engaged with the British force under Buller. He gave the orders to destroy the tunnel, through which the railway line went, at Laing's Nek, on 16 May 1900.

Meyer was summoned to Pretoria before the departure of Paul Kruger, and placed in charge of the British Prisoner of War Camp at Waterval, north of Pretoria, when the captured British officers were moved from their relatively comfortable lifestyle, at the Staats Model School, to that camp.

After the fall of Pretoria he moved with the Boers as far as Machadadorp before ill health again necessitated him returning home to Vryheid.

Because of ill health, he was unable to take an active part during the latter part of the war and at the conclusion of the war, he became a member of the Executive Council, taking part in the peace conference, and was one of the signatories of the Treaty of Vereeniging.



Picture: Discussions during the Treaty of Vereeniging

After the signing of the peace treaty many Boer leaders visited Europe to try and raise funds to repair their destroyed 'Republics', and it was during a visit to Europe that Meyer died from a heart attack in Brussels, Belgium. He is buried in the cemetery in Vryheid.

REMEMBER to keep an eye on our website (www.battletoursza.com) - for regular articles, updates, etc.

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