

Newsletter

July 2021

July 1900, and with morale low amongst the Boers, after the recent fall of Johannesburg and Pretoria, the Boer Generals decided to mount three simultaneous attacks on the British in order to generate renewed confidence in their fighters. On 11 July 1900, Boer commandos attacked a supply convoy at Dwarsvlei and the British Garrisons at Silkaatsnek (Battle of the Month – www.battletoursza.com) and Onderstepoort. All three actions were resounding successes and many Boers who had laid down their arms after the fall of Pretoria, re-joined the struggle. Lord Roberts was forced to halt the initiatives gained east of Pretoria and direct some of his forces to Magaliesberg to counter the renewed Boer activities in the area.



Silkaatsnek - a U-shaped gap in the Magaliesberg range of mountains

Roberts, having rested his forces after the Battle of Diamond Hill, had enabled the Boers to re-group and move east and west of Pretoria, instead of their 'retreat' towards Nelspruit after the Battle of Diamond Hill, following the route taken by President Kruger and his government. The Boers started guerrilla attacks on recently repaired rail links, and General Ben Viljoen launched determined attacks on British forces, south and south-east of Pretoria, resulting in the Battle of Witpoort on 16 July 1900.

In the Free State, after considerable disruption to the British forces in strategic garrisons, the Boers made their way to the Brandwater Basin, an area between Bethlehem and Fouriesburg, with the latter being the last capital of the Free State during the war. The British under the command of Generals Paget, Broadwood and Hunter commenced with their pursuit of the Boers, and more specifically, General de Wet.

When de Wet escaped from the Basin, there was a scramble for control amongst the Boers which enabled General Hunter, on 30 July 1900, to force the Boers to surrender. Over 4 000 men were captured, together with a number of guns. 1 500 Boers who were not happy about the surrender managed to escape, together with eight guns.

July 1901, apart from the odd skirmish, was probably the 'quietest' month of the war. However, a number of 'sweeps' commenced in order to cut off and capture Boers who were becoming a 'nuisance' – one in the Eastern Cape against the many Cape Rebel units active in that part of South Africa, and the other in the Southern Free State to try and curtail the activities of the Boers in their efforts to get support from some Northern Cape Afrikaners.

On 11 July 1901, General Broadwood's force captured the complete Free State Government, except President Steyn, who managed to escape thanks to the help of his servant.



Picture: Johannes Petrus Coetzee

Johannes Petrus Coetzee of the farm Paardekraal near Cradock who was 21 years old, was the first Cape Rebel to be publicly executed, by hanging, in the town.

The public manner of his execution created a huge outcry in the British Parliament and amongst certain concerned British communities.

Staying with activities in Great Britain, on 16 July, the Colonial Office announced the appointment of a Ladies Commission to investigate conditions in the Concentration Camps in South Africa.

Other noteworthy activities in July 1901 were the activities of Breaker Morant, which would eventually lead to his demise, Emily Hobhouse's activities against the Concentration Camps and the number of meetings she was having in the UK in order to raise donations to improve conditions in these Camps, and the execution of other Cape 'rebels'.

The month ended with Commandant Kritzinger confirming, to the British, his 'Stormberg Proclamation', stating that any person of colour, found in the employ of British forces, would be executed. In June he had issued the Stormberg Declaration, confirming that the North Eastern districts of the Cape Colony (Aliwal North, Burghersdorp, Dordrecht, Jamestown, Ladygrey, Molteno, Rhodes, etc.) were still annexed as part of the Republic of the Orange Free State.

