

Newsletter July 2020

The early days of July 1900 saw much activity in the town of Rustenburg. Initially Lord Roberts decided to abandon the town as he felt it was too remote from Pretoria and he didn't want to spread his troops too thinly from Pretoria. During the first week of July both the Union Jack and the Boer Vierkleur were hoisted twice each until the British, under Baden-Powell finally decided the town's importance needed a 'permanent' presence.

With morale still low amongst the Boers, the Boer generals decided to mount three simultaneous attacks on the British in order to generate confidence in their fighters. On 11 July Boer commandos attacked a supply convoy at Dwarsvlei (Battle of the Month – www.battletoursza.com), and attacked the British positions at Silkaats Nek and Onderstepoort. All three actions were resounding successes and many Boers who had laid down their arms after the fall of Pretoria, re-joined the struggle. Lord Roberts was forced to halt the initiatives gained east of Pretoria and direct forces to Magaliesberg to counter the renewed Boer activities in the area.



General de Wet was still active in the Free State but was making plans to break out of the Brandwater Basin, an area south of Bethlehem, as the British advances had forced a number of Boer positions, and there was a danger of almost 6 000 Boers being 'hemmed in'.

In mid-July 1900, General de Wet made plans for the Boers to break out. He had divided his men into three divisions, with orders of how, when and to where each division should proceed. De Wet, with the Free State Government of the time, left first. However, there was confusion in the ranks with regard to who was in command now that de Wet had departed.

Picture: General de Wet

After holding a 'council of war' to solve the issue, the vote narrowly went in favour of Prinsloo. However many commanders hadn't been consulted and there was wide-spread unhappiness.

Towards the end of the month, the position in the 'Basin' was becoming untenable as the British were making advances on a number of fronts. Instead of the Boers following orders given by de Wet, Prinsloo requested an armistice, which the British rejected. All this confusion led to Commandant Prinsloo, who still believed he was in command, surrendering to the British.



Over 4 000 men were captured, together with a number of guns. Fifteen hundred Boers who were not happy about the surrender managed to escape, together with eight guns.

On 16 July General Ben Viljoen with three commandos launched an attack on a far superior British force in the Tierpoort / Olifantsfontein / Witpoort area (south / east of Pretoria). Amongst other regiments, the Irish Fusiliers distinguished themselves. The Boers were forced to retreat after heavy fighting when British re-enforcements arrived. Seven British soldiers were killed and 30 wounded.

Lord Roberts started his eastward advance having consolidated his positions on the outskirts of Pretoria. At about the same time, he informed General Botha that families of Boers fighting in the conflict, who lived in British occupied territory, would be sent to the commandos in the Eastern Transvaal (now Mpumalanga). Although Botha protested, over 400 Boer women and children were sent by open rail trucks from Pretoria. Ben Viljoen made arrangements for them to go to Barberton.

July 1901, apart from the odd skirmish, was probably the 'quietest' month of the War. Dominating the headlines for July were the activities of Breaker Morant which would eventually lead to his demise, Emily Hobhouse's activities against the Concentration Camps which led to the appointment of the Ladies Commission to investigate these camps, and the execution of a number of Cape 'rebels'.

However, on 11 July 1901 the Free State government were surprised by General Broadwood and captured at the town of Reitz. Also General Jan Smuts commenced his Cape Colony expedition to try and garner support from sympathetic Boers in that region.

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

1900

Sgt. A. H. L. Richardson	Lord Strathcona's Horse	Wolve Spruit (Standerton)
Capt. W. E. Gordon	Gordon Highlanders	Leehoehoek (Krugersdorp)
Capt. D. R. Younger	Gordon Highlanders	Leehoehoek (Krugersdorp)
Capt. N. R. Howse	New South Wales Medical Staff	Vredefort

1901

Lieut. W. J. English	2 nd Scottish Horse	Vlakfontein
Pvt. H. G. Crandon	18 th Hussars	Ermelo

Anniversary of the death of President Paul Kruger – 14 July 1904

Stephanus Johannes Paulus 'Paul' Kruger was a South African politician. He was one of the dominant political and military figures in 19th century South Africa, and President of the South African Republic (or Transvaal) from 1883 to 1900.

He came to international prominence as the face of the Boer cause – that of the South African Republic and its neighbour the Orange Free State – against Britain during the South African War (1899–1902). He has been called a personification of 'Afrikanerdom', and remains a controversial and divisive figure – admirers venerate him as a tragic folk hero, and critics view him as the obstinate guardian of an unjust cause.

Born near the eastern edge of the Cape Colony, Kruger took part in the Great Trek as a child during the late 1830s. The Great Trek was the migration of 'rural' people, wanting to get away from British rule, and can almost be seen as the initial 'cause' of the South African War (1899–1902). He had almost no education apart from the Bible. A protégé of the Voortrekker leader Andries Pretorius, he witnessed the signing of the Sand River Convention in 1852 – a convention whereby the United Kingdom of Great Britain formally recognised the independence of the Boers north of the Vaal River.

Over the next decade he played a prominent role in the forging of the South African Republic, leading its commandos and resolving disputes between the rival Boer leaders and factions. In 1863 he was elected Commandant-General, a post he held for a decade before he resigned soon after the election of President Thomas François Burgers.



Kruger was appointed Vice-President in March 1877, shortly before the South African Republic was annexed by Britain, as the Transvaal.

Over the next three years he headed two deputations to London to try to have this overturned.

He became the leading figure in the movement to restore the South African Republic's independence, culminating in the Boers' victory in the First Boer War of 1880–81.

Kruger served until 1883 as a member of an executive triumvirate, and was then elected President.

In 1884 he headed a third deputation that brokered the London Convention, under which Britain recognised the South African Republic as a fully independent state.

Picture: President Paul Kruger



Following the influx of thousands of predominantly British settlers with the Witwatersrand Gold Rush of 1886, 'uitlanders' (out-landers / foreigners) provided almost all of the South African Republic's tax revenues but lacked civic representation – the Boer burghers retained control of the government. The uitlander problem and the associated tensions with Britain dominated Kruger's attention for the rest of his presidency, to which he was re-elected in 1888, 1893 and 1898, and led to the Jameson Raid of 1895–96 and ultimately the Second Boer War.

Kruger left for Europe as the war turned against the Boers in 1900 and spent the rest of his life in exile, refusing to return home following the British victory.

After he died in Switzerland at the age of 78 in 1904, his body was returned to South Africa for a state funeral, and buried in the Heroes' Acre in Pretoria. (Acknowledgement – Wikipedia)

REMEMBER to keep an eye on our website (www.battletoursza.com) - our blog has regular posts on Anniversaries / Battles / Activities / Births & Deaths / etc.

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