

Newsletter

February 2024

February 1900: At the beginning of February all three sieges were still in effect and the Boers appeared to be in control of their plans. However, British re-enforcements were arriving daily. On 28 February Buller eventually relieved Ladysmith after Battles at Vaalkrantz and Tugela Heights, which consisted of several battles in the hills to the south-east of Ladysmith. Buller's force comprised almost 25 000 men and over 70 guns. According to Darrell Hall in his book 'The Hall Handbook of the Anglo-Boer War', between 19 and 27 February 1900, British casualties numbered: Captured, wounded or killed – 114 Officers and 1 779 men; killed or died of wounds – 25 Officers and 331 men; wounded – 88 Officers and 1 444 men.

Kimberley was relieved on 15 February by a British force under Roberts / French which numbered over 30 000 men and 70 guns. All the major battles leading up to the Relief of Kimberley (Graspan, Belmont, Modder River and Magersfontein) had taken place in earlier months, but their casualties were equally significant. From the four battles the numbers were: killed or died of wounds – 38 Officers and 458 men; wounded – 94 Officers and 1 085 men.

The Siege of Mafeking had almost become a game of 'wait and see' – the Boers were achieving what they had set out to do – waiting for the garrison to surrender, whilst Baden-Powell was making a name for himself keeping the townsfolk busy and their minds off what was happening outside the boundaries of the garrison.



Picture: Battle of Paardeberg

Once Kimberley had been relieved, the massive force under Lord Roberts, which outnumbered the laager of Piet Cronje 6 to 1, moved to capture the cumbersome Boers at Paardeberg, some with their families, and a leader who had really passed his 'sell by date'.

The Battle of Paardeberg lasted 10 days, with the Boers finally surrendering on Majuba Day. Although being considerably outnumbered, in the 10 days, the Boers inflicted the following casualties on the British: killed or died of wounds – 24 Officers and 324 men; wounded – 68 Officers and 1 065 men.

February 1901: A very quiet month as far as battles / engagements, however, the Battle of Modderfontein (between Johannesburg and Potchefstroom) was significant in that this was General Smuts' first battle of being in overall command of the Boer attack. He attacked a weak garrison on 29 January, and then on 2 February defended his position against British re-enforcements. On 18 February, Lieutenant-Colonel von Donop surprised a Boer laager near

Hartebeesfontein and took nearly 50 prisoners, whilst close-by, on a ridge called Cyferfontein the Boers engaged a column under the command of Lord Methuen. Failing to make a significant impression on the British the Boers withdrew. British casualties were 49 killed and wounded.

Probably the most important event of the month was the meeting between Kitchener and Botha to discuss peace. The book 'Methods of Barbarism' by S.B. Spies records (page 226) – "*Annie Botha, who had previously acted as an intermediary between the British military authorities and her husband, was used to bring about a meeting between Kitchener and Botha.*" Spies carries on (page 227) – "*on 22 February 1901 Mrs. Botha returned with a letter from her husband, agreeing to a meeting with Kitchener. Botha had only agreed to the interview after he had consulted his government. Kitchener confided to Roberts; 'It may mean a great deal and at any rate can do no harm. She says they are very tired of the war.'* On 28 February 1901 Louis Botha and Lord Kitchener met for five hours at Middelburg in the Eastern Transvaal."

February 1902: During the month there were a number of skirmishes and engagements, with the major events being:

