

Newsletter

September 2021

September 1900 – After the defeat of the Boers at the Battle of Bergendal, Lord Roberts annexed the Transvaal or Zuid Afrikaanse Republiek (ZAR) on 1 September 1900.

The battle, described as the Battle of Long Tom Pass commenced on 8 September when General Buller, with about 12 000 men and 45 guns attacked General Botha at Paardeplaats.

Over the next few days the Boers, totally outnumbered, fought a rear-guard action, resulting in them having to destroy many wagons with supplies, and a Long Tom gun, enabling them to escape.



Picture: A typical scene with a Long Tom Gun

On 11 September President Kruger crossed the border into Mozambique, for his eventual departure from Lourenço Marques for Europe.

On 17 September a British force under Lieutenant-General Methuen engaged a Boer commando under Commandant de Beer. The British were successful in capturing a number of Boers, supplies, and one of the British guns that the Boers had captured at Colenso.

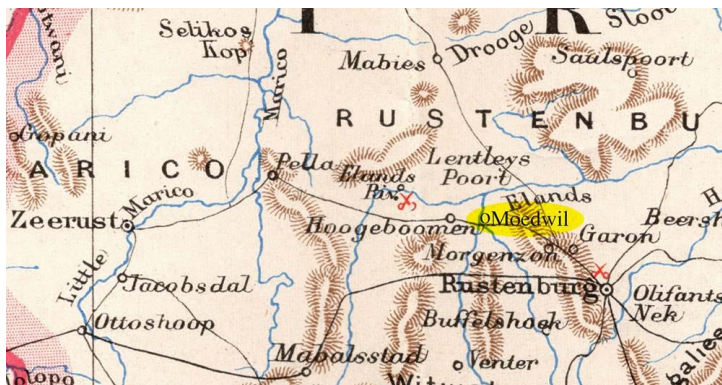
September 1901 – General Smuts who had been campaigning with General de la Rey in the Western Transvaal decided, at the beginning of September 1901, to take a commando of hand-picked men to travel to the Cape. His mission was twofold – to give the British another front on which to concentrate and to try and get support and buy-in from the Afrikaners in the Cape.

In the book 'General Jan Smuts and his long ride' by Taffy and David Shearing, it states, "The long ride, one of the epics of the war, didn't make a difference to its final outcome, but it made a world of difference to Smuts. He was now strong and dominant. The war had given him a crash course in leadership and decision making. What he learnt would carry him into the future to become a South African Prime Minister twice and a statesman of international reputation."

In September 1901 General Louis Botha, his brother Chris and his brother-in-law, General Emmett, invaded Natal. It has been recorded that Botha's plan was to invade Northern Natal, disrupt British control to the limit, then cut south to enter the Cape Colony and ultimately join forces with Smuts who had already succeeded in getting into the Cape with his small force. Knowing South Africa in

terms of terrain, and with his force of only about 2 000 men, this would have been almost impossible. I believe Botha saw this as an easy way to replenish dwindling supplies, as the garrisons in Natal were ill prepared for Boer attacks. The Battle of Blood River's Poort was a success. The Battles of Fort Prospect and Itala (Battle of the Month – www.battletoursza.com) resulted in Botha returning to the Transvaal, due to British reinforcements having arrived.

In the Cape Colony Commandant Lotter and his commando were captured on 5 September in an engagement where the British suffered 20 casualties. Also in the Cape General Smuts and his commando managed to escape being surrounded by British forces near Penhoek Pass, and five days later they attacked a squadron of Lancers at Modderfontein. The Boers managed to capture two guns but had to leave the guns when they were forced to retire in a hurry, due to the arrival of British reinforcements.



Minor engagements took place in the Orange Free State as well as in the Western Transvaal.

The month ended with the Battle of Moedwil, which was featured in last year's newsletter, as the Battle of the Month.

In a battle that lasted less than two hours, the British lost 61 killed or mortally wounded and 145 wounded, with over 400 horses and cattle either being killed or recorded as missing due to a stampede when the Boer attack on the camp commenced.

