

Newsletter

August 2025

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

August 1900: Last month's newsletter covered the events of the Brandwater Basin and the surrender of Commandant Prinsloo and over 4 000 Boers. General de Wet was now the target of the British – they needed him captured, together with the Free State Government.

De Wet was making his way into the Transvaal to meet with the Transvaal Government to decide on future strategies. General Broadwood, part of the British force in pursuit of de Wet, sent a letter from Commandant Prinsloo, to de Wet (under a white flag).



Picture: General de Wet

C.R. de Wet's Memoirs, 'The Three Years' War' records (pages 136 & 137):

"Hunter's Camp, 30th July 1900

To the Commander-in-Chief, C.R. de Wet.

Sir, -

I have been obliged, owing to the overwhelming forces of the enemy, to surrender unconditionally with all the Orange Free State Laagers here.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

M. Prinsloo,

Commander-in-Chief."

De Wet was not happy with what he received and replied, sending his reply in an unclosed envelope:

"In the Veldt, 3^d August 1900

To Mr. M. Prinsloo.

Sir, -

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter dated the 30th of last month. I am surprised to see that you call yourself Commander-in-Chief. By what right do you usurp that title? You have no right to act as Commander-in-Chief.

I have the honour to be,

C.R. de Wet,

Commander-in-Chief."

De Wet was obviously furious with what had happened but now had to contend with a huge British Force which was out to capture him. De Wet in his Memoirs carries on (page 137) – *"My position had now become very difficult. It seemed as far as I could discover, that there were five or six English generals and forty thousand troops, of which the greater part were mounted, all of them trying their best to capture the Government and me."*

This was the start of the first de Wet hunt which has been well recorded. De Wet's escape, with the help of Danie Theron and his scouts, took him well into the Transvaal where he and Steyn met with other senior Boer leaders. However, there was a need for de Wet to get back to the Free State and re-organise the Boer commandos who were still willing to fight. De Wet managed to find a way through the Magaliesberg mountains, evading thousands of troops that were trying to capture him, and return to the Free State. Professor Fransjohan Pretorius, in his book 'The Great Escape of the Boer Pimpernel – Christiaan de Wet – The Making of a Legend' records (page 194) – *"Roberts only learned the next day, 22nd August, that de Wet had split from the main force and slipped through his fingers again. The futility of the operation in the bushveld gradually began to dawn on him. 'It is only a waste of men and power, wandering about the bush after an enemy who will never be captured,' he fumed to Kitchener. On 27th August Roberts withdrew his forces, thus officially calling off the first de Wet hunt."*

August 1901: August 1901, compared with the actions of the previous year, was uneventful. The British scorched earth policy, as well as the roll-out of blockhouses, to try and pin the Boers into areas, was in full swing. The Boers needed supplies, and the British controlled all access points into the country. The railway lines from Cape Town and Durban were being well protected, so the ambushing of trains on these lines was becoming more and more difficult.

The Pretoria-Pietersburg railway line was not viewed by either the British or the Boers as being strategic. However, it was a line that was used to supply all necessities to the garrisons at Warmbaths, Nylstroom, Pietersburg and others.



At the beginning of August 1901, the recognised train 'wreckers', Jack Hindon and Henri Slegtkamp moved from the Eastern Transvaal to the Northern Transvaal to try their luck on the Pretoria-Pietersburg railway line. With their group of fellow train wreckers, they set up camp north-east of Nylstroom.

Picture: The 'Train Wreckers'

Hindon had a train timetable in his possession which indicated that goods trains were sent from Pretoria to Pietersburg on Wednesdays and Saturdays. An attack was planned for a Saturday. At

approximately 14h00, a goods train with an armoured truck, approached from Nylstroom. As soon as the locomotive had passed over the mine, the Boers detonated the charge.

Immediately after the explosion, the Boers opened fire on the train from a distance of less than 30 metres. Half an hour after the derailment an armoured train arrived from the south and was soon joined by another from the north and the Boers had no option but to retreat without any loot.

Hindon, although disappointed, planned his next attack, strengthening his force with men from Chris Muller's and Nick Groenewald's commandos. Together they came up with the date of 27 August, however the attack only happened on 31 August. The attack was planned and the detonation identified for a specific carriage – which went ahead according to plan. The locomotive with the three leading carriages remained on the rails, the remainder were derailed. The subsequent attack lasted less than 30 minutes during which time Lieutenant-Colonel Vandeleur and nine British soldiers were killed with one dying of wounds a few days later.

The Boers looted rifles, ammunition, dynamite, clothes, money and food supplies such as sugar, tea, coffee and salt. They also seized the watches, tunics and boots of the surviving British soldiers. The Boers then set the trucks alight and blew up the railway tracks on the other side of the wrecked train before they withdrew.

Other notable events during the month of August:

- **29 August 1845** – The birth of Lieutenant Gronville Bromhead, one of the defenders of Rorke's Drift. Bromhead was a quiet, underestimated officer whose courage and calmness earned him the Victoria Cross and a lasting place in military legend
- **6 August 1850** – The birth of Henry Hook, also one of the defenders of Rorke's Drift, who was awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions in defending the Hospital.



