

Newsletter

February 2022

February 1900: Kimberley was relieved on 15 February 1900 after a siege lasting 123 days. The Relief of Ladysmith followed 12 days later on 27 February. On the same day, Cronje surrendered to the British at Paardeberg with over 4 000 men and 50 women, including his wife. The disaster at Paardeberg had lasted 10 days. Following these two 'setbacks' many Boers went back to their farms and the Boer leaders had a challenge on their hands to get them back into the war. After Cronje's capture with his large cumbersome convoy and 'home comforts', the Boers started looking at cutting back on the size, and composition, of their convoys.

For those familiar with the sport golf, Freddie Tait was killed at the Battle of Koodoosberg on 7 February 1900.

Koodoosberg is a farm 45 km south west of Kimberley.

Tait was an amateur golfer who won the British Amateur Championship twice, and tied for third place in the British Open Championship in both 1896 and 1897.

The Freddie Tait Cup is awarded annually to the leading amateur in the South African Open.

Picture: Lieutenant F.G. Tait



On 9 February 1900, George Labram, an American mechanical engineer, who had created the 'Long Cecil' cannon in Kimberley to try and counter the Boer's Long Tom, was killed by a shell fired by the Boers. Labram was responsible for many inventions in Kimberley during the siege. He had moved to Kimberley in 1893 and was employed by the De Beers Company to build and manage a crushing mill.

February 1901: On 6 February 1901 a Boer force under the command of General Louis Botha attacked a British column led by Major-General Smith-Dorrien at Lake Chrissie, 30 km north east of Ermelo. Smith-Dorrien in his memoirs records that he had 54 men killed and about the same number wounded.

February 1901 ended with the Middleburg Peace Conference, where on 28 February, British commander Lord Kitchener and his delegation met with a Boer delegation headed by General Botha. The talks failed to bring peace and Kitchener commenced with the barbed wire and block house campaign to try and thwart guerrilla attacks by the Boers.

February 1902: On 8 February 1902 Arthur Martin-Leake (see our V.C. feature in this Newsletter) was awarded the Victoria Cross at an action at Vlakfontein in the Standerton District.

Since the introduction of the first V.C. award in 1857, over 1 350 have been awarded. To date only three people have received the award twice – Martin-Leake being one of them.

On 25 February 1902 General de la Rey attacked a British convoy at Ysterspruit (Battle of the Month – www.battletoursza.com).

Some other interesting 'happenings' in February, unrelated to the South African War (1899-1902) which might be of interest to readers are:

- In a cricket Test Match played in Port Elizabeth on 13/14 February 1896 between South Africa and England, South Africa were bowled out for 30, with England's George Lohmann taking eight wickets for seven runs.
- In World War II, Singapore fell to the Japanese on 15 February 1942.

... and finally ...

- South African Major Edwin (Ted) Swales V.C. died on 23 February 1945 whilst trying to get his severely damaged bomber back to friendly airspace. His plane was the Master Bomber on an RAF raid. He had ordered his crew to bail out after losing two engines in an attack by German Me110's. He was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross.



Picture: Major Ted Swales V.C.

During the three February months of the South African War (1900, 1901 & 1902), ten V.C.'s were awarded:

1900

Lt. F.N. Parsons	Essex Regiment	Paardeberg
Sgt. A. Atkinson	Yorkshire Regiment	Paardeberg
Pvt. A E. Curtis	East Surrey Regiment	Natal
Lt. E.T. Inkson	Royal Army Medical Corp	Natal
Sgt. J. Firth	1 st Manchester	Caesar's Camp
Pvt. J. Pitts	Duke of Wellington	Plewman's Farm (C.C.)
Cpt. C. Mansel-Jones	West Yorkshire Regt.	Terrace Hill (Natal)

1901

Sgt. W.B. Traynor	West Yorkshire Regt.	Lake Chrissie (Tvl)
Cpl. J.J. Clements	Rimington's Guides	Strijdenberg (C.C.)

1902

Sur-Capt. A. Martin-Leake	S.A. Constabulary	Vlakfontein (Standerton)
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Victoria Cross of the Month

Surgeon-Captain A. Martin-Leake – South African Constabulary



*Picture: Surgeon-Captain Arthur
Martin-Leake V.C.*

Arthur Martin-Leake was born at Standen, Hertfordshire on 4 April 1874. He qualified as a doctor in London in 1898, then joined the Hertfordshire Company of the Imperial Yeomanry, and served with them for a year in South Africa.

On their return he remained behind and was employed by the army as a civil surgeon. When Baden-Powell formed the South African Constabulary (SAC) he joined as a Surgeon-Captain.

A line of posts held by the SAC was to be extended to near Van Tonder's Hoek in the Transvaal. A reconnoitring party of 130 men under Captain Capell found themselves within 370 metres of a Boer laager, who attacked them with superior numbers. On the left centre Sergeant Waller was hit in the leg from 35-40 metre range. Martin-Leake bandaged him then ran to the mortally wounded Lieutenant Abrahams.

Citation:

For great devotion to duty and self-sacrifice at Vlakfontein, 8th February 1902, when he went out into the firing line to dress a wounded man under very heavy fire from about 40 Boers only 100 yards off. When he had done all he could for him, he went over to a badly wounded officer, and while trying to place him in a more comfortable position he was shot three times. He only gave up when thoroughly exhausted, and then he refused water until other wounded men had been served.

(London Gazette – 13 May 1902)

The Boers then rushed the position and took the remaining men prisoners. They expressed regret at having shot Martin-Leake, but said that as he rushed from one side to the other they were unaware that he was tending to the wounded. After being released Martin-Leake was recommended for the V.C. by General Baden-Powell.

