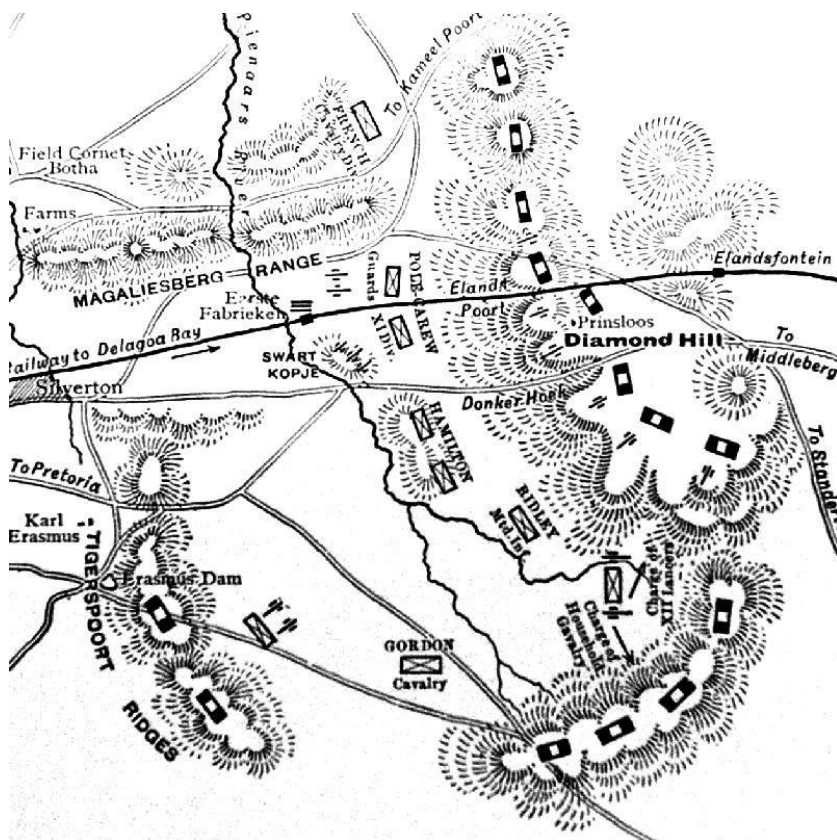


Newsletter

June 2020

June 1900 saw the occupation of both Johannesburg and Pretoria, the latter without a shot being fired. This had a huge effect on the motivation of many Boers as the capitals of both of the Republics fighting against the British had fallen – Bloemfontein in the Free State and Pretoria in the Transvaal (ZAR). Many Boers laid down their arms and returned to their farms.

At the beginning of the month Free State President Steyn, and General de Wet accused the Transvaal leaders of cowardice in their apparent unwillingness to fight. President Steyn sent a telegram from Brakvlei, to President Kruger in Machadadorp, at 3 am on 1 June which read – *"I have received your telegram with amazement ... more than half our burghers are in the field and I have just had news of a fine action near Senekal where the enemy were repulsed with great loss, and of a fight at Lindley where between four and five hundred prisoners were taken. Now, must I understand that a Council of War is proposed by your officers in order to abandon that struggle which we began in the name of the Lord – to abandon it in a cowardly manner? Only a small part of the Transvaal is in the hands of the enemy – nearly all our land lies under his heel."* (Source – No Charge for Delivery – C.W.L. de Souza)



The major Battle of Diamond Hill (Battle of the Month – www.battletoursza.com) in the Transvaal also took place in June 1900, along with many irritating (to the British) hit and run attacks by General de Wet in the Free State.



De Wet was mounting attacks on the railway system in order to disrupt supplies to the British forces which were making huge progress northwards. The Battles of Roodewal and Katbosch were examples of de Wet's tactics. General Buller made steady progress from Natal on route to join up with General Roberts, and occupied Volksrust after battles at Botha's Pass and Alleman's Nek.

The month of June 1900 also saw the start of the Scorched Earth Policy. This was ordered by Roberts in response to damage being caused to railway and communications infrastructure. Where this damage was being done, the inhabitants of farms in the area were to be held responsible, their houses were to be burnt and the inhabitants made 'prisoners of war'.

