

Newsletter

September 2022

September 1900: After the Battle of Bergendal in August 1900, Lord Roberts annexed the Transvaal and continued with his chase after the Boers, down the railway line to Delagoa Bay. General Botha, with the major portion of the Boer force having moved northwards towards Lydenburg, and other commandos moved in a southerly direction to the area of Barberton, left General Viljoen to look after the railway and ensure President Kruger's departure for Europe.

Recently appointed Commandant Danie Theron was killed by British artillery whilst trying to evade capture. He was looking for Commandant Leibenberg who was not at the agreed position for a surprise attack on the British.

Theron ran into seven members of Marshall's Horse and during the resultant fire fight Theron killed three and wounded the other four. The column's escort was alerted by the firing and immediately charged up the hill, but Theron managed to avoid capture.

Finally the column's artillery (six field guns and a 4.7 inch navel gun) were unhitched, and the hill on which he was located was bombarded.

Theron was killed in an inferno of lyddite and shrapnel. All that fire power for one man!



Picture: Commandant Danie Theron

General Buller, with a force of 12 000 men and 48 guns was in pursuit of Botha, and Lydenburg and the surrounding areas saw a number of actions. At Hectorspruit, a settlement about 30 km west of Komatiëpoort, the town closest to the Mozambique border, the first Long Tom and various other pieces of heavy artillery were destroyed. This was in the line with the Boers now becoming a more mobile force and preparing for the guerrilla phase of the war. Nelspruit was occupied on 18 September, and Lord Roberts moved his headquarters to the town. General Cunningham occupied Rustenburg in the early hours of 26 September, without a shot being fired.

September 1901: Colonel Benson continued with his night marches and attacks on Boer positions, which was very uncharacteristic of the British mode of engagement. He was using many blacks, and Boers who had surrendered, as scouts, which ensured accurate information of Boer positions. These engagements included Pullen's Hope, Tweefontein and Middeldrift.

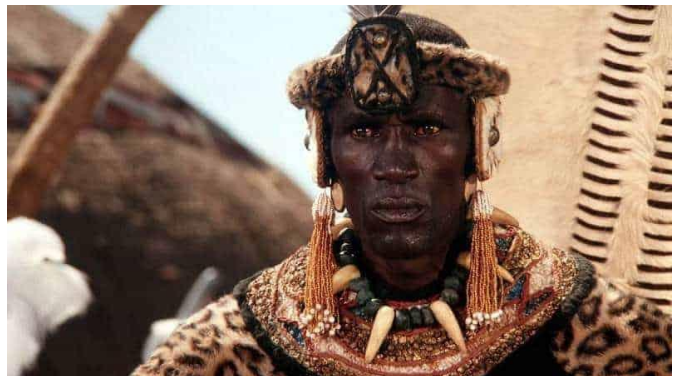
In mid September General Botha, having planned his invasion of northern Natal, engaged with the British at Blood River's Poort, Fort Itala and Fort Prospect. On 30 September he captured a convoy of 30 wagons near Melmoth.

Jan Smuts was keeping the British force in the Cape Colony busy and despite being surrounded by the British at Penhoek Pass, the Boers managed to break out at night fall.

In the Western Transvaal, a major battle, the Battle of Moedwil took place. This battle, in a war which was labelled 'the last of the gentleman's wars', was to leave a rather sour taste in the mouths of many commentators. At the Battle of Vlakfontein (29 May 1901), the Boers had been accused of 'executing' a number of wounded soldiers. The Battle of Moedwill, being almost a 'replay' of that battle, in that the same regiments were involved in both, the Boers accused the British of 'executing' a number of their wounded. Piet Schuil, a Dutch volunteer, who was looking after the Boer horses whilst the Boers were preparing for battle, was accused of firing on two British soldiers whilst flying a white flag on the end of his rifle. A British Military Court found him guilty and he was executed by a firing squad on 2 October 1901.

An interesting non 'Boer War' related story from the month of September:

- Shaka Zulu died on 22 September 1838. The founder of the great Zulu nation developed an army which was to decimate the British force at the Battle of Isandlwana. He developed an attack whereby a number of regiments extending several ranks deep formed a dense body known as the chest, while on each side a regiment moved forward forming the horns.



Picture: Shaka Zulu

As the horns curved inward around the enemy, the main body would advance killing all those who could not break through the encompassing lines.

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

1900

Lt. G.G.E. Wylly	Tasmanian Imperial Bushmen	Warmbaths
Tpr. J.H. Bisdee	Tasmanian Imperial Bushmen	Warmbaths

1901

Lt. L.A.E. Price-Davies	Kings Royal Rifle Corp.	Blood River Port
Dvr. F.H. Bradley	Royal Field Artillery – 69 Batt.	Itala
Pte. W. Bees	Derbyshire Regiment	Moedwil

Victoria Cross of the Month

Private W. Bees – 1st Battalion Derbyshire Regiment



William Bees was born on 12 September 1874 at Loughborough, Leicestershire.

He joined the Derbyshire Regiment in March 1890 and served on the Indian Frontier, taking part in the Tirah Campaign of 1897-98. His next active service was in South Africa.

In the Western Transvaal General Kekewich's column camped at Moedwil, on the banks of the Selons River, between Rustenburg and Zeerust.