- Uitspanningsfontein, a farm about 40 km north-west of Beaufort West in the Western Cape, Colonel Crabbe with 500 men was ordered to head the column of supplies, on its way to Fraserburg. On reaching Uitspanningsfontein, Crabbe was forced to set up camp and entrench, as a Boer force had pinned them down. Major Crofton, with the main convoy, were encamped nearby. A 'mix-up' in communications for re-enforcements prevented them from arriving. On 5 February the Boers attacked leaving the British with 13 dead and 41 wounded. Major Crofton lost his life in the attack. The Boers took what they needed and retreated.
- Kalkrans was a farm south of Vrede and on 23 February, part of the cordon set up to curtail Boer movements, had General de Wet and Free State President Steyn in close proximity. De Wet, with about 900 Boers, were making a 'run for it'. The Times History records (Vol.V, page 490) – "*Some of the horde, who were riding, followed, and by midnight 600 of the best fighting men were safely through the dreaded cordon. The rest were left behind, and for the most part fell eventually into British hands. De Wet left 14 dead on the field and carried away 20 wounded. The New Zealanders, who had shown fine tenacity, had 23 killed and 43 wounded.*"
- The Battle of Ysterspruit has been covered in a previous Newsletter, but in summary, General de la Rey ambushed a British supply convoy. British losses were 56 men killed, 130 wounded, and just under 300 captured. 150 Wagons were captured by the Boers, together with two guns, over 2 000 rifles and over half a million rounds of ammunition.



Picture: Battle of Ysterspruit Memorial

Other 'related' events from the month of February:

- 24 February is officially Purple Poppy Day. The Purple Poppy symbolises all animals who died during conflict.
- On 7 February 1900 famous British golfer, Freddie Tait, was killed at Koodoosberg.

Tait was an amateur golfer who won the British Amateur Championship twice, in 1896 and again in 1898, by convincing margins.

Although his career was short, he won over 25 tournaments.

As an amateur he tied for third place in the British Open Championship in both 1896 and 1897.



Picture: Freddie Tait

- 9 February 1900 – George Labram, the American Engineer who was part of the Siege of Kimberley, was killed in his room at the Grand Hotel by a shell fired from a Boer Long Tom. Labram was the mastermind behind the building of the Long Cecil Gun – used to counter-act the Boer Long Tom fire power. He was also the mastermind behind the manufacture of armoured trains, of designing searchlights, and various inventions around food and personal hygiene.
- 8 February 1922 – tens of thousands of people attended the funeral of Boer General de Wet.
- 15 February 1942 – the Fall of Singapore.

During the three February months of the South African War (1900, 1901 & 1902), nine V.C.s were awarded:

1900

Lt. F.N. Parsons	Essex Regiment	Paardeberg
Sgt. A. Atkinson	Yorkshire Regiment	Paardeberg
Pvt. A.E. Curtis	East Surrey Regiment	Natal
Lt. E.T. Inkson	Royal Army Medical Corp	Natal
Sgt. J. Firth	Duke of Wellington's	Plewman's Farm (C.C.)
Cpt. C. Mansel-Jones	West Yorkshire Regiment	Terrace Hill (Natal)

1901

Sgt. W.B. Traynor	West Yorkshire Regiment	Lake Chrissie (Tvl)
Cpl. J.J. Clements	Rimmington's Guides	Strijdenberg (C.C.)

1902

Sur-Capt. A. Martin-Leake	S.A. Constabulary	Vlakfontein (Standerton)
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Victoria Cross of the Month

Captain C. Mansel-Jones, West Yorkshire Regiment

Conwyn Mansel-Jones was born in Beddington, Surrey, on 14 June 1871. The son of a judge, he was educated at Haileybury and Sandhurst. He was commissioned in the Prince of Wales' Own West Yorkshire Regiment in October 1890.

He served in the Ashanti Expedition of 1895-6 and in British Central Africa 1898-9. He was promoted Captain in March 1899.

At the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War Jones re-joined his regiment in Natal.

Picture: Captain Mansel-Jones V.C.



During the fights for Tugela Heights, according to The Times History, *"as the West Yorks, now joined by some of the South Lancashires, pushed across the summit they met with a heavy fire from the far side. (For rallying some of the men on this occasion Captain Mansel-Jones received the Victoria Cross.) But they were not to be stopped and swept right over the top, capturing a maxim and several prisoners. Then manning the Boer sangars they poured a heavy fire after the retreating enemy (5pm)."*

Citation:

On 27 February 1900, during the assault on Terrace Hill, north of the Tugela, in Natal, the companies of the West Yorkshire Regiment on the northern slope of the hill met with a severe shell, Vickers-Maxim and rifle fire, and their advance for a few minutes was checked. Captain Mansel-Jones however, by his strong initiative, restored confidence, and in spite of him falling very seriously wounded, the men took the whole ridge without further check; this officer's self-sacrificing devotion to duty at a critical moment having averted what might have proved a serious check to the whole assault.

