

Newsletter

January 2022

The month of January was an amazing month when it comes to the awarding of V.C.'s!

During the Anglo-Zulu War (1879) and the South African War (1899-1902) 22 V.C.'s were awarded – three for bravery at Isandlwana, 11 for bravery at Rorke's Drift, and eight (see below) for actions during the South African War.

This certainly would seem to be the highest number of V.C.'s awarded in a particular month, in just two conflicts in one country.



January 1900 – the British forces were still trying to relieve the cities of Kimberley, Ladysmith and Mafeking, with General Buller making no headway and suffering huge losses in his attempt to cross the Tugela River – Spioen Kop being a prime example, where the British casualties were 243 men killed and over 1 000 either wounded or taken prisoner. The Boers had made their last, unsuccessful attempt, to take the town of Ladysmith at the Battle of Platrand on 6 January 1900. On 10 January Lord Roberts arrived in South Africa to take over command of the British forces from Buller. On the same ship was Lord Kitchener, who was later to succeed Roberts.

January 1901 saw the continuation of guerrilla activities by the Boers. At Cyferfontein (near the town of Derby in the North West Province), on 2 January, the British casualties were 48 men either killed or wounded in an engagement with Boer General de la Rey. On 7 January the British force at Belfast managed to drive off an aggressive attempt by Boer commandos to retake the town. And, on 29 January, Major-General Knox unsuccessfully tried to halt General de Wet's progress southwards at the farm Tabaksberg – near Winburg in the Free State. However, an action at Middelfontein (also close to the town of Derby in the North West Province), between 23 & 25 January, saw the British suffer 12 men killed, 47 wounded and three reported missing (Battle of the Month – www.battletoursza.com).

The month ended with the three day Siege/Battle of Modderfontein, south of Westonaria (midway between Johannesburg and Potchefstroom) where the British garrison suffered 30 casualties, with the rest of the men surrendering. This was General Smuts' first action where he was in command of Boer forces. Probably the most significant event in January 1901 was the death of Queen Victoria (22 January 1901).

January 1902 was almost a 'status quo' of 1901 – guerrilla activities carried on with the British trying to hunt down and corner the Boer military leaders. Success came on 25 January when General Ben Viljoen was ambushed and captured near Lydenburg.



Picture: Battle of Isandlwana – Cairns marking War Graves

January was also a significant month in 1879 with the Battles of Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift taking place on 22 & 23 January respectively.

And in 1881, on 28 January, the Boers defeated the British at Laing's Nek when General Colley was in command of a force that were making their way to the Transvaal to relieve the towns that were under siege by the Boers – 1st Boer War.

British casualties were 84 killed and 112 wounded.

On 26 January 1885 General Gordon (Gordon of Khartoum) was killed, along with whomever was in the garrison, by Mahgist forces. His body was never found. Gordon was one year younger than Lord Roberts, and six years older than Buller, and one wonders whether, had he not been killed in 1885, would he have taken part in the South African War (1899-1902)?

And finally, for those interested in World War 1, Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae, a Canadian poet and soldier during World War 1, who served as a surgeon during the Second Battle of Ypres, in Belgium, died on 28 January 1918 from pneumonia. He is best known for writing the famous war poem 'In Flanders Fields' – the words of which are at the end of this Newsletter.

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

1900

Lt. J.P. Milbanke	10 th Hussars	Colesburg (Cape)
Lt. R.J. Digbey-Jones	Royal Engineers	Wagon Hill
Tpr. H. Albrechts	Imperial Light Horse	Wagon Hill
Lt. J.E.I. Masterson	1 st Devonshire's	Wagon Hill
Pvt. R. Scott	1 st Manchester's	Caesar's Camp
Pvt. J. Pitts	1 st Manchester's	Caesar's Camp

1901

Pvt. J. Barry	1 st Royal Irish	Monument Hill
Farr. Sgt. W.J. Hardham	4 th New Zealand Cont.	Naauwpoort

Victoria Cross of the Month

Lieutenant J.E.I. Masterson – 1st Battalion Devonshire Regiment



James Edward Ignatius Masterson was born on 20 June 1862.

He joined the 87th Royal Irish Fusiliers in 1881 and served in Egypt the following year.

In 1891 he was commissioned in the 2nd Devonshire Regiment and served in Burma and on the North-West Frontier of India.

During the South African War (1899-1902) he was present at Elandslaagte, Rietfontein and Lombard's Kop in Ladysmith.

He commanded D Company of the Devon's at Wagon Hill during their charge of the Boer position on 6 January 1900 at 6p.m.

Picture: Lieutenant James Masterson V.C.

Citation:

During the action at Wagon Hill, on 6th January 1900, Lieutenant Masterson commanded, with the greatest gallantry and dash, one of the three companies of his regiment which charged a ridge held by the enemy, and captured their position. The companies were then exposed to a most heavy and galling fire from the right and left front. Lieutenant Masterson undertook to give a message to the Imperial Light Horse, who were holding a ridge some hundred yards behind, to fire to the left front and endeavour to check the enemy's fire. In taking this message he crossed an open space of a hundred yards which was swept by a most heavy cross-fire, and, although badly wounded in both thighs, managed to crawl in and deliver his message before falling exhausted into the Imperial Light Horse trench. His unselfish heroism was undoubtedly the means of saving lives.

