

Newsletter

June 2025

Past newsletters have recorded the main battles that were fought during the June months of the Boer War (1899-1902), so I am going to try to highlight other events during the two June months – 1900 and 1901.

June 1900: Prisoners captured by the Boers in battles fought, up to the occupation of Pretoria, were sent to either Pretoria or a camp called Nooitgedacht which was close to Waterval Onder. Prisoners sent to Pretoria were kept at a camp called Waterval, with the more senior Officers being sent to the Staats Model School in Central Pretoria. With the occupation of Pretoria on 5 June 1900, one of the first priorities was to free the prisoners and to get them back into action as soon as possible.

'The Times History of the War' records (pages 269 & 270, Vol. IV) – "One of Lord Roberts' first cares was to release the prisoners. The Boers had intended, on abandoning the capital, to take them away east, but had been so hurried at the last by Lord Roberts' rapid movements that they had only been able to carry off 1 000, leaving over 3 000 behind at Waterval. These were nearly all rank and file, for most of the officers, who had been confined to Pretoria, had overcome their guards on the morning of the 5th and come out as free men to watch the march past Lord Roberts. On the 6th, Porter's brigade was ordered to affect the release of the men.



Picture: Lord Roberts

Starting from the cavalry camp north-west of Pretoria, Porter sent forward a squadron of the Greys under Captain Maude to explore the ground. On reaching Onderste Poort, where the railway passes through a range of hills half-way between Wonderboom and Waterval, this squadron had a slight skirmish with some Boers posted there by de la Rey, who was preparing to resist the attempt at rescue with a force of 2 000 men and four guns on the ridges near Waterval. After putting to flight the Boer outposts, Maude advanced through the Poort to a place within sight of the camp, where he was met by a throng of prisoners who had overpowered the Boer guard on his appearance, and were surging tumultuously over the plain towards him."

'The History of the War in South Africa 1899-1902', compiled by the direction of H.M. Government records (pages 101 & 102, Vol. III) – "The release of the prisoners, who numbered 3 029 men,

proved to be a more dangerous enterprise than the occupation of the city itself. Between nine hundred and one thousand had already been removed out of reach to Nooitgedacht on the Delagoa Bay line."

June 1901: Much has been recorded about the executions of the many Cape Rebels, captured by the British, fighting on the side of the Boers, although they were 'British' citizens, as they were citizens of the Cape Colony. However, there were other executions that were taking place in the Transvaal. The book 'Methods of Barbarism' by S.B. Spies records (pages 261 & 262) – *"... the treatment of the rebels in the Cape Colony – particularly the infliction of the death penalty on rebels captured in the field and their execution in the compulsory presence of the condemned men's fellow townsmen – as other examples of the harsher measures applied by Kitchener during the winter of 1901. These acts fall beyond the scope of his work, but Kitchener hinted at the desirability of public executions in the Transvaal as well. On 11th June 1901 P.R. Krause and N.T. Venter were shot at Pretoria after being found guilty of charges of breach of the oath of neutrality and being in unlawful possession of arms. It was clearly these executions Kitchener was referring to when he wrote to Broderick on 20th July 1901 : 'When two prisoners were quietly executed here in goal, the Dutch people refused absolutely to believe that they had been executed, and insisted that they had been quietly removed.'*

The British government was not in favour of public executions, however, and Transvaal civilians who were subsequently found guilty of treason, breaking the oath of neutrality and similar charges – R.C. Upton, C. Broeksma, and D.G. Wernick – were shot in goal without any of their fellow countrymen being forced to witness the execution."

The Battle of Wilmansrust on 12 June 1901 (which has been featured before) had 'mixed results' for the Victorian Mounted Rifles.



The book 'Goodbye Dolly Gray' by Rayne Kruger records (page 435) – *"The result had been friction with the commander of the column to which they had been attached, a General Beatson, who tried to turn their easy-going scorn of drill and smartness into the rigid discipline of a 'crack cavalry regiment'. They detested and mistrusted him. As soon as he heard of the disaster to the men attacked by Muller he made for the scene with his whole column. Then he mustered the Australians and told them they were 'a lot of wasters, and white-livered curs' and – seeing an Australian officer jotting the speech down – 'you can add dogs too', throwing in the further observation that all Australians were alike.*

Picture: General Beatson

An oration of this kind would have rolled off the backs of old regulars; the Australians mutinied and refused to march under him. He had three of the leaders arrested. They were court-martialled and sentenced to death. When Lord Kitchener heard, he commuted the sentence to three years imprisonment, and when the Australian Government made representations to the British Government a complete pardon was granted."

Other 'related' events during the month of June:

- **11 June 1900** – the Earl of Airlie was killed at the Battle of Diamond Hill.
- **23 June 1900** – Heidelberg was occupied by the British.



