

## Newsletter

June 2022

**June 1900:** The first few days of June 1900 saw Boers leaving Johannesburg with what they could take. Commandant Krause, who was in charge of the town had agreed to a 24-hour truce with Roberts, which gave time, not only to civilians, but to the military and government officials, to get military supplies and gold out of the town. Thomas Pakenham in his book 'The Boer War' describes the events as follows (page 221) – *"Commandant Krause, the Boer official now in charge of Johannesburg, had promised the mines would be left intact. The city would be surrendered next morning at eleven o'clock. There was one vital condition imposed by the Boers: they must be given 24 hours to withdraw their army from the town. Roberts had been perfectly willing to agree. It was probably the most serious strategic mistake of his career."*

The Battle of the Month on our website, the Battle of Kalkheuwel, took place on 3 June (Battle of the Month – [www.battletoursza.com](http://www.battletoursza.com)). Major-General French, who commanded the left flank of the British force which was advancing on Pretoria after the occupation of Johannesburg, had become aware of a Boer convoy making their way from Johannesburg towards the Western Transvaal. Although it was late in the afternoon, he decided to attack the Boers. Casualties on both sides were light, but almost 50 horses had to be euthanized and the Boers lost half of their wagons – either destroyed or captured.

Captain Oates of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, and of the 1912 Antarctic Expedition fame, was at the battle.

He died from hypothermia during the arctic expedition when he walked from his tent into a blizzard. He believed he was holding up his fellow explorers.

His famous last words on leaving the tent were – *"I am just going outside and may be some time."*



*Picture: Captain Lawrence Oates*

The British occupied Pretoria after the Boers had put up a delaying action on the outskirts of the town. During this time, the State Attorney, General Smuts managed to get all the bullion from the mint and the banks on a train bound for Machadadorp.

Boer morale was at its lowest once Pretoria had been occupied and many burghers returned to their farms. President Kruger sent a telegram to President Steyn of the Free State suggesting that

peace might be the only alternative to war. In the reply, President Steyn and General de Wet accused the Transvaal leaders of cowardice in their apparent unwillingness to fight.

General Botha however was planning a 35 km defence line to the east of Pretoria to halt the advancing British. This resulted in the Battle of Diamond Hill where British casualties, killed and wounded, amounted to just under 200.

On the Natal front, at the same time that the British were engaged at Diamond Hill, Buller's force were engaged with the Boers at Alleman's Nek, close to Laing's Nek. Here the British losses were 35 killed and 142 wounded.

In the Western Transvaal, the British entered Klerksdorp on 7 June without a shot being fired.

Whilst in the Free State General de Wet was targeting the railway network in order to affect the transport of British supplies. On 7 June he attacked the railway siding at Roodewal, 70 km northeast of Kroonstadt.

**June 1901** saw the continuation of guerrilla activities in the whole of the Transvaal, as well as the Free State and the Cape Colony – the Boers were in dire need of supplies, and the only way to obtain these was to attack British supply routes.

The Battle of Wilmansrust on 12 June saw the Boers launch a surprise attack on a position near Middelburg, manned by Australians who were part of Major-General Beatson's column.



*Picture: Action during the Battle of Wilmansrust*

In the 15 minute engagement, in the early hours of the evening, the Boers killed 25 and wounded 45 of the Victorian Mounted Rifles, as well as making off with two guns and about 80 prisoners.

Towards the end of the month both Republican governments and most of the military leaders met near Standerton to discuss the way forward. After some fiery words from Free State President Steyn, where he again accused his Transvaal compatriots of wanting to give up too easily, it was agreed to carry on with the war. At that meeting it was also decided that General Smuts should 'invade' the Cape Colony to try and muster support for the Boer's cause.

Some other interesting occurrences in the month of June:

- On 1 June 1879, Louis-Napoléon, the heir apparent and last hope for the restoration of the House of Bonaparte to the throne of France, was killed in a skirmish during the Anglo-Zulu War.
- General Redvers Buller, one of the most celebrated soldiers of the Victorian age, passed away on 2 June 1908, aged 69.
- On 5 June 1916 Field Marshall Kitchener died when the ship on which he was travelling was sunk by the Germans – see Personality of the Month.
- And finally, a quote that I picked up off Facebook by Field Marshall Montgomery, which I have not been able to verify, but here goes. He was recorded as saying – *"Give me 20 divisions of American soldiers and I will breach Europe. Give me 15 consisting of Englishmen, and I will advance to the borders of Berlin. Give me 2 divisions of those marvellous fighting Boers and I will remove Germany from the face of the earth."* (If anyone knows the actual source of this quote, I would appreciate it.)

