

Newsletter

March 2021

March 1900 saw the British making their way due east towards Bloemfontein after the Relief of Kimberley and the Cronje disaster at Paardeberg in February 1900. The battles at Poplar Grove and Abrahamskraal were just unnecessary obstacles in the way to them taking Bloemfontein on 13 March. With the fall of Bloemfontein, General de Wet sent the Free State Burghers home, with orders to report back, at positions to be communicated, on 25 March. On 17 March the Boer leaders, including Presidents Kruger and Steyn, reorganised the Boer forces into more mobile, smaller units and decided that commandos would no longer be accompanied by their women folk and unnecessary wagons. This, to some historians, is one of the interpretations of the start of the guerrilla phase of the war.

After the fall of Bloemfontein, British units pursued the Boer forces, in their flight north and east, with engagements taking place as far as Thaba 'Nchu to the east of Bloemfontein.



The end of March 1900 saw the Battle of Karee Siding (our Battle of the Month – see our website – www.battletoursza.com) and the Battle of Sanna's Post, which was the battle of the month in March 2020, and can also be found on our website.

Picture: Typical terrain at the Battle of Karee Siding

Karee Siding is one of the lesser known battles of the war. However, it was an important battle as the British wanted to use Karee Siding as a supply station for their push towards the Transvaal. British casualties were 19 men killed and 170 injured. Boer casualties in the battle were three killed and 18 wounded. British casualties during the course of the month of March in 1900 totalled approximately 100 men killed and 400 wounded.

March 1901 saw a number of guerrilla actions in the Western Transvaal. There was also a lot of 'to-ing and fro-ing' between the British and the Boers relating to the negotiations of a Peace Treaty which had been discussed at a meeting between the two parties at Middelburg on 28 February 1901. However, the British terms were rejected by the Boers – the British wanted an unconditional surrender.

March 1902 was nearing the end of the war and much of the action took place in the then Western Transvaal (now North West Province) in the area between Klerksdorp and Delareyville.



The Battle of Tweebosch was fought on 7 March 1902, about 35 km north east of Delareyville, close to the Great Harts River.

General Methuen's column was attacked by the Boers under General de la Rey, and in a battle lasting five hours, the British casualties were 70 killed, 118 wounded and over 850 taken prisoner.

Methuen was injured in the battle and taken prisoner. De la Rey, against the wishes of his senior officers, decided to release the wounded Methuen and provided his personal wagon to transport Methuen to a hospital in Klerksdorp.

Picture: General Methuen

The month ended with the Battle of Boschbult on 31 March. The battle was a British defeat. Out of a total force of 1 800 men, the British lost 33 killed, 126 wounded, and over 70 missing. Canadian casualties were 13 killed and 40 wounded which was the bloodiest day of the war for the Canadians since their involvement in the engagement at Paardeberg in February 1900.

Cecil John Rhodes also died during the month – on 26 March 1902.

Having been one of the 'causes' of the South African War (1899-1902), through his involvement with the Jameson Raid, it is ironical that he wasn't around for the end of the war and the peace negotiations.

He was a young man when he died, aged 49, but was a sickly youngster in the U.K., and was sent to the Cape to take advantage of the climate.

What a footprint he left – a story well worth following if you know very little about the man.

The gun which was manufactured in Kimberley during the siege, the 'Long Cecil', was sent to Cape Town, where he died, to serve as a gun carriage in his funeral procession.



Picture: A young Cecil John Rhodes

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

1900

Sgt. H.W. Engleheart	10th Royal Hussars	Bloemfontein
Major E.J. Phipps-Hornby	Royal Horse Artillery	Koornspruit/Sannah's Post
Sgt. C.E.H. Parker	Royal Horse Artillery	Koornspruit/Sannah's Post
Gunner I. Lodge	Royal Horse Artillery	Koornspruit/Sannah's Post
Driver H.H. Glascock	Royal Horse Artillery	Koornspruit/Sannah's Post
Lieut. F.A. Maxwell	Indian Staff Corp	Koornspruit/Sannah's Post

1901

Lieut. F.B. Dugdale	5th Lancers	Derby (Tvl)
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Anniversary of the death of Boer Commandant-General Piet Joubert – 28 March 1900

Petrus Jacobus Joubert, better known as Piet Joubert, died on 28 March 1900 from injuries received late in November 1899 when he was thrown from his horse during the Natal campaign. He had been Commandant-General of the South African Republic from 1880 to 1900, and also served as Vice-President to Paul Kruger from 1881 – 1883. He saw action in both the First Boer War and the South African War (1899-1902).



