

Newsletter

October 2024

The major battles that took place during the months of October 1899, 1900 and 1901 in the South African War (1899-1902) have been covered in previous newsletters. This newsletter will record other interesting aspects of the war, together with other notable 'October' events.

October 1899: There are so many books written about the Boer War, the ultimatum preceding the outbreak of war, and the reaction to the ultimatum. However, the book 'The Anglo-Boer War – a Chronology', by Pieter G. Cloete (a book that you definitely need to acquire if you are interested in the Boer War), records what I have found the most interesting (page 34) –

- *Mr. J. Chamberlain (delighted), "They have done it."*
- *Lord Lansdowne, Secretary of War (writing to Chamberlain), "Accept my felicitations, I don't think Kruger could have played our cards better than he has ... my soldiers are in ecstasies."*
- *Lord Salisbury, "(The ZAR Ultimatum) liberated us from the necessity of explaining to the people of England why we are at war."*
- *The Telegraph, "Of course there can only be one answer to this grotesque challenge ... Mr. Kruger has asked for war, and war he must have."*
- *Moberley Bell of The Times, "The ultimatum was excellent in every way. An official document is seldom both eminently amusing and useful, but this was both."*
- *President Steyn, "I believe that nothing happens without the will of the Almighty and that He, who helped our forefathers in such a marvellous way, will take pity on us. In any case, His will be done."*, and
- *President Kruger, quoting Psalm 108:7, "God hath spoken in His Holiness, I will rejoice."*



Picture: President Paul Kruger

As per what was perceived to be a 'winning formula' – it had worked for the 1st Boer War in 1880/81 – the Boers commenced with their sieges of the major British garrisons in South Africa at the time – Kimberley and Mafeking, Ladysmith was well into Natal, so it had to be reached. This resulted in the Battles of Talana (Dundee), Elandsлагте, and Rietfontein before the Siege of Ladysmith could commence.

October 1900: By October 1900 the sieges were a thing of the past, and had resulted in a heavy loss at Kimberley, where, after the British had relieved the town, Piet Cronje was forced to surrender with over 4 000 men (and just to be 'politically' correct, women), along with all his supplies and guns, because he was too immobile. This served as a huge lesson to the Boers over the next two years of combat.

The major battle in October 1900 was the Battle of Frederickstad which lasted from 20 to 25 October, with the Boers under the command of de Wet and Liebenberg withdrawing their force when British re-enforcements arrived. A 'sad' sequel to the battle was the execution of three captured Boers – T.C. Lombard, P.S. Fourie, and J.A Basson, who, at the battle *"treacherously threw up their hands in a token of surrender, and then shot a British Officer."* ('Methods of Barberism' by S.B. Spies – page 70).

General Buller was also relieved of his command, Lord Roberts believed that there was now no more need for the Natal Field Force, which Buller commanded. At the time, Buller, having defeated the Boers at Bergendal, was now chasing them around the area of Pilgrim's Rest, and received the information from Roberts, at Krugerpos, that he was to return to Britain.

October 1901: On the day that the war entered its third year Commandant Lotter was sentenced to death, for atrocities committed, and was executed the following day. On 24 October, at the Battle of Kleinfontein (the 'battle of the month'), near the present-day town of Groot Marico, British casualties were 30 killed and 52 wounded. However, they also lost nearly 20 wagons and over 300 head of cattle and horses – much needed supplies for the Boers. The biggest battle of the war was fought at Bakenlaagte where British casualties were 63 killed in action, 17 died of wounds, and 149 wounded. The book 'The Boer War Casualty Roll (1899-1902)' by Alexander Palmer lists a further eight casualties as being 'accidental' – this is a subject for further research. Colonel Benson, one of the most promising Officers in the British Army at the time, was a casualty and one wonders what would have happened to him in later years. A number of his peers became Field-Marschals, and from his results in the South African War he certainly was on a par with them.