(London Gazette 27 July 1900)

Mansel-Jones' leg was amputated. He was DAAG for recruiting from 1901 to 1910, then retired due to ill-health caused by his war wounds. In 1913 he married Marion Barton-Wright and the following year was called to the Bar. At the outbreak of World War 1 he went to France as DAAG at General Headquarters. He was created a Companion of the DSO in June 1915.

In 1917 Lieutenant-Colonel Mansel-Jones was created Officer la Legion d'Honneur by the French President and in 1918 was awarded the CMG. From 1920-42 he was a member of the Hon. Corps of the Gentlemen-at-Arms. He died in Lynington, Brockenhurst, Hampshire, on 29 May 1942, aged 70, and is buried in St. Nicholas Churchyard, Brockenhurst.

Anniversary of the death of Captain R.H.L.J. de Montmorency – 23 February 1900

Captain of the Honourable Raymond Harvey Lodge Joseph de Montmorency, V.C., 21st Empress of India's Lancers, and commanding de Montmorency's Scouts in South Africa, was killed in action, near Stormberg on 23 February 1900.

He was the eldest son of the late Viscount Frankfort de Montmorency, K.C.B., and Rachel, his wife, daughter of Field Marshal Sir John Michel, K.C.B.



Captain de Montmorency was born in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, in February 1867, and after the family returned to Britain, he was educated at Marlborough.

He joined the Lincolnshire Regiment from the Royal Military College in September 1887.

He was promoted to Lieutenant in the 21st Lancers in November 1889, and to Captain in August 1899.

De Montmorency was a Lieutenant in the 21st Lancers during the Sudan Campaign in 1898.

Picture: Captain de Montmorency

On 2 September 1898 at the Battle of Omdurman (also known as the Battle of Khartoum), after a charge, Lieutenant de Montmorency returned to help an Officer who was lying wounded and surrounded by many of the enemy. After driving off the enemy he found that the Officer was dead. He placed the body on his horse and returned to his Regiment. The citation for this action read:

"At the Battle of Khartoum on 2nd September 1898, Lieutenant de Montmorency, after the charge of the 21st Lancers, returned to assist Second Lieutenant R.G. Grenfell, who was lying surrounded by a large body of Dervishes. Lieutenant de Montmorency drove the Dervishes off, and, finding Lieutenant Grenfell dead, put the body on his horse which then broke away. Captain Kenna and Corporal Swarbrick then came to his assistance, and enabled him to re-join, the Regiment, which had begun to open a heavy fire on the enemy."

(London Gazette, 15 November 1898)

It is written of him: *"his early death cut short the career of one who possessed every quality of a partisan leader"*. He had raised a corps of scouts, over whom he had a remarkable influence. He knew no fear.

His death is mentioned in the despatch from Paardeberg, 28 February 1900, by Lord Roberts, where Captain de Montmorency is stated to have been "*a very promising Officer*".

Captain de Montmorency is buried in Molteno Cemetery. (Molteno is a town in the Eastern Cape, high in the Stormberg Mountains.)

His name is inscribed on a tablet placed in Marlborough College Chapel in memory of all Marlburians who fell in the war. (Acknowledgement – The Boer War Casualty Roll 1899-1902, Alexander M Palmer)



Picture: Captain de Montmorency's Grave

The book 'The Colonials in South Africa 1899-1902' by John Stirling, records the following (pages 124 & 125) – "*The corps lost their gallant leader in a skirmish near Stormberg on 23rd February 1900. It is said that he fired 11 shots after being mortally wounded. Captain McNeill, of the Seaforth Highlanders, who had been aide-de-camp to General Gatacre, succeeded to the command of the scouts on Montmorency's death.*"

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

Allan Gordon