

Newsletter

July 2023

As I have done for the past few months, I am quoting from selected headlines from the book 'The War Reporter – The Anglo-Boer War through the eyes of the Burghers', by J.E.H. Grobler. I have tried so find the book locally, to answer a number of requests, but have had no success to date.

July 1900: from the Editor's Comments (page 89) – *"Though the struggle continues unabated, Republican forces are finding it increasingly difficult to remain standing against the huge British force. At the same time, the price that the British are paying to wage this war is becoming higher every day. What we have to contend with is in essence a war of attrition. The side that gives in first will lose. If the Boers can hold out long enough, the Republics can win. If the British can keep on affording the war, and their will to win remains alive until the Boers can no longer hold out against their overwhelming numbers, they will win. Time will tell.*

In the meantime the war is still producing both positive and negative developments. One extremely negative development is that the war is causing unprecedented divisions within Afrikaner community – divisions even within households, between brother and brother. In the past weeks the clash between Piet and Christiaan de Wet is indicative to this." Piet de Wet had been becoming increasingly concerned with the burning of farms and the security of women and children and eventually in July 1900, he and several of his staff surrendered to the British at Kroonstad.



Picture: Battle of Silkaatsnek – First Battle – 11 July 1900

'The War Reporter' carries on (page 91) – *"This week was a black week for the Republican forces. Former Chief Commandant Marthinus Prinsloo has surrendered with a force of 4 300 Free State Burghers, including three generals and nine commandants, in the Brandwater Basin. The surrender has weakened the Orange Free State forces to such an extent that they will be unable to render any further meaningful resistance to the British army.*

Many critics will renew their objections to carrying on with the war, as they did after the surrender of General Piet Cronje in February. They will argue that the Republics might as well surrender

since they stand no realistic chance of eventually achieving a victory. To them our message, short and sweet, is: do not lose faith. The British cannot provision this massive war machine forever. The Boxer Rebellion in China is already claiming attention. At some stage they will realise that they cannot force the Boers to surrender unconditionally. They will then have to negotiate, and our freedom will be assured."

The following paragraph, from 'The War Reporter', with the war not even a year old, indicates the start of the hardships which were to be experienced over the next almost two years (page 91) – "A number of circumstances that have been forced on us by the present war conditions, including the scarcity of paper and the difficulty of relaying messages from the different fronts to our temporary printing press, compel us to turn the newspaper from a weekly into a monthly. In future it will, if circumstances allow, be issued on the first day of each month."

July 1901: from the Editor's Comments (page 119) – "On the military front neither side won any noteworthy victories this month. The British forces can claim that they were unlucky to miss capturing two major figures on the Republican side. Both President Steyn and General Smuts barely managed to avoid falling into British hands. In some circles Steyn is regarded as the soul of the struggle. That the British failed to exploit their excellent opportunity to remove him as a factor in this war may cost them dearly in future."



Picture: President Steyn



Picture: General Smuts

The event referred to above, relates to President Steyn and his Free State Government occupying the town of Reitz, a town in the east of the Free State, 50 km north of Bethlehem. There was very little 'activity' in the area, and the Government intended having a few days' rest and working on plans for the future. They arrived on 9 July, but early on 11 July a British column under the command of Brigadier-General Broadwood attacked the town, taking many prisoners, including some Government officials. Steyn, as was recorded, managed to escape.

General Smuts had a narrow escape on 20 July when he and a number of burghers were surprised at night, in the Gatsrand area. The Gatsrand is a range of mountains between Johannesburg and Potchefstroom. It is reported that he managed to escape by shouting orders in English, thus confusing the British attackers. His loyal servant, Kleinbooi was killed in the action.

During the two 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



Victoria Cross of the Month

Private H.G. Crandon – 18th Hussars

Henry George Crandon was born at Wells, Somerset, on 12 February 1874. He joined the 18th Hussars and in October 1894 went to India. He served there until he was transferred to Natal, where he took part in the Siege of Ladysmith.

After the relief he served with his regiment in various theatres until July 1901, when he and Private Berry were advanced scouts near Ermelo. They came upon a party of Boers and in the fight Berry was wounded in two places and his horse was killed.

Citation:

On the 4th July 1901, at Springbok Laagte*, Private Berry's horse fell and became disabled, and he was himself shot in the right hand and left shoulder. Private Crandon at once rode back under heavy fire to his assistance, gave up his horse to the wounded man, to enable him to reach shelter, and followed him on foot, having to run for 1 100 yards, all the time under fire.