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

1900

Lt. G.G.E. Wylly

Tpr. J.H. Bisdee

Tasmanian Imperial Bushmen

Tasmanian Imperial Bushmen

Warmbaths

Warmbaths

1901

Lt. L.A.E. Price-Davies

Dvr. F.H. Bradley

Pte. W. Bees

Kings Royal Rifle Corp.

Royal Field Artillery – 69 Batt.

Derbyshire Regiment

Blood River Port

Itala

Moedwil

As a new feature, and having obtained permission from Ian Uys, I am going to 'feature' one of the recipients of the Victoria Cross in each monthly newsletter. For those who have a copy of Ian's book, 'Victoria Crosses of the Boer-War', this will not be new to you. Those who don't have a copy of the book, I'm sure you will find this most interesting.

Lieutenant Guy George Egerton Wylly - Tasmanian Imperial Bushmen

Guy George Egerton Wylly was born on 17 February 1880 at Hobart, Tasmania, and was the son of Major Edward Wylly, formerly of the 109th Regiment and Madras Staff Corps. His maternal grandfather served as Sergeant-at-Arms to the House of Assembly in Hobart.

In April 1900 Wylly became a Lieutenant in the Tasmanian Bushmen.

On 1 September 1900, Major E. Brooke led a party of Army Service Corps men foraging near Warmbad (Warmbaths), near Belfast. They were escorted by a troop of Tasmanian Imperial Bushmen commanded by Lieutenant Wylly. He was leading a party of eight scouts when they were ambushed at point-blank range.

Major Brooke and Lieutenant Wylly were among six men wounded, while three of their horses were killed.



Citation: "On 1st September 1900, near Warm Bad, Lieutenant Wylly was with the advance scouts of a foraging party. They were passing through a narrow gorge, very rocky and thickly wooded, when the enemy in force suddenly opened fire at short range from hidden cover, wounding six out of the party of eight, including Lieutenant Wylly. That officer, seeing that one of his men was badly wounded in the leg, and that his horse was shot, went back to the man's assistance, made him take his (Lieutenant Wylly's) horse, and opened fire from behind a rock to cover the retreat of the others, at the imminent risk of being cut off himself. Colonel T.E. Hickman, DSO, considers that the gallant conduct of Lieutenant Wylly saved Corporal Brown from being killed or captured, and that his subsequent action in firing to cover the retreat was instrumental in saving others of his men from death or capture." (London Gazette, November 23, 1900)

When Lieutenant Wylly rescued Corporal E Brown the man was wearing a leather money belt around his ankle. As a mauser bullet struck his leg it cut a piece out of the sovereign in the belt, leaving the coin sticking in his wound. While Wylly covered the retreat of the party with rifle fire, he was joined by Trooper F Groom, who was later awarded the DCM (Distinguished Conduct Medal). Corporal E Brown's brother, Trooper G Brown, later died of his wounds. Wylly was decorated by King Edward VII at St. James Palace, London, on July 25, 1901.

Wylly transferred to the Berkshires, then the Lancashire Regiment, with whom he served in India from December 1901. He was gazetted to the 46th Punjabis in October 1902, and two years later served with the Queen's Own Corps of Guides. From 1904-1909 he was ADC to Lord Kitchener in India. During 1915 and 1916 Wylly was ADC to the Commander of the Northern Army, India, and was seriously wounded in the face at Authoille in August 1915.

In June 1916 Major Wylly was GS02 to the 4th Division, BEF, and from July he became GS02 to the ANZAC Corps. For his services in France Wylly was created a companion of the DSO in January 1918.

He served on the North-West Frontier of India from 1919 to 1930, commanding the DCO Lancers from 1926 to 1929. He was ADC to the King from 1926 to 1933, while serving as Assistant Adjutant and QMG of the Peshawar District.



He died in Camberley, Surrey on 9 January 1962.

There is a memorial to him at St. John's Crematorium, Woking, Surrey.

His Medals – VC, CB, DSO, QSA, Delhi Durbar Medal (1911), 1914-15 Star, BWM, AVM, IGS (bar Waziristan 1919-21) Coronation Medals 1911, 1937, and 1953.