During the first Boer War, caused by the British annexation of the Transvaal, Joubert was elected as a member of the triumvirate that administered the provisional Boer government, which was set up in December 1880 at Heidelberg.

He commanded the Boer forces at the Battles of Laing's Nek, Ingogo and Majuba, and was present at the peace negotiations that led to the signing of the Pretoria Convention, which was the peace treaty that ended the First Boer War.

Picture: General Piet Joubert

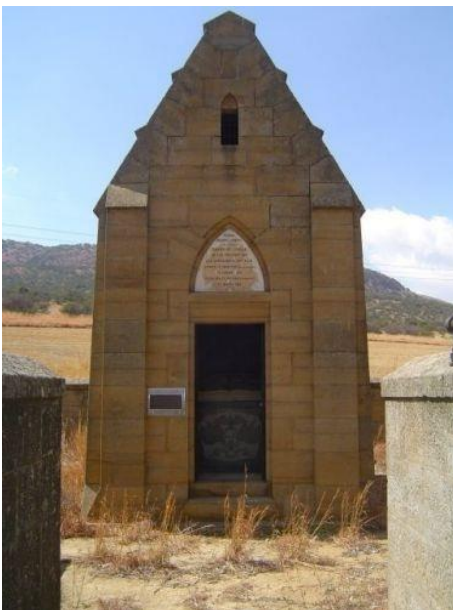
Joubert was a farmer and had studied law, skills which led to him being elected to the Transvaal Volksraad (Government) as member for Wakkerstroom. After the First Boer War, he entered politics more seriously and stood against Paul Kruger on four occasions, losing out on the third attempt by a narrow margin when he stood for the Boer grievances against the Uitlander (foreigners) issue. He was appointed twice as Vice President to Paul Kruger, firstly from May 1883 to the elections in 1888, and secondly from May 1896 until his death in March 1900.

At the outbreak of the South African War (1899-1902) Joubert immediately assumed command of the operations and Boer forces in the Transvaal. However, he was now in his late sixties and lacked the same offensive spirit and boldness that he had displayed during the First Boer War. By nature, he was a very cautious man, and stayed on the defensive. The Siege of Ladysmith became his passion, and many 'commentators', as well as Boer leaders believe that had he pursued victories at Colenso and Willow Grange, the port of Durban could have been in Boer hands before British re-enforcements arrived. Joubert took little part in any of the actions around Ladysmith and had difficulty in imposing his will on his military subordinates. Most of the Boer offensives were planned and executed by other commanders with little or no input from Joubert, and it is through this lack of 'commitment' that Louis Botha was able to exert his authority and become the military 'genius' during the course of the war.

Late in October 1899, Joubert was commanding a raid near the Tugela River when he injured as a result of being thrown from his horse. He returned to Pretoria and Louis Botha resumed command of the Transvaal forces, a position he was to hold until the end of the war. Joubert's injuries led to internal infections and he died of peritonitis in Pretoria on 28 March 1900.

He was considered an honourable enemy by the British who offered him rare praise. Sir George White, who commanded the garrison in Ladysmith, called Joubert "a soldier and a gentleman, and a brave and honourable opponent".

In the book 'De la Rey – Lion of the West' by Johannes Meintjies, Meintjies writes (page 162) – *"And before that month was out, there was another item of sad news – the death of Commandant-General Petrus Jacobus Joubert, de la Rey's friend and ally, one of the most revered and loved men in the history of the South African Republic. Although he had been Paul Kruger's opponent in three presidential elections, he was held second only to Kruger himself. He was more of a volkvader (father of the people) than a soldier, but had bravely given of his best when the war commenced until illness laid him low and brought on his death at the age of nearly seventy. De la Rey felt his death deeply"*.



In the book, Meintjies quotes de la Rey (page 162/163) – *"He was such a noble man that he was revered by the burgers of the Transvaal as well as the Free State."*

It is impossible to indicate what a blow his death was to the Officers and burgers. In spite of his grave illness, he took care to prepare the country for his death by dividing the Republic, making me Commandant-General of the western parts, and General Louis Botha Commandant-General of the eastern parts of the Transvaal. This was a tremendous responsibility for General Botha and myself at a time when such a deterioration had set in, but it was a responsibility which by the grace of God we had to undertake and execute to the best of our abilities".

Picture: General Piet Joubert's grave

He was buried on his farm Rustfontein in the Volksrus district.

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