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

1900

Sgt. A.H.L. Richardson	Lord Strathcona's Horse	Wolve Spruit (Standerton)
Capt. W.E. Gordon	Gordon Highlanders	Leehoehoek (Krugersdorp)
Capt. D.R. Younger	Gordon Highlanders	Leehoehoek (Krugersdorp)
Capt. N.R. Howse	New South Wales Medical Staff	Vredefort

1901

Lieut. W.J. English	2 nd Scottish Horse	Vlakfontein
Pvt. H.G. Crandon	18 th Hussars	Ermelo

Anniversary of the birth of Manie Maritz – 26 July 1876

Manie Maritz (christened Salomon Gerhardus Maritz), also known as Gerrit Maritz, was born in Kimberley in the Northern Cape, which, at the outbreak of the South African War (1899-1902), was a British colony, and as such, he was born a British subject. On completing his schooling he travelled to Johannesburg where he stayed with an uncle. During the Jameson Raid he volunteered as a guard at the fort in Johannesburg, which entitled him to become a citizen of the Transvaal/Zuid-Afrikaanse Republiek (ZAR).

Having served as a guard he then joined the Zuid-Afrikaanse Republiek Politie (ZARP) – the same unit that fought with distinction at the Battle of Bergendal in August 1900.

At the outbreak of the South African War, Maritz joined the Boksburg commando and saw action in most of the battles in the Natal campaign.

He later joined Daniel Theron's crack reconnaissance corps which became well-known for the guerrilla campaign they conducted against the British forces, attacking trains and rail-yards.

He later participated in the invasion of the Cape Colony, eventually campaigning in the North-western Cape, an area he knew well.



Manie Maritz

Near the end of the war Maritz was accused of initiating the Leliefontein massacre (31 January 1902), a similar crime for which Commandant Gideon Scheepers, Breaker Morant, and others were sentenced to death by firing squad. Maritz had gone into the town to interview the European missionaries in the town, which appeared to anger the local inhabitants. Maritz and his men rode into Leliefontein and detained the chief missionary and handed out proclamations threatening death to residents as a punishment for being British sympathisers. A two-day engagement took place with the locals killing 30 Boers on the first day. Maritz, with reinforcements, invaded Leliefontein the following day, killing over 40 locals and wounding a further 100.

Deneys Reitz, who arrived on the scene a little while later described the scene as follows – *"We found the place sacked and gutted and among the rocks beyond the burned houses lay 20 or 30 dead Hottentots, still clutching their antiquated muzzleloaders. This was Maritz's handiwork. He had ridden into the station with a few men to interview the European missionaries, when he was set upon by armed Hottentots, he and his escorts narrowly escaping with their lives. To avenge the insult, he returned the next morning with a stronger force and wiped out the settlement, which seemed to many of us a ruthless and unjustifiable act. General Smuts said nothing but I saw him walk past the boulders where the dead lay, and on his return he was moody and curt."*

At the end of the war the Boers were obliged to lay down their arms and sign an oath of allegiance to the British monarch, but Maritz, with many others, refused to do so. He crossed the border to neighbouring German South West Africa. He then spent time in Europe and Madagascar, before returning to German South West Africa where he helped the Germans during the Herero and Namaqua genocide which took place between 1904 and 1908. In 1910, when the Union of South Africa was established he returned to the Transvaal where he joined the police force.

In 1913 Maritz accepted a commission in the Active Citizen Force of the Union Defence Force and was appointed to command the military district adjacent to German South-West Africa. In August 1914 he was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel. At the outbreak of World War 1, with South Africa obliged to support Britain and the Commonwealth states in the conflict with Germany, Maritz was ordered to advance in the direction of the German border.

He refused to do so and as such was ordered to relinquish command, and return to Pretoria. He again refused and on 9 October 1914 he decided to rebel and side with the Germans. After occupying the town of Keimoes, with forces loyal to him, he was wounded in a skirmish with South African troops and he was taken to a German hospital for treatment.

When he returned to South Africa in 1923 he was arrested and charged with high treason. He was convicted and sentenced to three years' imprisonment. Previous convictions, of the other leading Boer rebels, were terms of imprisonment of six and seven years and heavy fines. The then Prime Minister of South Africa, Louis Botha, reduced these sentences as he recognised the value of reconciliation, and the maximum sentence was reduced to two years.

When General Hertzog's National Party won the 1924 election, they released Maritz after only serving three months.

He died in Pretoria on 19 December 1940.

Some people have named the 1914 rebellion after him – the Maritz Rebellion.



Picture: Manie Maritz's final resting place

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