Picture: The Women's Monument in Bloemfontein where Emily Hobhouse's ashes were scattered

On 27 October Emily Hobhouse, returning to South Africa after a visit in 1900, arrived in Cape Town by boat but was refused permission to land, and a few days later was deported back to Great Britain. Of interest, she had been instrumental in the government decision to send a group of women, under Dame Millicent Fawcett, to look at the situation in the Concentration Camps, but was not part of this government commission. However, it was her actions that put into play the forces that led to reform.

She returned to South Africa after the war and helped set up home industries in the Orange Free State and Transvaal to help rehabilitate the Boer families. In 1913 she was invited to unveil the Women's Monument in Bloemfontein. Bad health unfortunately prevented her from returning to Britain immediately after the event. She died on 8 June 1926 and had her ashes were scattered at the Women's Monument.

Other interesting events during the month of October:

- **20 October 1897** – An attack on Dargai Heights during the Tirah campaign resulted in the award of four Victoria Crosses. Sergeant Findlater, a Gordon Highlander, was shot in the ankles during an advance against opposing defences. Being unable to walk, and exposed to enemy fire, he continued playing his bagpipes, to encourage the battalion's advance. For this act of bravery, he was awarded the Victoria Cross.
- **10 October 1900** – HMS Partridge opened fire on the Boer commando of Manie Maritz in the port of Saldanha Bay. Maritz's commando were busy stealing cattle but hastily withdrew after eight rounds from the naval 4-inch gun. A unique Boer/British Naval action.
- **14 October 1899** – General Buller departed England for South Africa.
- **14 October 1900** – Winston Churchill was elected to Parliament, winning his seat in Oldham.
- **29 October 1900** – Prince Christian Victor of Schleswig-Holstein, a grandson of Queen Victoria, died of enteric fever in Pretoria.



Picture: Prince Christian Victor

During the three October months of the South African War (1899, 1900 & 1901), eight V.C.s were awarded:

1899

Capt. C. Fitzclarence	Royal Fusiliers	Mafeking
Capt. M.F.M. Meiklejohn	Gordon Highlanders	Elandslaagte
Sgt.Maj. W. Robertson	Gordon Highlanders	Elandslaagte
Capt. C.H. Mullins	Imperial Light Horse	Elandslaagte
Capt. R. Johnston	Imperial Light Horse	Elandslaagte
Lt. J. Norwood	5 th Dragoon Guards	Nicholson's Nek

1900

Maj. E.D. Brown	14 th Hussars	Geluk
Lt. A.C. Doxat	3 rd Bn. Imperial Yeomanry	Zeerust

Victoria Cross of the Month

Lieutenant A.C. Doxat – 3rd Battalion, Imperial Yeomanry



Picture: Lieutenant Alexis Doxat V.C.

Lieutenant Alexis Charles Doxat was born in Surbiton, Surrey, on 9 April 1867. He served as a Captain in the Dalston Militia and passed the Auxiliary School of Instruction and the Musketry School. Although a member of the London Stock Exchange, he resigned to serve in South Africa.

From May 1900 Lieutenant Doxat took part in Lord Methuen's advance from Boshof. In September he joined General Douglas' column in the Western Transvaal as personal ADC, though he acted as reconnaissance Officer.

Citation:

On 20th October 1900, near Zeerust, Lieutenant Doxat proceeded with a party of mounted infantry to reconnoitre a position held by 100 Boers on a ridge of kopjes. When within 300 yards of the position the enemy opened a heavy fire on Lieutenant Doxat's party, which then retired, leaving one of their number who had lost his horse. Lieutenant Doxat, seeing the dangerous position in which the man was placed, galloped back under a very heavy fire, and brought him on his horse to a place of safety.

(London Gazette, 15 January 1901)

He was the first Yeoman and the first member of the Stock Exchange to be awarded the V.C.. Lieutenant Doxat was presented with his V.C. by King Edward VII at Marlborough House on 17 December 1901. He married Mrs. Hugh Mair (a widow) and served in World War I.

Honorary Major Doxat was invalided out of the army in 1918. He died in Cambridge on 29 November 1942, aged 75. His medals were sold by Sotheby's in 1971 for £1 900 (British Pounds).

