

## Newsletter

July 2025

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

**July 1900:** Following the fall of Bloemfontein, Johannesburg and Pretoria, and the Boer defeat at the Battle of Diamond Hill, many Boers were questioning the efforts of the Boer Generals to keep the war going. Sporadic attempts on British convoys and garrisons had kept the 'interest alive', but a more intense effort to get motivation for the Boers to carry on with the fight was needed. During the month of July 1900 many of the Free State commandos gathered in an area which became known as the Brandwater Basin to rest and to regroup.

General de Wet, together with President Steyn and other senior Boer military leaders – Piet de Wet, Philip Botha, J.H. Olivier, Generals Froneman and Prinsloo, and others had gathered in the 'basin' to plan their next moves.



Picture: General de Wet

By mid-July General de Wet became aware that the British were planning an attack on the Boers, and the peaceful, mountainous position that the Boers had selected, because of the size of the British force, was un-defendable. 'The Times History of the War' describes the basin (page 309, Vol. IV) – *"The country to which the Boers had now retired may be described as a huge horse-shoe formed by the Wittebergen range, which extends round from Commando Nek opposite Ficksburg, by Moolman's Hoek, Nelspoort, and Witnek to Slabbert's and Retief's Neks on the north, and then by the Roodebergen range, which continues from Retief's Nek in a south-easterly direction through Naauwpoort Nek and Golden Gate to Generaal's Kop, a magnificent mountain mass which connects the main Drakensberg ridge with the Roodebergen; the circumference of the horse-shoe measured this way is roughly seventy-five miles [120 kilometres]. The base-line of the horse-shoe, about forty miles in length [64 kilometres], is formed by the Caledon River, separating the Free State from Basutoland. The principal gates of this great citadel are four – Commando, Slabbert, Retief and Naauwpoort Neks."*

It became obvious to General de Wet that whoever controlled the passes, controlled the battle, and with the Boers being outnumbered by nearly three to one, the best solution for the Boers was to 'break out'. This decision was not accepted by all, but de Wet divided the Boers into three sections. This created further problems, as when de Wet departed with President Steyn, he left a power struggle regarding who was in command. De Wet was first to break out with 2 600 men,

Paul Roux was to lead the second break out with 2 000 men, with Crowther leading the third group with the balance of the men.

De Wet's break out was a success, but the rest of the Boer fighting force were forced to surrender. Whether this was because of the power struggle that was left behind is a matter for further research, however, the Boer leader who led the surrender was General Prinsloo. General de Wet's memoirs 'Three Years' War' records (page 126) – *"Immediately after my departure, some of the officers, displeased that Assistant Commander-in-Chief Roux should have been entrusted with the command, expressed the wish that another meeting should be held and a new Assistant Commander-in-Chief elected. All would have gone well if only Roux had stood firm. Unfortunately, however, he yielded, and on 17<sup>th</sup> July a meeting was called together at which Marthinus Prinsloo was chosen Assistant Commander-in-Chief. He had a bare majority even at the actual meeting, and several officers, who had been unable to be present, had still to record their votes. Not only, therefore, had Prinsloo been elected irregularly, but his election, such as it was, could only be considered as provisional. Nevertheless, for the moment, power was in his hands. How did he use it?"*

*He surrendered unconditionally to the English."*

Having lost 4 000 men at Paardeberg at the end of February, the Boer losses, five months later at the Brandwater Basin were in excess of 4 300 men, 2 800 head of cattle, 4 000 sheep and 5 000 horses. The total number of Boers who took up arms to fight the British in the war vary, however these losses probably comprised ±20% of the Boer force in the field.

The Brandwater Basin, hardly visited these days as most overseas visitors are only interested in the sieges, is an area well worth visiting and appreciating by those interested in the finer aspects of the Anglo Boer War.



*Picture: The Imperial Yeomanry Rosette*

**July 1901:** Those who follow my writings and who have been on my tours know that when I produce a casualty list of battles, or of Regiments, I consult, amongst other references, 'The Boer War Casualty Roll (1899-1902)' by Alexander M Palmer. In 'pulling out' casualties for the Imperial Yeomanry I came across a casualty – Lieutenant Charles Dixon Kimber, and with the incident in which he was involved being July 1901, I thought it made sense to include it in this newsletter, as it followed events during the Anglo Boer War.

Palmer records (page 393) – *"Lieutenant Charles Dixon Kimber (Duke of Cambridge's Own) Imperial Yeomanry, was killed in action at Wildfontein, near Ventersdorp on 17<sup>th</sup> July 1901, while endeavouring to save a dismounted sergeant of his troop. Lieutenant Kimber was the second son of Henry Kimber, M.P., Landsdowne Lodge, Putney, and grandson of the late Lieutenant-General Dixon, Royal Engineers. He was born on 24<sup>th</sup> October 1863, and educated at Epsom and Merton College, Oxford. He was admitted a solicitor in January 1890 and was a member of the firm of*

*Kimbers and Boatman, Lombard Street., E.C. Lieutenant Kimber volunteered for service early in 1900 and joined the Duke of Cambridge's own as a trooper. He was present in the affair at Lindley, and taken as a prisoner at Nooitgedacht, but escaped from there, reaching the British lines on 5<sup>th</sup> August 1900.*" (In the book 'A Gazetteer of the Second Anglo-Boer War' by Huw M. Jones and Meurig G.M. Jones, there are seven references to Nooitgedacht. However, none of these references 'accommodate' the date early in August.)