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

**1900**

Pvt. C.B. Ward	King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry	Lindley
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**1901**

Sgt. J. Rogers	South African Constabulary	Thaba 'Nchu
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## Victoria Cross of the Month

### Sergeant J. Rogers – South African Constabulary



James Rogers was born at Riverina, New South Wales, Australia, on 2 June 1875.

He came to South Africa with the First Victorian Contingent.

When they returned to Australia in December 1900, Corporal Rogers remained in South Africa and joined the S A Constabulary as a scout.

He was promoted to Sergeant.

*Picture: Sergeant James Rogers*

According to R.L. Wallace in his book 'The Australians at the Boer War' – *"In June 1901 a column of 500 Royal Irish Rifles were active in the south-east of the Free State, repelling small parties of the enemy who had returned to the area where they had suffered defeat a year earlier. After some skirmishing on the morning of 15 June the column returned in the afternoon to near Thaba Nchu, where a rear-guard detachment of two Imperial officers and 6 men of the South African Constabulary found themselves being attacked by about 60 Boers."*

#### Citation:

On the 15<sup>th</sup> June 1901, during a skirmish near Thaba Nchu, a party of the rear-guard of Captain Sitwell's column, consisting of Lieutenant F Dickinson, Sergeant James Rogers, and six men of the South African Constabulary, was suddenly attacked by about 60 Boers. Lieutenant Dickinson's horse having been shot, that officer was compelled to follow his men on foot. Sergeant Rogers, seeing this, rode back, firing as he did so, took Lieutenant Dickinson up behind him and carried him for half a mile on his horse. The Sergeant then returned to within 400 yards of the enemy and carried away, one after the other two men who had lost their horses, after which he caught the horses of two other men, and helped the men to mount. All this was done under a very heavy rifle fire. The Boers were near enough to Sergeant Rogers to call upon him to surrender, his only answer was to continue firing.

*(London Gazette – 18 April 1902)*

Rogers is understood to have said – *"I dropped Dickinson behind our rear-guard and then prepared to go back after the other two. He shouted, 'you are a fool, you will get killed', but I galloped off. I got the other two back all right, and by this time had collected a few bullets through*

*my clothing and hat and had used up all my bullets shooting off my pistol from horseback. Later I found the Boers to be fine, hospitable people. We beat them only because they fought as individuals and lacked discipline."*

The column had stopped behind a high fence beyond a mealie field, half a mile back. Rogers had a bullet through his hat, searing the top of his head, and another through the sole of his boot.

Rogers returned to Australia in December 1901, and was commissioned. He then returned to South Africa to serve with the Cape Police until 1907, and then returned to Australia. That year he married Ethel Seldon and they had two sons.

He served at Gallipoli with the ANZAC's and was wounded. Captain Rogers served in France before being invalided back to Australia in June 1916 and returned to farming. He lived for many years in Kew, Melbourne, before settling in Sydney.



Rogers became Australia's senior V.C. and is listed in the Australian Dictionary of Biography.

He and his wife attended the V.C. Centenary Ceremony in London in 1956.

He died in Sydney on 28 April 1961, aged 85 years.

He was given a state funeral at Springvale Cemetery.

*Picture: A memorial erected in honour of Sergeant James Rogers V.C.*

Acknowledgement – Ian Uys

**Anniversary of the birth (24 June 1850) and death (5 June 1916)  
of Horatio Herbert Kitchener**

Kitchener was born in Ballylongford, County Kerry, in Ireland, on 24 June 1850. His early schooling was completed in Switzerland after the family had moved there, and then, with his father having been a military man, he enrolled at the Royal Military Academy in Woolwich. After seeing brief service with a French Field Ambulance Unit, he was commissioned into the Royal Engineers early in 1871 and saw service in Palestine, Egypt and Cyprus as a Surveyor.

In January 1883 Kitchener was promoted to Captain and was dispatched to Egypt, where he took part in the reconstruction of the Egyptian Army. It was during this time that he was initiated into Freemasonry. In the mid 1890's he was in command of British forces in the Sudan and in 1898 he avenged the defeat of General Gordon at Khartoum. Late in that year he became Governor-General of the Sudan.