(London Gazette 18 October 1901)

Private Crandon's V.C. was presented to him by Lord Kitchener in Pretoria on 8 June 1902. He was also promoted corporal. In 1905 Crandon worked at Swindon as a gardener for Sir Lees Knowles. In 1914 he re-enlisted in the 18th Hussars in South Africa for World War 1. He was wounded at Ypres in May 1915 then, after his convalescence, sent to the Balkans for two years, then to Egypt and Palestine.

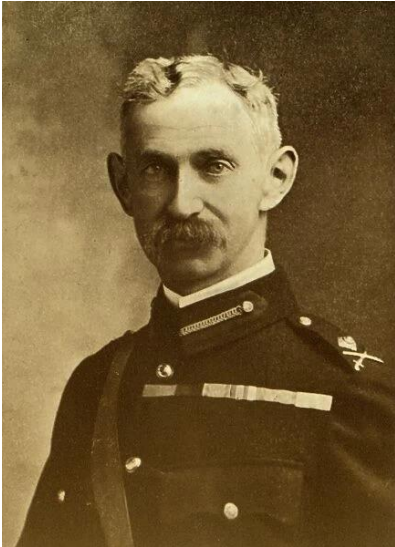
In November 1948 Crandon was badly injured in a road accident, sustaining two leg fractures and facial injuries, and spent several months in hospital. His wife, Margaret, died in June 1951. Crandon died at Manchester, Lancashire, on 2 January 1953, aged 78 years, and is buried in Swinton Cemetery.

* Springbok Laagte is a farm in the Witbank District of the old Eastern Transvaal – now Mpumalanga.



Picture: Private Crandon V.C.'s Grave

Anniversary of the death of Major-General Geoffrey Barton – 8 July 1922



Geoffrey Barton was born in Stuttgart, Germany on 22 February 1844.

After completing his education at Eton College, he purchased his commission in the 1st Battalion Royal Fusiliers late in 1862 and was posted to India where he was promoted to Lieutenant in 1865. He served the British Army from 1862 until after the South African War (1899-1902) and saw service in South Africa, Egypt, India, Ireland and Hong Kong.

His first period of service in South Africa was towards the end of the Anglo-Zulu War (1879).

Picture: Major-General Geoffrey Barton

At the outbreak of the South African War (1899-1902), Barton joined General Sir Redvers Buller's Natal Field Force in command of the 6th Brigade. His initial involvement in the Relief of Ladysmith was in support to the main attacks on Colenso and Spioen Kop. However, as Buller's force started their final advance on Ladysmith in mid-February 1900, Barton's Fusilier Brigade were very involved.

'The Times History' records the following on an attack launched by Barton in the final stages of the relief (page 500, Vol III) – *"Barton advanced the Irish Fusiliers, who cleared the knoll, and thus successfully covered both their own brigade and Norcott's from sniping. For this exercise of initiative, Barton, whose orders had been not to cross the Gomba, was sharply reprimanded by Buller, and the Fusiliers were subsequently recalled."* Barton was slightly wounded on the final push to Ladysmith.

After the Relief of Ladysmith Barton, with selected men from the Fusiliers Brigade, were sent to form part of Colonel Mahon's column which were to Relieve Mafeking. Quoting again from 'The Times History' (page 216, Vol IV) – *"100 picked infantry contributed in equal proportions by each battalion of Barton's Fusilier Brigade, representing England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland."*

After the Relief of Mafeking Barton operated in the Western Transvaal (now North West Province) with half his Fusilier Brigade, and was appointed Military Governor of the Klerksdorp District. In October, when Barton was in Krugersdorp, he was ordered by Roberts to make his way to Potchefstroom, as word had been received that General de Wet had crossed the Vaal from the Orange Free State. Before departing from Krugersdorp, the Fusiliers were involved in the second Battle of Dwarsvlei. His force was engaged with the Boers at the Battle of Frederikstad between 20 and 25 October 1900.

Barton was sent back to the Western Transvaal and was responsible for the blockhouse line in the Hekpoort Valley.

There is a magnificent example of a blockhouse, which unfortunately is now on private property, but still visible from the road, which is referred to as Barton's Folly. Barton ended the war as the Military Governor of Pretoria.

Picture: Barton's Folly Blockhouse in Hekpoort



He retired from the British Army in 1904 at the age of 60 and settled in Scotland. He took an interest in the Red Cross Society and the Boy Scout Movement, which had recently been formed by Baden-Powell. He died on 8 July 1922, aged 78.

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

Allan Gordon