June 1901 was full out guerrilla activity in both the then Eastern and Western Transvaal as well as the Cape Colony, with many engagements and skirmishes taking place. The most significant of these were the Battles of Graspan and Wilmansrust. The month also saw the senior 'officials' from the two Republics getting together for a number of meetings to decide on the future of the war. President Steyn (Free State) once again expressed his feelings towards his Transvaal counterparts who were considering Peace Talks and vowed to carry on fighting without the Transvaal should they decide not to carry on. A decision from these talks was that General Jan Smuts was tasked with forming a commando of 'top' burghers to operate in the Cape Colony to try and solicit support from sympathetic Boers in this area.

With the British policy of Concentration Camps now in 'full swing', the population in Britain were getting involved in this policy of 'Barberism' and the issue was becoming a huge political issue.

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

1900

Pvt. C. B. Ward	Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry	Lindley
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1901

Sgt. J. Rogers	South African Constabulary	Thaba 'Nchu
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Anniversary of the birth of Brigadier-General Douglas Haig – 19 June 1861

Brigadier-General Haig was born in Edinburgh, Scotland on 19 June 1861. His father was head of the family's Haig & Haig whisky distillery. After studying at Oxford University he commenced with his military career at the Military College at Sandhurst in 1884. Being a keen and successful horseman, Haig represented England at Polo whilst at Sandhurst. Haig saw service in India before returning to the U.K. to enter Staff College. Whilst in the U.K. he had his first meeting with Colonel John French.

Haig's first experience in action was in the Sudan in 1898 where he was appointed an Officer in the Cavalry Brigade. During this campaign he gained experience with the Maxim gun and its worth in battle. He was appointed brevet Major at the end of this campaign.



At the outbreak of the South African War (1899-1902) he joined Lieutenant-Colonel French's brigade and took part in the Battle of Elandslaagte.

Haig and French were ordered to leave Ladysmith before the siege began and they were on the last train to leave the town before the Boers commenced with the four month siege.

French was given command of the recently arrived Cavalry Division from the U.K. and this Division played a major role in the Relief of Kimberley, which featured the last great cavalry charge, at Roodekalkfontein, where around 6 000 horses, in a frontal attack, cleared the enemy position.

Haig was given command of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade when French's Division took part in the capture of Bloemfontein and then Pretoria.

Picture: Brigadier-General Douglas Haig

At the start of the guerrilla phase of the war the Cavalry Division was disbanded and Haig became part of a force which policed the Johannesburg area. He was then given the task of hunting down and capturing the Boer General de Wet who was wreaking havoc in the Free State by disrupting the supply of provisions to the British troops.

In January 1901 Haig was given the rank of Brigadier-General and put in command of a column of 2 500 to operate in the Northern Cape to track down the Boer Commandant Kritzinger. As was standard policy for all British units at that time, Haig's actions included burning farms (Scorched Earth Policy) as well as rounding up Boer women and children to be sent to established concentration camps.

In April 1902 Haig was charged with locating the Boer General Jan Smuts and escorting him to the peace negotiations at Vereeniging. This was not the first time that Haig had crossed paths with Smuts, and I quote from 'Unafraid of Greatness' by Richard Steyn

"In this depressed frame of mind, Smuts' bedraggled commando had made its way through the Elandsrivierspoort, where it ran into a 200-strong force from the 17th Lancers. A bloody clash ensued in which the Boers' deadly accuracy with the rifle accounted for 29 of the enemy killed and 49 wounded, against one dead and six wounded in their own ranks. With new rifles, fresh supplies, clothing, saddles and boots to carry away from the British camp, morale soared once more. As Reitz recorded, 'we had renewed confidence in our leader and in ourselves, a factor of considerable importance to a body of men in a hostile country'.

Colonel Douglas Haig, OC of the Lancers, and directly responsible to General French for the Elands River area, was only 14 miles away in Tarkastad when he learned with horror of his regiment's losses. For the next four weeks, according to Thomas Pakenham, the guerrilla war in the mountains of the Eastern Cape became a personal duel between Haig and Smuts, two well-matched, intensely professional and drivers of men. The pair, as well as General French, were to meet again in World War 1, but this time on the same side."

On the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Haig helped organize the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) commanded by Field Marshal Sir John French. In December 1915 Haig replaced French as Commander-in-Chief BEF. In January 1917 Haig was made a Field Marshall. His 'exploits' during World War I make very interesting reading and depending on whose opinion one believes, he seems to have been a controversial individual. Haig has commonly been portrayed as an inept commander who exhibited callous disregard for the lives of his soldiers.

Haig died from a heart attack on 29 January 1928 aged 66.

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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