(London Gazette – 4 June 1901)

According to the Times History – *"Firing to the last second the Boers turned and ran. But at the first convenient rocks they halted, still grimly determined not to be hunted down the hill in daylight. For the next half hour the fight went on, the Devon's losing almost as heavily as in the charge. It was now that Lieutenant Field and Captain Lafone were killed, and Masterson wounded in half a dozen places while most gallantly carrying back a message for support. A few minutes later it was dark, and the Boers now finally abandoned the hill."*

Masterson was promoted to Captain in 1900, to Major in the King's Own Loyal Lancashire Regiment in 1911 and the following year he retired.

In 1910 he re-enacted at an army pageant the capture of the first French Eagle during the Peninsula War by his ancestor, Sergeant Patrick Masterson of the 87th Foot.

He served as a Transport Officer from 1914-1915.

Masterson died at Waterlooville, Hampshire, on 24 December 1935 and is buried in Hulbert Road Cemetery, Waterlooville.



Picture: Masterson's Grave in Hulbert Road Cemetery

Acknowledgement – Ian Uys

Anniversary of the Death of Lieutenant-General Charles Warren – 21 January 1927



Picture : Lieutenant-General Charles Warren

Charles Warren was born in Bangor, Wales on 7 February 1840 and was educated at schools in Shropshire before enrolling at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst and then the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich.

He was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Royal Engineers on 27 December 1857. His early military career was confined to surveying and exploration and in this capacity he saw service in Malta, Western Palestine (Jerusalem), and Southern Africa.

In 1885 Warren decided to enter politics but lost his first campaign by a narrow margin. The following year he was appointed Commissioner of Police in London. In 1889 he was promoted to Major-General and sent to Singapore to command the garrison there.

In 1895 he returned to London where he commanded the Thames District before being put on the Reserve list in 1897 having reached the rank of Lieutenant-General.

During the above career, he was regarded as a 'pioneer archaeologist' of the Biblical Holy Land, being better known for work around the Temple Mount. He was Police Chief, the head of the London Metropolitan Police, during the Jack the Ripper murders.

Warren was a devout Anglican and a practicing Freemason, where he became the third District Grand Master of the Eastern Archipelago in Singapore.

Wikipedia records the following on Warren relating to his involvement in the South African War (1899-1902) – *"On the outbreak of the Boer War in 1899, he returned to the colours to command the 5th Division of the South African Field Force. The decision to give command to Warren was surprising. By then, Warren was 59 years old, was said to have a 'disagreeable temper', had little recent experience leading troops in battle and did not get along with his superior, General Sir Redvers Buller.*

In January 1900, Warren bungled the second attempted relief of Ladysmith, which was a west flanking movement over the Tugela River. At the Battle of Spioen Kop, on 23–24 January 1900, he had operational command, and his failures of judgment, delay and indecision despite his superior forces culminated in the disaster. Farwell highlighted Warren's fixation with the army's oxen and his view that Hlangwane Hill was the key to Colenso. Farwell suggested Warren was 'perhaps the

worst' of the British generals in the Boer War and certainly the most 'preposterous'. He was described by Redvers Buller in a letter to his wife as 'a duffer', responsible for losing him 'a great chance'.

Warren was recalled to Britain in August 1900 and never again commanded troops in the field. He was, however, appointed Honorary Colonel of the 1st Gloucestershire Volunteer Corps of the Royal Engineers in November 1901, promoted general in 1904 and became Colonel-Commandant of the Royal Engineers in 1905." The Farwell referred to in the above is Byron Farwell and his book – 'The Great Boer War'.

However, for those interested in either Warren and/or the Siege of Ladysmith, the book 'The Anglo-Boer War, The Road to Infamy', by Owen Coetzer is a must read. Coetzer goes into depth on the Commission of Enquiry into the events leading up to the Relief of Ladysmith and analyses the roles that General Buller and Warren played. Coetzer believes that it was Warren who put together the final plan for the relief. It is a very interesting interpretation on the characters, and the physical battles fought. Coetzer has no doubt where Warren fitted in. Coetzer states (page 261) – *"In Buller's despatches on the final operations, it is surprising to find no mention whatsoever is made of the important part which Warren took in commanding the majority of operations which led to the relief."*

On page 262 Coetzer records – *"Many years later when Lady White was discussing the Natal Campaign at a dinner table, she remarked to her neighbour, 'Of course, my husband knew all along that it was really Charles Warren who relieved Ladysmith'."*

After the war Warren was also involved with Baden-Powell in the creation of the Boy Scout movement.

Coetzer records (page 268) a statement made by Warren – *"So I turned away and made up my mind ... I determined to go in for education of boys, and to show my ability, I determined to make order out of the confused chaos of weights and measures, and also to find out what's the matter with the earth's position – as no astronomers, as yet, have been able to find any law for the position of the planets."*



Picture: Scout Master Charles Warren

He died on the evening of 21 January 1927 of pneumonia, at his home in Weston-super-Mare, Somerset. He was given a military funeral in Canterbury Cathedral, and was buried in the churchyard at Westbere, Kent, next to his wife.

As Coetzer records (Page 269) – *"And so passed a true hero of the Boer War."*



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

Allan Gordon