The V.C. was presented to Martin-Leake by King George V at St. James Palace in June 1902. He qualified as a surgeon the following year then served in India as a medical officer on the Bengal-Nagpur Railway. In May 1907 his brother, Theodore, a Lieutenant in the Royal Engineers, was drowned off the Dorsetshire coast following an accident to the war cutter, Thrasher.

In 1913 he served with the Montenegrin Red Cross. The following year Lieutenant Martin-Leake was with the RAMC at the First Battle of Ypres, attached to the 5th Field Ambulance, where he won the first 'Double V.C.'.

Citation:

Lieutenant Arthur Martin-Leake, Royal Army Medical Corps (attached 5th Field Ambulance), who was awarded the Victoria Cross on 13th May 1902, is granted a clasp for conspicuous bravery in the present campaign. For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty throughout the campaign, especially during the period 29 October to 8 November 1914, near Zonnebeke, in rescuing, whilst exposed to constant fire, a large number of the wounded who were lying close to the enemies trenches.

(London Gazette – 18 February 1915)

The V.C. bar was presented to Martin-Leake by King George V at Windsor Castle in July 1915. Before the war's end Lieutenant-Colonel Martin-Leake had commanded a Casualty Clearing Station with the 1st Army. He returned to serve in India after the war. In 1930 he married a widow, Winifred Carroll, sadly she died two years later.

Martin-Leake had many hobbies, including riding a motorbike and flying his own plane. During World War II he commanded a mobile ARP unit. In his later years he enjoyed fishing, gardening and cooking.

Martin-Leake died at Ware, Hertfordshire on 22 June 1953, and was cremated after a service in High Cross Churchyard.

A memorial plaque was placed inside the church.

His will directed that his medals be given to the RAMC.



Picture: Memorial Plaque to Lt Col Martin-Leake V.C.

Martin-Leake is one of only three people to win a Bar to their V.C.. The other two are: Captain Noel Godfrey Chavasse Royal Army Medical Corps (WWI) and Captain Charles Upham 20 Infantry Battalion New Zealand (WWII). Martin-Leake's 1902 V.C. was the last awarded in the South African War (1899-1902).

Acknowledgement – Ian Uys

Anniversary of the death of Meyer de Kock – 12 February 1901

At the time of the South African War (1899-1902) Meyer de Kock was a well-respected businessman living with his family in Belfast in the Eastern Transvaal (now Mpumalanga). When war broke out in October 1899, de Kock, who was 50 years old, did not join his local commando for service in the field but remained behind to guard the bridges and railway line in the area around Belfast. The line ran from Lourenço Marques (now Maputo) to Pretoria and was the life-line for supplies for the Boers.

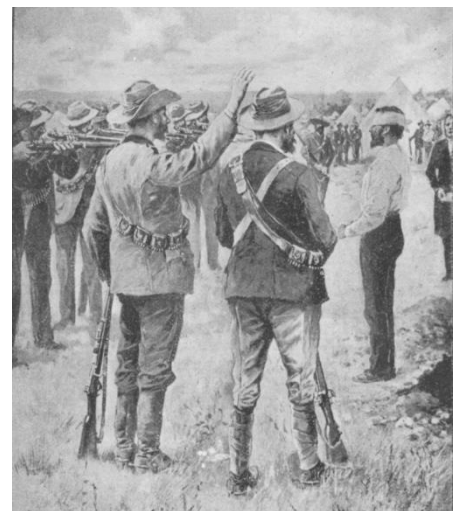
After the Battle of Belfast (Bergendal) in August 1900, with both Bloemfontein and Pretoria in the hands of the British, de Kock and many other Boers, regarded the war as being lost and he voluntarily surrendered to the British garrison in Belfast on 10 December 1900. He had thought about this decision for some months, and eventually, for a number of reasons, decided to 'throw in the towel'. His reasons were that his wife was not used to the hardships of war and as head of his family, he had to rescue them from the difficult situation in which they found themselves and to prevent British troops from damaging his property as they had already embarked on the scorched earth policy. He also wanted a platform to complain to the British about the concentration camps and the treatment being inflicted on Boer women.

De Kock was taken to Pretoria by British authorities and interviewed by British Military Intelligence and once he had been 'cleared', he and other burghers met to discuss how they could get back into their districts to convince the locals about peace. They decided to return to their own districts, form local peace committees, and approach the burghers in the field to try and persuade them to surrender. De Kock returned to Belfast and started a local peace committee. On 22 January 1901 he decided to visit the Boer Commandos who were operating in the district of Belfast.

When de Kock arrived at the Boers' pickets he was arrested immediately and taken to General Muller who sent him to the district government camp. On 29 January 1901 de Kock appeared before a special military court to be tried for high treason. Although he was offered legal representation, de Kock declined the offer.

He was charged with having left his commando and handing his weapons to the enemy. To this charge, he pleaded guilty but added that if he had not done so, his family would have been ejected from their home or suffered in some other way.

Picture: Meyer de Kock was placed alongside an empty grave in preparation for his execution



The second charge against him was that he had cooperated with the enemy in trying to persuade fellow Boers to lay down their arms. Together with this charge was the fact that he had created a 'Peace Committee', using documentation compiled by the enemy. He pleaded guilty to the latter but explained that it was done with good intentions to promote peace. A number of witnesses

were called in to support these charges. At the end of the trial, the court found de Kock guilty of high treason and sentenced him to death.

He was sent back to the commandos to be executed by firing squad and on 12 February 1901 he was shot next to an open grave prepared for him.

His grave can be viewed on the farm Windhoek near the town Dullstroom in Mpumalanga.



Picture: Meyer de Kock's grave near Dullstroom

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

Allan Gordon