At 4.45 a.m. on 30 September 1901 they were attacked by General de la Rey. The Boers gained the crest of a nearby hill and fired into the camp. Kekewich was hit twice and the gunners especially suffered severely.

Picture: Private Bees V.C.

According to the Times History, *"A Maxim belonging to the Derbyshires came into action at the south-western corner of the camp, and was served with remarkable devotion. Captains Keller and Baldwin were badly wounded here; and out of a detachment of nine men, six were hit. Private Bees received the Victoria Cross for his gallantry in fetching water from the river under short-range fire from the Boers."*

Citation:

Private Bees was one of the maxim-gun detachment which, at Moedwil, on the 30th September 1901, had six men hit out of nine. Hearing his wounded comrades asking for water, he went forward, under heavy fire, to a spruit held by the Boers, about 500 yards ahead of the gun and brought back a kettle full of water. In going and returning he had to pass within 100 yards of some rocks, also held by the Boers, and the kettle which he was carrying was hit by several bullets.

(London Gazette – 17 December 1901)

Kekewich repulsed the Boer attack by employing the Scottish Horse in a turning movement. By 6.15 a.m. the fight was over. The British casualties were 214 officers and men, while the Boers lost about 60 men.

Bees was promoted to corporal on the field of battle. He was discharged in September 1902.

He married at Loughborough in April 1903, where his best man was Harry Beet V.C.. His wife, Sarah, and he had a son and a daughter.

He re-joined the army in October 1914, but was discharged due to illness. From April 1915 he was with the Sherwood Foresters (former Derbyshire's) until he was transferred to the Durham Light Infantry. He served with them in the mining sector for a year and 133 days, then enlisted with the RAMC for the duration of the war.

He died at Coalville, Leicestershire, on 20 June 1938, aged 64.



Picture: Private Bees V.C.'s Grave

In October 1938 his widow presented his medals to the Sherwood Foresters, as his children had pre-deceased him. His World War 1 trio were not among these medals.

Anniversary of the birth of Lieutenant-General P.S. Methuen – 1 September 1845 (later Field Marshal)

Paul Sanford Methuen was born in Wiltshire in the U.K. and was educated at Eton College. After serving for a short period of time in the Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry he joined the Scots Fusilier Guards, becoming Lieutenant in November 1864.

He saw action in the Third Anglo-Ashanti War (1873) and in Egypt at the Battle of Tel el-Kebir in 1882. On his return to the U.K. he was promoted to major in the regiment.

Methuen served in the expedition of Sir Charles Warren to Bechuanaland in 1884 to 1885, where he commanded Methuen's Horse, a corps of mounted rifles.

He was promoted to Lieutenant-General on 1 April 1898, and was given the command of the 1st Division at the outbreak of the South African War (1899-1902).



Picture: Field Marshal Methuen

Methuen arrived in Cape Town in November 1899, tasked with the relief of Kimberley. Initial successes at Belmont and Graspan were followed by a more costly success in casualties at the Battle of Modder River where Methuen himself was wounded.

At Magersfontein he was outwitted by Boer Generals de la Rey and de Wet. Having achieved considerable success at Modder River, although defeated, the Boer trenches seemed to be the way forward. In the past the Boers had always occupied the high ground – however, at Magersfontein they dug trenches, and Methuen, without thoroughly scouting the Boer position, bombarded the mountains behind the Boer position for hours. When the Highland Brigade advanced on the Boer position, supposedly on the hills, they were mowed down by the Boers in the trenches.

After Magersfontein, Methuen remained in the Free State chasing after de Wet, only to be outsmarted time after time. On 7 March 1902, at the Battle of Tweebosch, Methuen broke his leg after falling off his horse and was captured by the Boers.

In the book 'De la Rey- Lion of the West' by Johannes Meintjies, an eye-witness account of the capture of Methuen is recorded. The book 'Goodbye Dolly Gray' by Rayne Kruger has the event recorded as follows (page 482) – *"At this, the engagement at Tweebosch, the British sustained the worst defeat of the whole guerrilla war. Nearly 200 men were dead or wounded, 600 others were made captive. While his burghers collected booty and helped with the wounded, de la Rey found*

Methuen in a tent. So the two men met face to face at last in the most poignant encounter of the war.

Again there was the question of the prisoners. De la Rey issued them with rations and sent them to the nearest British post. Many of his burghers clamoured for at least so valuable a hostage as the British General to be kept. But de la Rey, out of consideration for his wounds, insisted on seeing that he was taken to the nearest British hospital."

There is much speculation as to what might have happened had Methuen been kept prisoner by the Boers. Would the Peace Treaty, which was signed a few months later, have been any kinder to the Boers, in exchange for the release of Methuen?

Kitchener's reaction to Methuen's capture is recoded by Kruger (page 483) – "*Kitchener collapsed when he heard the news. The fact testifies to the intensity of the strain which he had undergone. He remained in bed, without food, for 36 hours.*"

Methuen remained in South Africa until after the Peace treaty had been signed, returning to England as an invalid, still walking with the help of crutches.

In 1904 he was appointed Colonel of the Scots Guards and in June 1911 was promoted to the rank of Field Marshal. In 1914 he was appointed Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Malta in February, a post he held until he retired from active service in 1919.



Picture: The badge of the Scots Guards

He died at Corsham Court, his family home, on 30 October 1932, aged 87.

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

Allan Gordon