

## Newsletter

July 2024

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

**July 1900:** This month saw the saga of the occupation of Rustenburg unfold. For those who are familiar with where Rustenburg is situated, other than being close to Olifants Nek, one of the four passes through the Magaliesberg Mountain range during the war, it really had no strategic importance in 1900. I do believe that the British recognised this, but having had a garrison in the town during the 1<sup>st</sup> Boer War (1880-1881), there was probably a sentimental association with the town, and with established infrastructure, it was the closest established town between Pretoria and Mafeking. The Jameson Raiders never used the town as a 'base' on their 'journey' to Johannesburg. The Rietfontein base west of Pretoria, was developed by Baden-Powell who recognised the strategic positioning of that base. And, without getting too involved in a subject which was obviously considered at length by military 'brains', the Nauwpoort base was, to me, far more strategically positioned for the guerrilla activities that took place in the Western Transvaal.

On 14 June 1900 the British occupied Rustenburg. Lionel Wulfsohn in his book 'Rustenburg at War' records (page 83) – *"On 13<sup>th</sup> June 1900 great excitement prevailed in the town as rumours were spreading like wild-fire about the imminent arrival of the British."* One needs to remember that after the fall of Bloemfontein, Johannesburg and Pretoria, many Boers had laid down their arms believing there was no point in carrying on the war. Wulfsohn carries on – *"Yesterday morning (14 June 1900) at daybreak they (the British) came in, and quietly entered the town from several sides."*

On 3 July, Lord Roberts ordered General Baden-Powell to evacuate the town, and to move east and occupy the two strategic passes in the Magaliesberg (Commando Nek and Silkaatsnek), both west of Pretoria. Baden-Powell left behind a small British force. The Boers, under the command of General Lemmer, sensing that there was little in the way of British 'defence' in Rustenburg, occupied the town in the early hours of 5 July. On realising what had just happened General Methuen sent reinforcements to Rustenburg, and the brief occupation by the Boers came to an end. Lemmer withdrew his burghers late the same day and occupied the nearby pass at Olifants Nek. Without going into any detail the British again evacuated Rustenburg on 7 August, only to re-occupy the town on 26 September 1900.



*Picture: General Baden-Powell*

The Battle of Witpoort (16 July 1900) has been covered in a previous newsletter, however the build-up to the battle commenced on 7 July with General Hutton, in command of a force in excess of 3 000 men and 30 field guns advancing from Pretoria to clear the area east of Pretoria of Boers who were re-grouping in the area after the Battle of Diamond Hill. Hutton's force was involved in minor engagements with the Boers for the next three days before the eventual battle on 16 July.

During the war there were a number of attempts to capture the Boer leaders, none more so, than the capture of General de Wet. With activities hotting up in the Brandwater Basin, and de Wet having decided that an escape for him and the then mobile Free State Government was imperative, the British, having learnt of his break-out, commenced on what was known as the 1<sup>st</sup> de Wet hunt – 16 July. Four days later, following a number of meetings between the de Wet brothers (Christiaan and Piet), at a meeting between the two, Piet suggested that the struggle was futile and peace should be considered. This is a story all on its own – but it was the last time that the Boer General saw his brother.

On 20 July, after a rest of about six weeks to re-group and re-equip his force, Lord Roberts and his British force commenced with their movement eastwards towards Belfast, along the Pretoria/Delagoa Bay Railway Line. On 27 July, this force reached Middleburg and occupied the town without any opposition.

The month of July 1900 ended with the surrender of Commandant Prinsloo and over 4 000 Boers in the Brandwater Basin.



**July 1901:** On 2 July six unarmed Boers, who were reportedly ready to 'hand themselves over', were murdered by the Bushveldt Carbineers. The Bushveldt Carbineers were an irregular mounted infantry regiment, raised in South Africa, in February 1901 and based in Pietersburg. The regiment is best known for one of its recruits – Breaker Morant. The unit was later renamed as the Pietersburg Light Horse on 1 December 1902. It was, during its brief existence, responsible for many horrific incidents. Because of these incidents Morant and Handcock were eventually executed.

On 11 July General Broadwood surrounded the village of Reitz in the Orange Free State, having heard that the Free State Government were 'camped' in the town. President Steyn's manservant had been up early in the morning, probably making coffee, and was aware of activity around the town. He woke the President and the two of them managed to escape whilst it was still dark. Broadwood captured the rest of the Free State Government at first light.

