

Newsletter

June 2021

June 1900 was not a good month for the morale of many of the Boer burghers who, at the outbreak of hostilities, had believed that the war could be won. Both Johannesburg and Pretoria fell to the British early in the month, with Bloemfontein having fallen earlier, this meant that both Boer Republic capitals were now under the Union Jack. And while many Boer soldiers were considering their involvement in hostilities, Botha was planning a 35 km defence line to the east of Pretoria to halt the advancing British. There are many reports regarding the size of the British force that had taken Pretoria, and I recently came across the following reference in the book 'With Bobs and Kruger' by Frederick Unger, an accredited journalist who managed to get accreditation from both the Boers and the British (page 315) – *"He was a scout who had been captured near Johannesburg, and was spreading the information to the surrounding crowd that Generals French and Hutton, with twenty thousand men each, were approaching Pretoria on either flank, while 'Bobs' with forty thousand infantry, was marching in the centre."*

Reliable sources estimated the size of the British force, at the Battle of Diamond Hill, to be about 20 000 men with over 80 guns, with the Boers totalling about 6 000 men and 30 guns. Suffice to say, the Boers were totally outnumbered. Unger interviewed General Botha at Balmoral after the Boers had retreated, after the battle, and he records (page 373) – *"It was one of the prettiest fights we have had", he said. 'The fighting-line extended for 35 miles, and the British would not have broken through at all if we had not been forced to send part of our force to the relief of one of our commandos which had been surrounded.'* Following the Battle of Diamond Hill, the British troops who had been successful in both Johannesburg and Pretoria spent most of the month re-grouping and recuperating.



Picture: President Steyn

It is worth repeating that 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 to President Kruger in Machadadorp, 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)

General de Wet in the Free State had started with his guerrilla tactics and was targeting the railway network in order to affect the transport of British supplies. On 7 June de Wet attacked the railway siding at Roodewal 70 km northeast of Kroonstadt and 150 km south of Johannesburg – (Battle of the Month - www.battletoursza.com).

In Natal, Buller's force who were moving towards the Transvaal engaged the Boers at Botha's Pass, just north of Newcastle.

On 16 June Lord Roberts made a proclamation that all Boer houses and farms in the Transvaal and Free State which were in the general area of railway lines and state infrastructure, would be burnt down.

The proclamation went on that the local residents would be detained and carried away as prisoners to be incarcerated in concentration camps.

This was the beginning of the Scorched Earth Policy.



Picture: Lord Roberts

June 1901 saw the continuation of guerrilla activity in both the then Eastern and Western Transvaal, the Free State as well as the Cape Colony – the Boers were in dire need of supplies, with many engagements and skirmishes taking place. The Battle of Wilmansrust on 12 June 1901 saw the Boers launch a surprise attack on a British position near Middelburg in the Eastern Transvaal, where the British suffered 17 casualties. At the end of the month both Republican governments and most of the military leaders met in Standerton to discuss the way forward. It was agreed to carry on with the war.

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

1900
Pvt. C.B. Ward

Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry

Lindley

1901

Sgt. J. Rogers

South African Constabulary

Thaba 'Nchu

With acknowledgement to news I get from 'The Stags Heid', the following, although nothing to do with the South African War (1899-1902), is, I'm sure of interest to all –

"June 18th 1815 (The Battle of Waterloo) is known as 'The Day That Changed Europe', but barely 100 years later on 28th June 1914 (107 years ago) was 'The Day That Changed The World'. Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his wife Sophie were killed by a Bosnian Serb nationalist gunman during an official visit to the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo. The killings sparked a chain of events that led to the outbreak of The Great War. The number plate on the Archduke's car was 11-11-18 (A111 118)" – co-incidental, or just plain scary?

I always end my newsletter by featuring the anniversary of an individual – this month I going to feature two. The first is Louis Napoleon, the Prince Imperial of France, who had nothing to do with the South African War 1899-1902, but was killed during the Anglo-Zulu War. The second is Jan Kemp, a Boer General, but my focus is on the 1914 Rebellion, about which little is known and/or appreciated.