Anniversary of the birth of Field Marshal Frederick Sleigh Roberts – 30 September 1832

Field Marshal Frederick Sleigh Roberts was born in Cawnpore, India on 30 September 1832. He completed his schooling at Eton before being accepted into Sandhurst. He then attended the Addiscombe Military Seminary before entering the East India Company Army in December 1851 as a second lieutenant with the Bengal Artillery. He transferred to the Bengal Horse Artillery in 1854 and was promoted to Lieutenant in May 1857. Roberts was involved in the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and was awarded the Victoria Cross for actions on 2 January 1858 at Khudaganj.

Roberts transferred to the British Army in 1861 and served in the Umbeyla Campaign (1863) and the Abyssinian Campaign (1867–1868). He was promoted to Brevet Lieutenant Colonel in August 1868, and in November of the same year to the rank of Captain. In July 1872 he was promoted to the rank of Major and in January 1875 to Brevet Colonel. Three years later, in December 1878 he was promoted to the substantive rank of Major General.

After the Anglo-Zulu War in 1879 he spent a very brief interval as Governor of Natal and then Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Transvaal Province – his first experience in Southern Africa. Roberts returned to South Africa on 23 December 1899 to take overall command of British forces in the South African War (1899-1902). His appointment in South Africa subordinated the previous commander, General Redvers Buller as a response to a string of defeats which came to be known as 'Black Week'.

Roberts appointed a number of influential men as part of his Headquarters Staff, the most prominent being Lord Kitchener as his Chief of Staff. Roberts proceeded in launching a two-pronged offensive, personally leading the advance into the Orange Free State, whilst leaving Buller with the objective to relieve Ladysmith.



Picture: Field Marshal Roberts

During the battle of Colenso Lord Roberts's son was killed whilst trying to defend the guns which were eventually captured by the Boers. Freddie Roberts, killed in the action on 17 December 1899, earned a posthumous Victoria Cross.

Having raised the Siege of Kimberley the British force under Roberts, forced the Boer General Piet Cronjé to surrender, with 4 000 burghers, at the Battle of Paardeberg on 27 February 1900. Roberts then, after a number of battles, captured the Free State capital Bloemfontein on 13 March. However, his advance from Bloemfontein was delayed by the shortage of supplies and the outbreak of a severe typhoid epidemic that inflicted heavy losses on the British forces.

On 3 May 1900, Roberts resumed his offensive towards the Transvaal, and after the Battle of Doornkop, which secured Johannesburg, his force moved to Pretoria capturing the capital of the Transvaal Republic on 31 May.

Roberts then regrouped his force after being on the offensive for over two months in which he had captured the two Boer Republic capitals, before taking on the Boers at Diamond Hill on 11 June. Having defeated the Boers at Diamond Hill, the British force under Roberts pursued the Boers eastwards to where his force met up with the British force under Buller at the Battle of Belfast (Dalmanutha) on 27 August 1900. On 29 September 1900, with President Kruger having left South Africa, and the war almost over after the last set piece battle of the war at Belfast, Lord Roberts was offered the position of Commander-in-Chief at the War Office in London. On accepting this new post he handed over command to Lord Kitchener on 29 November. Roberts left South Africa on 11 December, having visited his son's grave, near Colenso, for the last time.

On his return to the U.K. he busied himself with improving education and training for soldiers. He was also instrumental in promoting the mass training of civilians in rifle shooting skills through membership of shooting clubs. This was probably because of his South African War experience where the civilian population (the Boers) were extremely skilled in the handling of fire-arms.

In September 1902 he visited Germany to attend the German army manoeuvres. Ten years later, in October 1912, in a speech he claimed that Germany was making enormous efforts to prepare for war and ended his speech by saying – *"arm yourselves – and if I put to myself the question – How How can I, even at this late and solemn hour, best help England? — England that to me has been so much, England that for me has done so much — again I say, Arm and prepare to acquit yourselves like men, for the day of your ordeal is at hand"*. Truly prophetic words.



Roberts died of pneumonia in France on 14 November 1914 whilst visiting troops fighting in World War 1.

His body was taken to the U.K for a funeral service.

After lying in state in Westminster Hall he was given a state funeral and buried in St. Paul's Cathedral.

He is one of only two people, during the 20th Century, who were not members of the Royal Family, who lay in state and were then given a state funeral – the other being Sir Winston Churchill.

Picture: A Memorial to Field Marshal Roberts

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