On 21 July General Smuts, together with President Steyn, and other Boer Generals – Botha, de Wet and de la Rey left on their separate ways, having planned the Boer raid into the Cape

Province. Taffy and David Shearing in their book 'General Jan Smuts and his Long Ride' record (page 20) – "*Smuts revelled in it. He was fitter and stronger than he had ever been. By now he knew his men, and at Losberg recruited about 340 for the expedition, only to have six killed by lightning in a great storm as they slept.*" The British were very active in the Free State, hunting down de Wet. Smuts with his small commandos of men, chosen for the raid, now had to evade a huge British force. The Shearing book records (page 22) – "*At present 15 000 men in seven British columns were involved in a massive drive across the northern Orange Free State.*"

### Other interesting events during the month of July:

- **4 July 1879** – the final battle of the Anglo-Zulu War took place at Ulundi.
- **2 July 1900** – Boer General Kootjie Snyman was stripped of his rank after being accused of being 'ineffectual' in managing his forces at Mafeking and performing badly at Diamond Hill.
- **19 July 1900** – Piet de Wet, brother of Boer General Christiaan de Wet, surrendered to the British.
- **24 July 1900** – Neville Reginald Howse became the first Australian to be awarded a Victoria Cross.
- **20 July 1901** – Gezina Kruger, the wife of President Kruger, died in Pretoria.
- **July 1902** – After the Peace of Vereeniging, the big three Boer Generals – Botha, de la Rey and de Wet – were appointed to raise money from overseas for economic reconstruction of the country. They left for Europe, but despite a warm reception wherever they went, they only raised 125 000 British Pounds.



Picture: Gezina Kruger's grave

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 <sup>nd</sup> Scottish Horse	Vlakfontein
Pvt. H.G. Crandon	18 <sup>th</sup> Hussars	Ermelo

## Victoria Cross of the Month

### Sergeant A.H.L. Richardson – Lord Strathcona's Horse

Arthur Herbert Lindsay Richardson was born at Southport, near Liverpool, Lancashire, on 23 September 1872. Richardson went to Canada in 1892 and worked as a dentist at Stoney Mountain, Manitoba, before joining the North-West Mounted Police at Regina in May 1894. Posted to Battleford, he was promoted corporal in 1898. He joined Lord Strathcona's Horse, a Canadian cavalry unit, and was present in the advance by General Buller into the Transvaal.

#### Citation:

On the 5<sup>th</sup> July 1900, at Wolwe Spruit, about 15 miles north of Standerton, a party of Lord Strathcona's Corps, only 38 in number, came into contact and was engaged at close quarters with a force of eighty of the enemy. When the order to retire had been given, Sergeant Richardson rode back under a very heavy cross-fire and picked up a Trooper whose horse had been shot and who was wounded in two places, and rode with him out of fire. At the time when this act of gallantry was performed Sergeant Richardson was within 300 yards of the enemy, and was himself riding a wounded horse.

(London Gazette 14 September 1900)



Picture: Sergeant Richardson V.C.'s Grave

Richardson was the first man to win a V.C. in a Canadian unit which was under British command. As a token of their esteem, his fellow Canadian troops presented him with a gift of 3 000 Pounds. He was discharged in Ottawa in March 1901. Richardson returned to the 'Mounties', but performed poorly and purchased his discharge in November 1907.

Richardson became the Town Constable of Indian Head, Saskatchewan, but became debt ridden and pawned his medals. He returned to England in 1909 and worked in Liverpool. He was reunited with his family after an absence of 16 years. Known as the 'shy V.C.' he lived in obscurity and poverty.

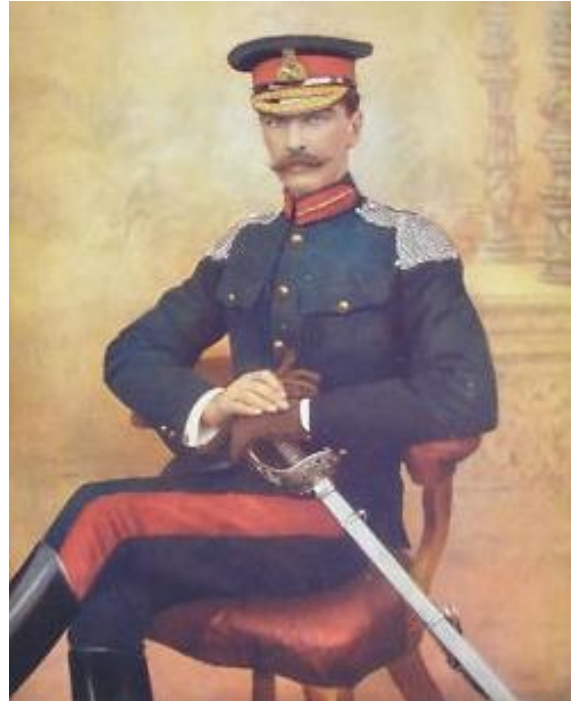
He died in Liverpool on 5 December 1932, aged 59 years, and is buried in St. James Cemetery.