Palmer carries on – *"He was then attached to the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Brigade for duty and was appointed Lieutenant in the Imperial Yeomanry in September 1900 and afterwards saw much service. The evening before he was killed, his squadron consisting of three officers, Lieutenant Kimber, and 45 men, was sent from camp at Grasslaagte to Wildfontein, distant about thirty miles to surprise some Boers. Heavy rain fell during the night march, and just as day was breaking the party reached its destination, and having captured some cattle, was attacked by some of Kemp's commando. The squadron formed a rear-guard, but the Boers succeeded in getting around the left flank, and the cattle had to be abandoned. The party was then ordered to retire, and while the movement was being carried out, Lieutenant Kimber heard a shout for help and, looking around, saw one of his sergeants on foot whose horse had bolted. Riding back to assist him, and while the sergeant was in the act of mounting behind him, a Boer fired at them, and Lieutenant Kimber fell shot through the heart. The sergeant was uninjured.*

*Lieutenant Kimber is buried in Pietfontein, on the road to Ventersdorp. A history of this officer's life has been written by his sister, Mrs. Thornton, Eirene, Putney, S.W., published by Nisbet and Co., the proceeds being devoted to the erection of a Soldiers' Home near Pretoria in Memory of Lieutenant Kimber."*



I have tried, without success to reference this action. Not even 'The Times History of the War' has a reference – unless I have missed something. However, Kimber's grave, near Ventersdorp could be a good 'stop-off' on a tour in that part of the world.

*Picture: Lieutenant Kimber*

During the two July months of the Anglo Boer War (1900 & 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 <sup>nd</sup> Scottish Horse	Vlakfontein
Pvt. H.G. Crandon	18 <sup>th</sup> Hussars	Ermelo

## Victoria Cross of the Month

### Lieutenant W.J. English – 2<sup>nd</sup> Scottish Horse

William John English was born in Cork, Ireland, on 6 October 1882. He joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> Scottish Horse, a unit raised locally by the Earl of Tullibardine, which served with Colonel Benson's column in the Eastern Transvaal. Lieutenant English, 18, had recently been promoted when he found himself at Elandshoek (Vlakfontein), near Nelspruit.

#### Citation:

William John English, Lieutenant 2<sup>nd</sup> Scottish Horse. This officer with five men, was holding the right of the position at Vlakfontein, on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1901, during an attack by the Boers. Two of his men were killed and two wounded, but the position was still held, largely owing to Lieutenant English's personal pluck. When the ammunition ran short, he went over to the next party and obtained more; to do this he had to cross some fifteen yards of open ground under a heavy fire at a range of from twenty to thirty yards.

*(London Gazette 14 September 1900)*



Three men were killed and nine wounded during the engagement. English's V.C. was gazetted two days before his 19<sup>th</sup> birthday. It was awarded to him by the Prince of Wales at the Horse Guard's Parade in London in July 1902, the same time as Clements received his.

After the war English joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dragoon Guards (Queen's Bays) as a Lance-Corporal. He was commissioned in the ASC in 1906 and posted to Dublin the following year. He commanded a company of the RASC there until February 1908, when he was stationed in Cape Town. In 1914 he was promoted Captain. He lived in upper Norwood, Surrey.

*Picture: Lieutenant English V.C.*

In November 1924 Major English was stationed in Belfast, Northern Ireland. He transferred to the Indian ASC in 1928, before he retired. During World War II Lieutenant-Colonel English commanded a battalion of the Royal Ulster Rifles, then transferred to the Middle East in early 1941. He died aboard a ship in the Mediterranean near Egypt on 4 July 1941, aged 58 years, and is buried in the Maala Military Cemetery in Aden.

### Anniversary of the birth of Lieutenant-Colonel C.F.S. Vandeleur – July 1869

Lieutenant-Colonel Cecil Foster Seymour Vandeleur, D.S.O., Scots Guards, was killed in a train which was wrecked between Isaterval and Hamman's Kraal, about fifteen miles north of Pretoria, on 31 August 1901. The enemy, who lined the banks of the cutting, opened fire on the derailed carriages, and Lieutenant-Colonel Vandeleur was shot down. He was the eldest son of Hector Stewart Vandeleur of Kilrush, was born in July 1869, and educated at Eton. He entered the Scots Guards in February 1889, being promoted Lieutenant in May 1892, Captain and Brevet-Major in June 1899, transferred to the Irish Guards in May 1900, became Major in the following October, and Brevet-Lieutenant-Colonel a month later.

He served with the Unyoro Expedition in 1895, being mentioned in despatches and receiving the medal. He took part in the Nandi Expedition, 1895-96, being again mentioned in despatches and receiving the D.S.O. He served in the Niger-Soudan Campaign under Major Arnold in 1897, including the expeditions to Egbon, Bida, and Ilorin, was mentioned in despatches, and received the Brevet of Major and the medal with clasp. Lieutenant-Colonel Vandeleur served in the Soudan Campaign under Lord (then Sir Herbert) Kitchener in 1898 and was present at the Battles of the Atbara and Khartoum, being slightly wounded, was mentioned in despatches, and received the British medal and Khedives medal with two clasps, and the Fourth Class of the Order of the Medjidie.



*Picture: Lieutenant-Colonel Vandeleur*

He was on special service in South Africa from December 1899 to January 1900 and was employed with the transport division from 20 January 1900 and was D.A.A.G.

Lieutenant Vandeleur is buried in Pretoria. He was mentioned in despatches, London Gazette, 8 February 1901, and promoted Brevet-Lieutenant-Colonel.

(Reference – The Boer War Casualty Roll (1899-1902); Alexander M Palmer)

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**Allan Gordon**