At the outbreak of the South African War (1899-1902) Kitchener was in the U.K., but after early British defeats he accompanied Lord Roberts to the Cape, arriving in Cape Town in late December 1899 together with a large contingent of British reinforcements.

Kitchener was present at the Relief of Kimberley on 15 February 1900 and led an unsuccessful frontal attack on the Boers at Paardeberg.

After the fall of Bloemfontein Kitchener was used in a number of 'hot spots' around the areas of conflict, with his involvement at the 'relief' of the garrison at Elands River being probably his biggest achievement.

*Picture: Lord Horatio Herbert Kitchener*

After the last set piece battle of the war at Bergendal/Belfast, Roberts decided that the war was nearly over, and handed over command to Kitchener. Kitchener was promoted to Lieutenant-General in November 1900 and then to General two months later.

Roberts had hardly left when Kitchener experienced embarrassing defeats at Nooitgedacht and Helvetia. Having arrived in Southern Africa as the 'leading light' in North Africa, Kitchener wasn't prepared to have nomadic Boers destroy his reputation. The scorched earth policy, accompanied with the resultant concentration camps was introduced by Kitchener, to try and curb the 'hit and run' tactics which were being very successfully used by the Boers.

The book, 'Cassell's History of the Boer War 1899-1901' states the following (page 1506) – *'It ought to be said that Lord Kitchener was not merely sweeping the country with the notion of sweeping out or capturing the Boers in arms. His plan involved much more than that. The man of the Sudan had resolved to sweep every white man, woman and child, combatant and non-combatant, out of the country districts; and also to destroy or carry away everything which could assist the enemy or enable them to prolong the guerrilla warfare. Towns and villages were to be destroyed; crops and stock carried away or burnt; women and children to be brought into Johannesburg, Kroonstad, or some other of the 'refugee camps' now growing to alarming proportions.'*

In the book 'De la Rey, Lion of the West' by Johannes Meintjies it states (page 195) – *"Like Buller, he (Kitchener) was a typical Rooinek to Boer eyes, a monster of a man, one who preferred to be misunderstood rather than be suspected of human feelings. Actually he was extremely sensitive with a refined taste."*

And a final opinion on Kitchener, from the book 'The Boer War' by Eversley Belfield (page 145) – *"Yet Kitchener's abilities far outweighed his deficiencies. As a relatively young, yet experienced soldier, he was extremely ambitious. Eager to take up his next post as Commander-in-Chief in India, he had a strong incentive for finishing the war as quickly as possible. He possessed the energy and self-confidence essential for galvanising the British Army into that ceaseless activity so necessary for harrying guerrillas.'*



*Picture: A typical British 'block-house'*

Kitchener was responsible for the block-house system which was originally introduced to protect the railway lines at various vulnerable points. Eventually there was a system of block-houses which criss-crossed the areas where the commandos were active in an effort to 'herd' these commandos into areas where there was a concentration of British troops. By the end of the war there were over 7 000 block-houses, of various designs, covering the country.

After the South African War (1899-1902) Kitchener was appointed Commander-in-Chief in India, and arrived there in November 1902. In June 1911 Kitchener then returned to Egypt as Consul-General. When war was declared in 1914 he was on leave in the U.K., and never returned to Egypt. Instead he was appointed Secretary of State for War by the then Prime Minister.

Kitchener appointed a number of South African War veterans such as Douglas Haig and John French into strategic posts, however he soon found that being involved in the military, and politics didn't necessarily compliment opinions. He started getting into conflict situations with military leaders – this is a subject too complicated to be dealt with here.

With armaments being 'stretched' and the American commitment not being realised the Chancellor of the Exchequer suggested that Kitchener head a special and confidential mission to Russia to discuss munition shortages.

Lord Kitchener sailed from Scotland on 5 June 1916 aboard HMS Oak before transferring to the armoured cruiser HMS Hampshire for his diplomatic mission to Russia. A few hours out to sea, at about 7.30pm Hampshire struck a mine and sank west of the Orkney Islands. Only twelve men survived. Amongst the dead were all ten members of Kitchener's entourage and his body was never recovered.



*Picture: HMS Hampshire*

**REMEMBER** to keep an eye on our website ([www.battletoursza.com](http://www.battletoursza.com)) - for regular articles, updates, etc.

**Allan Gordon**