

Newsletter

December 2024

The major battles that took place during the months of December 1899, 1900, and 1901 in the South African War (1899-1902) have been covered in previous newsletters. This newsletter will record other interesting aspects of the war, together with other notable, related 'December' events.

December 1899: Following 'Black Week' (the British defeats to the Boers at the Battles of Stormberg, Magersfontein and Colenso), Lord Roberts wrote a confidential letter to Lord Lansdowne, the British Secretary of State for War, offering his services in South Africa. The letter was not complimentary to the attitude of General Buller, and was referred to Lord Salisbury, the then Prime Minister of Great Britain. Lord Salisbury felt that Roberts was too old, but a day after the Colenso defeat, Roberts was appointed Commander-in-Chief of British forces in South Africa, with Major-General Lord Kitchener as his Chief of Staff.

At the same time the Lord Mayor of London offered to raise a corps of Yeomanry, with the enlistment of the Imperial Yeomanry confirmed just days before Christmas.

Churchill, who had escaped from his imprisonment in Pretoria on 12 December, arrived in Durban from Delagoa Bay (Lourenco Marques/Maputo) on 23 December to a hero's welcome. After disembarking from his ship, he made a speech before making his way to the town hall.

The book 'Churchill Wanted Dead or Alive' by Celia Sandys records (page 137) – *"The crowd now commandeered the speaker and hauled him, seated in a rickshaw, through the streets to the steps of the town hall, where a cart had been drawn up as a platform from which he was again expected to speak. Hatless, hands on hips and with a Union Jack hoist beside him, he made his second battle-cry of the day, though not until the crowd had sung Rule Britannia."*



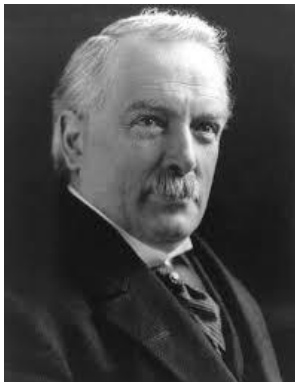
Picture: Sir Winston Churchill

December 1900: Early in December, General Botha instructed all commandos and town Landrosts (Mayors) to compile lists of those men who had laid down arms and/or signed the oath of neutrality. This was to try and get them back into the Boer fighting force ranks. He declared that those refusing to 'rejoin' would 'be dealt with', and those agreeing would be required to sign a document negating the oath of allegiance signed with the British.

It was widely accepted that the black population, who weren't in the employ of the Boers, were sympathetic to the British cause. However, the book 'Life on Commando during the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902' by Fransjohan Pretorius has a different slant on this – page 295 records – *"During the guerrilla phase black scouts were particularly valuable. The intelligence they provided mostly related to the movements and numeric strength of the British columns."* Pretorius further records (page 296) – *"Some black scouts for the Boers who could speak English posed as handymen in the British army. W.R. Nasson cites the case of Alfred Malapi who was executed for spying, by the British, at Aliwal North in December 1900. According to a British intelligence officer, Malapi 'dressed exactly like one of our men, Khaki coat, breeches, puttees, and an army cap', pretending for several months to be one of their own black handymen, before he was unmasked."*

December 1901: Although much was happening in South Africa relating to the war – battles, Smuts being in the Cape, concerns over Concentration Camps, arresting of Cape Rebels, etc., there was 'activity' in the UK. Having recently re-read the book 'Goodbye Dolly Gray' (a must read for Boer War enthusiasts) by Rayne Kruger, the activities of Lloyd George, who was later to become Prime Minister, interested me. Kruger records (page 456) – *"Lloyd George in particular found himself as much in personal danger as ever. He never stopped berating a government which he said would not make peace and could not wage war."*

Kruger carried on – *"... and when he went – courageously or rashly – to Birmingham Town Hall in December 1901, he caused a riot. This was the most famous Lloyd George Night of all. He gathered to himself all the animosity excited by the 'pro-Boer'; more, Chamberlain's diocese took the opportunity to avenge the attacks on their hero's personal honour."*



Picture: David Lloyd George

On arrival Lloyd George made his way unrecognised through a huge mob outside the hall, while four brass bands played patriotic airs and merchants sold half-bricks at 'three a penny, to throw at Lloyd George'. He had scarcely appeared on the platform when the avalanche descended. The mob broke 1 200 windows, battered down the doors, swept aside the police, surged into the hall: and to cries of 'Pro-Boer! Traitor! Kill him!', the blowing of police whistles, the screams of women, and the crash of falling masonry and broken furniture, Lloyd George only escaped with his life by slipping away disguised as a policeman."