Anniversary of the death of Louis Napoleon – 1 June 1879



*Prince Imperial Louis
Napoleon*

On 1 June 1879, 142 years ago, the Napoleonic dynasty came to an end with the death of the Prince Imperial in Natal during the Anglo-Zulu War. How did the French aristocrat get to be in a war between the British and the Zulus?

When France was defeated by Prussia in 1870, the Prince Imperial and his parents fled to England to live in exile. Queen Victoria, a close friend of the family, convinced her cousin, the Duke of Cambridge, who was then the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, to allow the Prince to attend the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich. He acquitted himself exceptionally well and graduated as an officer and was commissioned into the Royal Artillery.

On graduating he begged the British royalty to be allowed to join the British troops in South Africa, and permission was finally granted.

When in South Africa, he was almost 'moth balled', being kept away from the real action. However, on 1 June 1879 he was given permission to join a small British reconnaissance patrol led by Lieutenant Carey. This patrol was in the middle of nowhere and around midday they observed a deserted homestead in a valley and the Prince insisted that they stop there to rest. A Zulu Impi had observed the patrol and when the British soldiers stopped for their rest, they stalked the group, eventually coming out of the long grass to mount their attack. Lieutenant Carey and the four troopers galloped off to safety but the Prince was unable to mount his horse. It is reported that he lost his sabre in the struggle, and although he still had his pistol, he was left to face the horde of Zulu warriors who closed in on him. His body was recovered the following morning with 17 assegai wounds, all in the front of his body.

His body was taken to Durban for repatriation to the U.K., and he was buried in St Michael's Abbey, Farnborough, on the opposite side of the nave to his father. His early death sent shockwaves throughout Europe, as he was the last serious dynastic hope for the restoration of the Bonaparte's to the throne of France.

Anniversary of the birth of Jan Kemp – 10 June 1872

Jan Christoffel Greyling Kemp was born in the Transvaal on 10 June 1872 and was educated at the Staatsgymnasium (State Gymnasium) in Pretoria.

He took part in suppressing the Jameson Raid and at the outbreak of the South African War (1899-1902) he joined the Krugersdorp Commando as a burgher, taking part in many of the early engagements in Natal.

Being part of the Krugersdorp Commando he could very well have been involved in the armoured train incident where Winston Churchill was arrested.

He progressed rapidly through the ranks and in February 1901 was promoted to Combat General.



Picture: Jan Christoffel Greyling Kemp

Kemp had been identified to lead the 'invasion' of the Cape Colony but when the plan was abandoned he became one of General de la Rey's ablest and most daring officers. He was involved in the Battles of Nooitgedacht, Vlaktefontein, Moedwil, Ysterspruit, and Roodewal. At Roodewal, which was the last battle of the war, he launched a reckless attack on Major-General Kekewich's forces, using a mounted charge over open terrain, which had become his characteristic mode of attack.

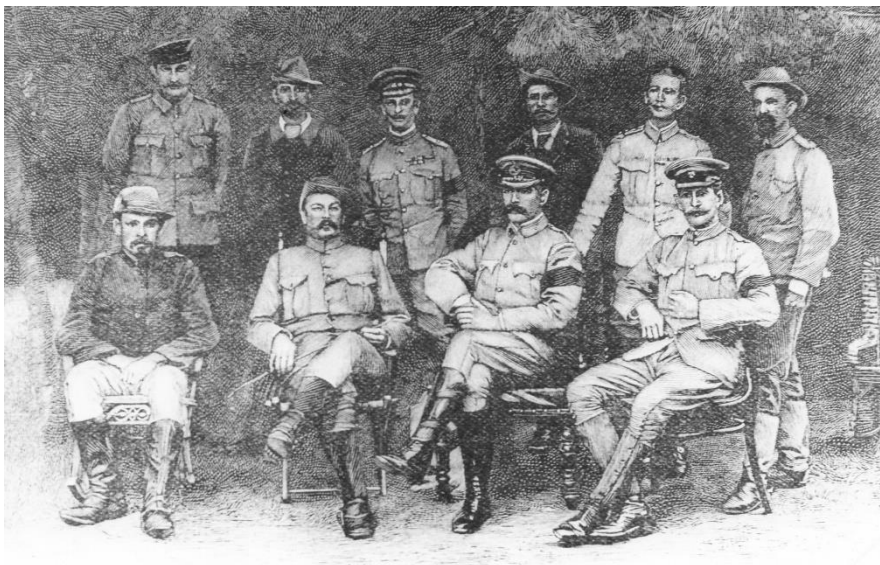
He represented the Krugersdorp commando at the Peace Negotiations at Vereeniging where he urged for the continuation of the war. He was one of the minority of six who voted against the peace terms.