Picture: the Earle of Airlie

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

1900

Cpl. F.H. Kirby	Royal Engineers	Eastern Transvaal
Pvt. C.B. Ward	King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry	Lindley

1901

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

Corporal F.H. Kirby – Royal Engineers

Frank Howard Kirby was born in Thame, Oxfordshire, on 12 November 1871, and entered the Royal Engineers in London in August 1892. He was mobilised for South Africa in 1899. In March 1900 he blew up the Bloemfontein Railway line, for which he was awarded a DCM (Distinguished Conduct Medal). He was meant to repeat this feat 'north of Kroonstad' while with General Hunter Weston's column.

As Johannesburg was captured on 31 May 1900, and 5 June, one can assume that Corporal Kirby was sent to sabotage the railway line from Pretoria to the Eastern Transvaal. This turned out to be an abortive mission.

Citation:

On the morning of 2nd June 1900, a party sent to try to cut Delagoa Bay Railway were retiring, hotly pressed by very superior numbers. During one of the successive retirements of the rear-guard, a man whose horse had been shot was running after his comrades. He was a long way behind the rest of his troop and was under a brisk fire. From among the retiring troops Corporal Kirby turned and rode back to the man's assistance. Although by the time he reached him they were under a heavy fire at close range, Corporal Kirby managed to get the dismounted man up behind him and to take him clear off over the next ridge held by our rear-guard. This is the third occasion on which Corporal Kirby has displayed gallantry in the face of the enemy.

(London Gazette 8 October 1900)

Corporal Kirby was promoted Troop Sergeant-Major on the field by Lord Roberts in July 1900. Sergeant Kirby was decorated by the Duke of Cornwall & York in Cape Town on 19 August 1901.



He became Warrant Officer in 1906 and three years later married Kate Jolly. They had two sons and two daughters. He was commissioned in April 1911 and the following year was gazetted to the Royal Flying Corps.

Kirby served in France in 1916-7 and was promoted Captain in 1917 and later Lieutenant-Colonel. From 1918-26 he was a Group Captain in the Royal Air Force. He died in Sidcup, Kent, on 8 July 1956, aged 84 years. There is a tablet to his memory in the Chatham Garrison Church, Kent.

Picture: The blue plaque erected in honour of Corporal Kirby V.C.

(Reference – Ian Uys)

Anniversary of the death of Lieutenant W.B.L. Alt – 12 June 1900

Lieutenant Brian Alt, C.I.V., was killed in action at Diamond Hill, near Pretoria, on 12 June 1900. He was the son of Colonel W.J. Alt, commanding the 22nd Middlesex Volunteers, and one of the youngest Officers in the C.I.V.'s, being only 22 years of age. He was educated at Clifton and New College, Oxford, and was an excellent athlete.

Lieutenant Alt was sent to South Africa in January 1900, and served in the north of the Cape Colony, moving thence to Bloemfontein. He then took part in the advance on Pretoria, marching through Lindley, Heilbron and Vredefort. The C.I.V.s were afterwards present at the attack on Diamond Hill. Early in the day Lieutenant Alt was wounded in the arm, but having got it dressed, he returned to the firing line. Later on, when about to get his wound redressed, he was shot in the temple. He is buried at the foot of the kopje where he fell, near Kleinfontein Farm, not far from van der Merwe Station on the Delagoa Railway. Lieutenant Alt was the only Officer of the C.I.V.'s who lost his life during the war.



Picture: Lieutenant Alt

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

With acknowledgement to the *Angloboerwar.com* website:

"Lieutenant W.B.L. Alt, the first officer of the City Imperial Volunteers to be killed in action, was the son of Colonel W.J. Alt, V.D., commanding the 22nd Middlesex (Central London Rangers) Volunteer Rifle Corps. He received a commission in 1897 in his father's regiment, of which he was appointed captain a few months ago. He was one of the youngest officers in the City Imperial Volunteers, for he was only twenty-two years old when he was gazetted, in January last, a lieutenant in the regiment. At that time he was at New College, Oxford, of which he had been a member three years.

By Old Cliftonians Lieutenant Alt will be best remembered as a distinguished athlete, who did much to heighten the reputation of that school. A member of a family with strong military tradition, young Alt was regarded by a wide circle of friends as a highly promising officer.

At his father's residence, Airlie Gardens, Campden Hall Road, London, a large number of messages of sympathy were received. His grandfather, Colonel Alt, was an officer in the old 63^d (now the Manchester) Regiment; an uncle, Lieut. H.D. Alt, of the 34th (now the Cumberland) Regiment, took part in the assault at the Redan; and another uncle of his, Lieut. Bulso Alt, first of the 1st West India Regiment and then of the 98th succumbed to fever in the Ashanti campaign of 1864.

(Western Daily Press, Monday 18 June 1900)

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

Allan Gordon