Robin Smith in his book 'Practically Over' writes how on returning to Liverpool, he became a recluse, but Smith records (page 26) – *"During this period, another man named Arthur Richardson, a corporal in the Gordon Highlanders, began passing himself off as the winner of the Victoria Cross. He succeeded so well that, when he died, he was buried with military honours. Ironically, the real Arthur Richardson, VC was discovered marching in the funeral cortege of his imposter."*

## Anniversary of the birth of Lieutenant-General J.M. Babington – 31 July 1854

James Melville Babington was born in Corstorphine, Scotland, on 31 July 1854. After completing his schooling, he was commissioned as a Lieutenant in the 16<sup>th</sup> Lancers in 1873. From 1877 to 1880 he was Adjutant of the regiment and in 1884 he accompanied Sir Charles Warren on the Bechuanaland Expedition. The Bechuanaland Expedition was a British military expedition into Bechuanaland, to assert British sovereignty in the region in the face of 'territorial interest' from Germany and the then Transvaal Republic.

From early 1889 to mid-1890, as Captain, Babington was based at Aldershot as Aide-de-Camp to Sir Evelyn Wood, returning to regimental duties with the Lancers in 1892. From 1896 to 1899 he was Assistant Adjutant-General in India, returning to England where he was appointed Staff Commander of the Cavalry Brigade at Aldershot.



*Picture: Lieutenant-General Babington*

During the Second Boer War, Babington commanded the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Brigade and took part in the early action at Modder River (28 November 1899) and at Magersfontein (11 December 1899). Babington was mentioned in the despatch (The London Gazette 16 March 1900) from Lord Methuen, in his report on the Battle of Magersfontein. Early in February 1900 the Highland Brigade, under the command of Brigadier-General Hector MacDonald, failed to take advantage of the Boer position at Koodoosberg, due to Babington's late arrival at the agreed position. Richard Danes in his book 'Cassell's History of the Boer War' records (page 566) – *"Macdonald lost no time in communicating his plan to Lord Methuen, who sent out Brigadier-General Babington with a strong force of cavalry and two batteries of Horse Artillery. These started on the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup> at 11h30 a.m., and they ought to have reached their point of attack early in the afternoon. Babington, instead of arriving early, arrived late."* Dane goes on, further on the same page – *"So Macdonald's plan failed. Not by any fault of his own, but purely owing to the fact that Babington declined to hurry his cattle. Lord Roberts liked men who could move when movement was necessary, and the first thing he did on hearing of Babington's failure was to supersede him in his command."*

In November 1900 Babington took over command of the district of Potchefstroom from General Barton. This command saw him in action against the Boers at Cyferfontein (2 January 1901), Middelfontein (23 to 25 January 1901), actions against the Boer General Kemp (1 to 3 March 1901), Geduld (22 March 1901), and then back to Klerksdorp in early May 1901, having been unsuccessful, together with other British columns, in capturing General de la Rey.



In June 1901, with Roberts now back in England, Babington commanded a column in the Eastern Transvaal comprising the 19<sup>th</sup> Hussars, the 1<sup>st</sup> King's Rifle Corp, two guns of the 83<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Royal Field Artillery and one gun of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Battery – together with other British columns, to rid the area of Boers who were making life difficult for the British along the Pretoria/Delagoa Bay Railway Line.

*Picture: One of the memorials at the site of the Battle of Magersfontein*

He was highly respected amongst his peers as being an expert in the management and deployment of every sort of mounted troop, and this, after the departure of Roberts, was put to good effect in both the Eastern and Western Transvaal during 1901. Although minor, he was responsible for many 'victories' in the above districts, and his name was feared by many of the Boer commandos. Babington left South Africa in September 1901, returning to England.

After the Boer War, Wikipedia records the following about Babington – *"Lieutenant General Sir James Melville Babington was a British Army officer and a renowned leader of cavalry, making a name for himself for his actions in the Second Boer War. He was Commander of the New Zealand Defence Force and one of the most respected British generals in the First World War, in command of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Division. After the war he was Commander of the British Forces in Italy.*

*General Babington's image was chosen by Paul McCartney and used by the Beatles to depict the fictional 'Sgt. Pepper' for the album Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band in 1967."*

**REMEMBER** to keep an eye on our website ([www.battletoursza.com](http://www.battletoursza.com)) - for regular articles, updates, etc.

**Allan Gordon**