So, the war was alive and 'well' in both countries.

Other interesting events during the month of December:

- **30 December 1865** – Rudyard Kipling was born in Bombay, India. An interesting coincidence is that his most famous poem 'If', was dedicated to Leander Starr Jameson, who, in 1895 on this day was getting into all sorts of trouble in the Transvaal for his involvement in the Jameson Raid.

- 29 December 1895** – The Jameson Raid began and was a total failure. Jameson waited on the border, but the Uitlander leaders in Johannesburg argued among themselves about the kind of government to be put into place after the invasion. Many of the Uitlanders had no interest in a violent uprising but preferred to celebrate the New Year. Rhodes decided to stop the raid, but it was too late because Jameson and his party had already crossed into the Transvaal. Jameson's troops tried to cut communication lines to Pretoria but cut the wrong lines. This meant that the Transvaal government knew the raiders were on their way before they reached Johannesburg. On 2 January 1896 Jameson had to surrender at Doornkop near Krugersdorp. The prisoners were handed over to their own government and the Uitlander leaders who had been part of the plot were put to trial in Johannesburg. Some of them were condemned to death, but the sentences were later reduced to large fines. Rhodes was forced to resign as the premier of the Cape Colony and the political problems between Afrikaans and English-speaking people became worse than ever in the colony. The Orange Free State co-operated more closely with the Transvaal. Transvaal residents felt that they were being threatened and Uitlanders were treated with more suspicion than ever before.
- 11 December 1899** – Augustus John Henry Beaumont Paulet, 15th Marquess of Winchester, a British peer and soldier, was killed at the Battle of Magersfontein. Lord Winchester was a Major in the Coldstream Guards and was mentioned in the despatch from Lord Methuen describing him as a man who 'displayed almost reckless courage'.

During the three December months of the South African War (1899, 1900 and 1901), 15 V.C.s were awarded:

1899

Capt. E.B.B. Towse	Gordon Highlanders	Magersfontein
Cpl. J.D.F. Shaul	Highland Light Infantry	Magersfontein
Lt. H.E.M. Douglas	Royal Army Medical Corp	Magersfontein
Capt. H.N. Schofield	Royal Field Artillery	Colenso
Capt. W.N. Congreve	Rifle Brigade	Colenso
Capt. H.L. Reed	Royal Field Artillery	Colenso
Lt. F.S. Roberts	King's Royal Rifle Corp	Colenso
Maj. W. Babtie	Royal Army Medical Corp	Colenso
Cpl. G.E. Nurse	Royal Field Artillery	Colenso
Pvt. G. Ravenhill	Royal Scots Fusiliers	Colenso
Sgt. H.R. Martineau	Protectorate Regiment	Mafeking
Tpr. H.E. Ramsden	Protectorate Regiment	Mafeking

1900

Sgt. D.D. Farmer	Cameron Highlanders	Nooitgedacht
------------------	---------------------	--------------

1901

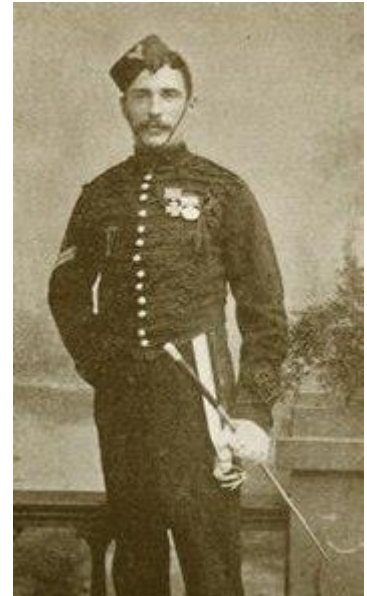
Sur.Capt. T.J. Crean	Imperial Light Horse	Tygerskloof (Free State)
Shoe.Smith. A.E. Ind	Royal Horse Artillery	Tafelkop (Free State)

Victoria Cross of the Month

Shoeing Smith A.E. Ind – Royal Horse Artillery

Alfred Ernest Ind was born at Tetbury, Gloucestershire, on 16 September 1872. He joined the Royal Horse Artillery in February 1901 and trained on pom-poms and was serving in the 11th Section in the Orange Free State when his courage was tested.