Anniversary of the birth of Boer General Piet Cronje – 4 October 1836

Pieter (Piet) Arnoldus Cronje was born in Colesberg, Cape Colony on 4 October 1836. His family moved to the Transvaal whilst he was still young, and he spent most of his formative years in the Potchefstroom district. The book 'Jan Smuts – Memoirs of the Boer War' which was edited by S.B. Spies and Gail Nattrass records (page 179) – *"He participated in the 1st Anglo-Boer War but made no significant military contribution. After the war he was elected to the Volksraad and participated in the wars against Mapoch and David Massouw. He resigned his Volksraad seat in 1884 and became Acting Commandant-General and a member of the Executive Council of the South African Republic. He led his commando which forced Jameson's Raiders to surrender in January 1896."*

The above said, Cronje was in command of the Boers at the siege of the British garrison at Potchefstroom. By withholding the information regarding the armistice from the British who were besieged in the garrison after the Battle of Majuba, he was able to force their surrender – the only garrison that surrendered during the war.

'The Times History of the War' records an interesting fact (pages 224 & 225) – *"Potchefstroom was the original capital of the Transvaal. When the Royal Scots Fusiliers entered Potchefstroom (in 1900), they hoisted their Union Jack, which has a curious history. It was the flag which was hauled down in Pretoria on the retrocession of the Transvaal in 1881.*



Picture: Royal Scots Fusiliers during the South African War

It was then buried by a few loyalists in a coffin on which was the following inscription:

*IN MEMORY OF
THE BRITISH FLAG
IN THE TRANSVAAL;
WHICH DEPARTED THIS LIFE AUGUST 2nd, 1881,
AGED 4 YEARS.*

Colonel Gildea, however, who was Commandant of Pretoria at the time, dug it up and brought it back to England, where it was left in charge of his Regiment, the Royal Scots Fusiliers.

Cronje's act of withholding the information relating to the armistice, was viewed as an 'act of cowardice' by many. When Potchefstroom was occupied by the British on 14 June 1900 during the South African War (1899-1902), the Royal Scots Fusiliers who were embarrassed in 1881 were allowed to march ahead of the column.

After the 1st Boer War he was elected to the Volksraad (Parliament) but resigned in 1884 and became Acting Commandant-General and a member of the Executive Council of the South African Republic (Transvaal). Cronjé was in command of the force that rounded up Leander Jameson at Doornkop at the conclusion of the Jameson Raid on 2 January 1896.

At the beginning of the South African War (1899-1902) he commanded the force that besieged the town of Mafeking with a force ranging between 2 000 and 6 000 Boers, against 1 200 regular troops and militia under the command of Colonel Baden-Powell. In November 1899 he was sent to the Cape Western front to the Siege of Kimberley. Together with General de la Rey (it is said that) they masterminded the defeat of the British at Magersfontein with the first use of the tactic of trenches – however research indicates that the use of trenches was used in Europe some time before. At Modder River, the Boer infantry were positioned at the base of the hills instead of at the tops – to increase the effectiveness of their rifles' flat trajectories, this tactic led to trenches at the following Battle of Magersfontein. Although Cronje claimed some of the credit, and a place in 'military history', it was actually due to de la Rey's direct involvement with the tactics and planning whilst Cronjé sat idly in camp.



Cronjé was defeated at the Battle of Paardeberg where he surrendered with 4 150 of his commandos on 27 February 1900, after a 10-day battle.

The commanding officer of the 3rd Battalion, the Grenadier Guards, Lieutenant Colonel Eyre Crabbe, was surprised to find that Cronjé had been accompanied on the campaign by his wife.

After his surrender he and his wife were sent to a prisoner-of-war camp on Saint Helena, where he remained until the conclusion of peace negotiations in 1902.

Picture: Boer Leader Piet Cronje

After the war he spent some time with General Ben Viljoen in the United States of America, enacting battle scenes from the war at the World Fair in St. Louis in 1904. After his return to South Africa he was a lonely figure, ostracised by most of his fellow burghers. He was dubbed the 'circus general' by the South African press.

He died on 4 February 1911, aged 74, in the Potchefstroom district where he farmed.

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

Allan Gordon