On 31 May 1910, exactly eight years after the Boers had made peace with the English through the Treaty of Vereeniging, South Africa became a Union. Despite the mistrust in the Boer camp, the Afrikaners, as they now became known, had negotiated and achieved self-determination.

Louis Botha, who commanded the Boer forces during the South African War (1899-1902) became the first Prime Minister of the Union. Four years after this historic event, the world was thrown into turmoil with the outbreak of the 1st World War. The book 'Louis Botha, A Man Apart' by Richard Steyn records (page 189) – *"Botha was back in Pretoria on 4 August when Britain declared war on Germany. An immediate decision now had to be made about South Africa's participation in the war."* Steyn goes on (page 190) – *"Many of the white population were openly anti-British and thus pro-German. Constitutionally neutrality was not an option for any Dominion."* Britain then asked the Union to invade South West Africa (now Namibia) to silence powerful radio stations that were

assisting German shipping. Botha informed Britain that Parliamentary approval would have to be obtained. However, as Steyn goes on (page 196) – *"The decision by the cabinet to invade German South West Africa had to be made without parliamentary approval, because Britain had insisted on an immediate answer."*

Let's now switch to the book 'De la Rey, Lion of the West' by Johannes Meintjies who takes the story further (page 337) – *"The Union Defence Force was Smuts' pride and joy. The appointment of General Beyers (a former Boer War General) as Commandant-General was a diplomatic move, for it enhanced the Force's popularity."*



*Picture: Participants at the Peace Negotiations in Middelburg in 1901
– a prelude to the signing of the Treaty of Vereeniging
Significant players - Front Row – from left – de Wet, Botha, Kitchener*

Under Beyers, a number of other former Boer Generals were appointed – Jan Kemp, Manie Maritz, Jacques Pienaar, and others.

Meintjies goes on – *"When Kemp told Maritz about Smuts' Plan for them (to invade South West Africa) Maritz said 'This is our opportunity, the first best chance.' Kemp knew exactly what he meant, and they were in agreement."*

"At military school Kemp and his cronies laid their plans. They would be in command of their military districts and he says, 'already we began to assign to one another the roles we would play when the time came to take revenge on the Robber Empire. Jacques Pienaar would be in Pretoria, Ben Bouwer at Heidelberg, I at Potchefstroom and Manie Maritz at Upington on the German border. In order to understand these so-called disloyal and treacherous feelings, one has to re-examine the past. At Vereeniging we made peace, as the majority were of the opinion that otherwise the whole Boer nation would be exterminated. The hope to regain our freedom, however, was not killed at Vereeniging. On the contrary, it was at Vereeniging itself that that hope

flamed up in full strength. Kemp goes on to declare that minutes were not kept of all the talks held at Vereeniging, some of the things said, no-one dared to write down. It was Botha, de la Rey and vice-President Schalk Burger who agreed that should England on a later day get into trouble, they would then take the opportunity to regain their independence."

There is obviously much more to this story, but there was belief amongst the staunch Afrikaners, because of that last recollection at the Vereeniging Peace talks, that the time was right for the Afrikaners to take back their country. The Union, having indicated to Britain that they would invade German South West Africa, were now fighting on two fronts, with Britain against the Germans, and a civil war.

This Rebellion is a subject all on its own. In summary, the Union Defence Forces deployed approximately 32 000 soldiers, including about 20 000 Afrikaners, in the field against the 11 500 rebels. On the government side, 132 were killed or died of wounds and another 242 were wounded, while 190 rebels died and approximately 325 were wounded. The defeated rebels came off lightly. Before the middle of 1915, thanks to Botha's reconciliation policy, most of the ordinary rebels were free again, although for ten years they were barred from public office.

Kemp was sentenced to seven years and fined £1 000, but served less than two years of this sentence. (Acknowledgment – Andre Wessels)

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

Allan Gordon