General Damant's column, which Ind was part of, was separated from Rimington's column, south-east of Frankfort on the Wilge River, when attacked by 300 Boers of the Vrede Commando. The Boers were initially mistaken for Yeomanry until they were very close. In the carnage which followed, most of the gunners were shot down around their guns, while Damant was hit in four places.



Picture: Shoeing Smith Ind V.C.

Citation:

During the action near Tafelkop, Orange River Colony, on 20th December 1901, Shoeing Smith A E Ind, 11th Section Pom-Poms, stuck to his gun under a very heavy fire, when the whole of the remainder of the pom-pom team had been shot down, and continued to fire into the advancing Boers till the last possible moment. Captain Jefficoat, who was mortally wounded on this occasion, requested that Shoeing Smith Ind's gallant conduct in this, and in every other action since he joined the Pom-pom Section, should be brought to notice.

(London Gazette 15 August 1902)

By the time Rimington arrived to relieve them, the British had 33 killed and 45 wounded out of 90 men. Ind was promoted Corporal and mentioned in despatches. During further service Ind was wounded and mentioned on another four occasions. His V.C. was presented to him by King Edward VII at Buckingham Palace in November 1901.

He served as a lodge keeper to the 2nd Duke of Westminster at Eton Hall in 1911. Ind died at Eccleston, Cheshire on 29 November 1916, aged 44 years. His V.C. and medals were sold in 1920 for 105 British Pounds.

Anniversary of the death of Major P.W.A.A. Milton – 11 December 1899

Major Percy William Albert Alfred Milton, 1st Battalion Yorkshire Light Infantry, was killed in action at Magersfontein on 11 December 1899.

He was born in May 1860, and entered the 51st Foot from the R.M.C. in May 1878, being promoted Lieutenant in December 1878, Captain in January 1884, Brevet-Major in September 1891, and Major in March 1894. He held the appointment of Station Staff Officer, 1st Class, Bombay, from 1882 to 1896, served with his battalion in the Afghan War of 1879-80, and was present in the engagement at Nargashai as orderly officer, being mentioned in despatches and receiving the medal.

Major Milton served with the Burmese Expedition, 1886-87, with the 1st Battalion Yorkshire Light Infantry during the latter part of the time in command of the Mounted Infantry, being mentioned in despatches and receiving the medal with clasp. He also served with the 2nd Battalion of his regiment in the Zhob Field Force in 1890 under General Sir George White during the Zhob and Kiderzai Expeditions, and in the march to Vidowa, was again mentioned in despatches and given the brevet rank of Major.



In South Africa he was commanding the Mounted Infantry with the Kimberley Relief Force and was present at the actions at Belmont (mentioned in despatches), Graspan, and Modder River. Lieutenant-General Lord Methuen, in his despatch of 15 February 1900, concerning the Battle of Magersfontein, reported that Major Milton in that action 'behaved gallantly and was shot three times before he died. He was making a successful effort to rally some men of the Highland Brigade.'

Picture: A scene from the Battle of Magersfontein

The following was recorded of Major Ray, 1st Battalion, Northumberland Fusiliers, who was also killed at Magersfontein on 11 December 1899 – *"When he fell he was with some Mounted Infantry on the right flank, endeavouring to prevent a threatening movement of the enemy. This movement, Sir Arthur A. Conan Doyle writes – 'would have put the Highlanders in an impossible position had it succeeded', and it was in this long and successful struggle to cover the flank of the 3^d Brigade that Major Milton, Major Ray, and many other brave men met their end."*

(Acknowledgement: Alexander Palmer, 'The Boer War Casualty Roll')

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

Allan Gordon