Picture: Lieutenant Gronville Bromhead

During the two August months of the Anglo Boer War (1900 & 1901), seven V.C.s were awarded:

1900

Pvt. W. House	Royal Berkshire Regiment	Silkaatsnek
Sgt. B.T.T. Lawrence	17 th Lancers	Essenbosch Farm
Sgt. H. Hampton	Liverpool Regiment	van Wyk's Vlei
Cpl. H.J. Knight	Liverpool Regiment	van Wyk's Vlei
Pvt. W.E. Heaton	Liverpool Regiment	Leeukloof Farm
Pvt. A.E. Durrant	The Rifle Brigade	Bergendal

1901

S.Maj. A. Young	Cape Police	Ruiter's Kraal
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Victoria Cross of the Month

Private W. House – 2nd Battalion, The Royal Berkshire Regiment



William House was born in Thatcham, near Newbury, Berkshire on 7 October 1879. He joined the Royal Berkshire Regiment (Princess Charlotte of Wales) in November 1896. He was to win fame at Mosilikatse Nek (SilkaatsNek) in the Transvaal, 10 miles north-east of the present Hartebeespoort Dam in the Magaliesberg, east of Pretoria. The name comes from Mzilikazi, the Matabele Chief, whom the Voortrekkers called Silkaats.

On 11 July 1900, General de la Rey scored a victory over the British at the pass. On 2 August, General Ian Hamilton retook the pass, with the Argyl and Sutherland Highlanders on the left and the Berkshires on the centre and right.

Picture: Private William House V.C.

Citation:

During the attack on the Mosilikatse Nek, on 2nd August 1900, when a sergeant, who had gone forward to reconnoitre, was wounded, Private House rushed out from cover (though cautioned not to do so, as the fire from the enemy was very hot), picked up the wounded sergeant, and endeavoured to bring him into shelter, in doing which Private House was himself severely wounded. He, however, warned the comrades not to come to his assistance, the fire being so severe. The grant of the Medal for Distinguished Conduct in the field to Private House, which was notified in the London Gazette of 27 September, 1901, is hereby cancelled.

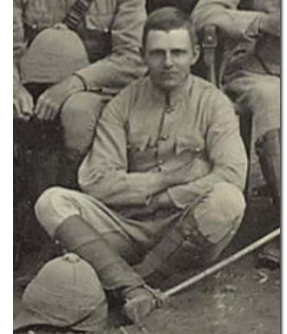
(London Gazette 7 October 1902)

The Boers abandoned their position before midday and the Pass was secured. House's V.C. was gazetted on his 23rd birthday. He subsequently served with the 2nd Battalion in India and returned to England in November 1911. He was liable to fits of depression while stationed at Dover's Shafts Barracks.

At Dover on 28 February 1912, while ostensibly cleaning his rifle it discharged and shot him in the head, killing him. The Dover Express reported that he had committed suicide "*owing to his brain being unhinged either by the wound he had received at the time he gained his VC, or from his subsequent service in India*". He is buried at St James' Cemetery, Dover. His medals are in the Royal Berkshire Regimental Museum at Reading.

Anniversary of the death of Lieutenant S.R. Theobald – 12 August 1901

Lieutenant Stanley Reay Theobald, 9th Lancers, died at Wolvevlei, Cape Colony, on 12 August 1901, of wounds received in action three days previously. He was the son of Colonel Percy Theobald, of Cheltenham, born in September 1877, and educated at Cheltenham College. He entered the 9th Lancers in September 1897, being promoted Lieutenant in October 1900.



Picture: Lieutenant Stanley Theobald

He accompanied his regiment from India to South Africa in September 1899 and served with the Kimberley Relief Force, taking part in the engagements at Belmont, Enslin, Modder River and Magersfontein, and had been slightly wounded. Lieutenant Theobald subsequently served in the advance on Bloemfontein, being present at Paardeberg and Driefontein. On 28 April 1900, he was reported to have been killed near Thaba 'Nchu. It was eventually ascertained, however, that he was a prisoner in Pretoria.

On the advice of Lord Roberts he was released, and then saw much fighting, but having suffered from an attack of Enteric Fever had been advised to return home. He, however, preferred to remain in South Africa, hoping to see the end of the war. He was mentioned in despatches by Lord Kitchener on 8 December 1901, for "*exceedingly gallant conduct on several occasions*". His name is inscribed on the Eleanor Cross War Memorial at Cheltenham College.

(Acknowledgement – The Boer War Casualty Roll 1899-1902; Alexander Palmer)

Palmer, in his book of casualties also records:

SR Theobald	PoW	Thaba 'Nchu	28/04/1900
SR Theobald	Slightly Wounded	near Bethulie	02/12/1900
SR Theobald	Dangerously Wounded	Wolvevlei	09/08/1901 (died 12/08/1901)

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

Allan Gordon