

Mid Month Visit – February 2021

I am not sure why, but February has been quite a busy month for me in researching various aspects of the South African War (1899-1902). I have been doing this research as I believe there is a huge need for booklets on all 'significant' battles fought during this war. There is a whole series of booklets relating to the battles fought in the Relief of Ladysmith during the Natal campaign, and there are a number of booklets which have been produced relating to a number of battles fought in the Magaliesberg. Marion Moir produced a booklet on the Battle of Long Tom Pass, but I believe that is now out of print, and I have a booklet on Magersfontein, 11 December 1899. Are all these booklets readily available? And if so, from where? Also, if they are not available/out of print, who is/are the 'champions' to make sure that the message/information does not die.

All of the above booklets are A5, which I find very convenient to carry around and use as a reference. They are also very affordable. I also have in my 'collection' an A4 account of the Battle of Frederikstad, and an A4 book on the Battle/Siege at Elands River. Should there be a standard?

As most of the local (Johannesburg) readers know, I have planned a one day trip in the Magaliesberg where we will be visiting/viewing six battle-sites, a cemetery, and two places of relevance to the South African War. Of the six battle-sites, there are booklets covering three of the battles – the other three are covered in many books, such as the book on the Magaliesberg by Vincent Carruthers, but in no great detail. It would, I feel, be important to have a booklet on the other three, for those who find these battles interesting, to have as a permanent, detailed reference on the event. With this in mind I started researching the Battle of Buffelspoort.

I, like most other 'locals', have driven the road many times, and I, like them had really paid no attention to an almost obscure sign that indicates the Battle of Buffelspoort.

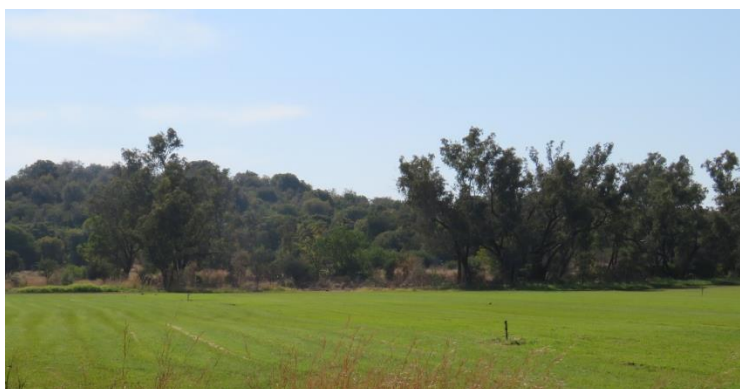


There is no memorial or graves to alert one's attention to what happened along that road on 3 December 1900. However, about 18 months ago, a number of military enthusiasts visited a



number of battle-sites in the area with Buffelspoort being one of them. The information provided by our tour facilitator interested me enough for me to start looking for a medal from that battle – after all, I am a medal collector. I now have the medal to Private N. Ward of the West Yorkshire Regiment who was killed in action during the battle.

However, that is only the beginning of the story. The small hill on which the two guns of the 75th Battery, Royal Field Artillery, under the command of Captain Farrell, were positioned was pointed out to us, and became the pivotal point of the account of the battle. I have been back on a number of occasions and taken photographs of this position.



A view of the hill I was led to believe was where the guns were positioned at the Battle of Buffelspoort

To make final preparations for our trip on 28 March, I took the renowned Magaliesberg historian, Andre Wedepohl (who will be with us on the day) with me to make sure everything was in order. He and I went through the Battle of Buffelspoort, and a number of accounts from people who were there – one of them being Jan Smuts, to get the story correct, and I must admit, what was told me 18 months ago is incorrect – if we believe Jan Smuts.



A view of the hill on the south side of the road from which the British fired on Smuts and the Boers who were trying to over-power the guns



To quote from 'Jan Smuts Memoirs of the Boer War' (page 143) – *"The first convoy had been stopped just at the entrance to the hills by the encounter with me, and part of the escort with the guns had taken post in one of the hills near the road, while a smaller body had been sent to occupy a higher hill on the other side of the road which overlooked the one on which the guns were."*

Andre and I spent quite a bit of time looking at a plan of the battle and it is quite clear, that what I had been told 18 months ago, about the hill on which the guns were placed, was incorrect. Firstly, there is no higher hill on the opposite side of the road, and secondly this hill has no 'huge boulders' on it. Smuts in his book (page 144) records – *"The work of capturing the guns had now however become far more difficult, because the gunners and escort had, with huge boulders with which the kopje (hill) was covered, constructed a rough fortification."*

Just to make sure that we were correct, again from the Smuts book (page 144) – *"a third force, consisting of about a hundred men, had posted themselves in a deep donga or sloop which ran at right angles across the road some 300 yards in front of the entrance to the hills."*

There is still a dry river bed, now covered with trees and other greenery, visible about 500 metres before the entrance to the hills. What had been identified to me, some 18 months ago, as the hill on which the guns had been placed is about 2 km down the road and there is no evidence of a donga along the road, other than the one as indicated above, some distance away – certainly not the distance Smuts had spoken about.



View of the donga, or dry river bed, which is now overgrown with trees and greenery

So, what was going to be a trip to just 'dot the I's and cross the T's', turned out to be a very important trip for me – especially in the fact that I want to write a booklet, and one of my photographs could have been totally incorrect.



Memorial to the Boers killed at the Battle of Buffelspoort

I have a number of bookings for 28 March, and those who would like to join us, please get in touch and I will supply details. For those not in the Johannesburg area (either in South Africa or overseas), when travel opens up, and you are in Johannesburg on business or pleasure and have a free day, please make contact and a trip will be arranged.

To end off with – I was going through documentation I have on the Relief of Kimberley (I have a medal group with a Kimberley Star) and I came across the following – *"The Kimberley Regiment is one of only two regiments in the British Empire holding as a Battle Honour the defence of its own city - in this instance Defence of Kimberley."*

I understand that there is no *Empire* any more – but I am battling to find out which is the other Regiment.....and town/city? Any helpers?

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