

Newsletter

June 2023

As in previous months, and because of the positive feedback I have received, I am again quoting from selected headlines in the book 'The War Reporter – The Anglo-Boer War through the eyes of the Burghers', by J.E.H. Grobler. I have been asked where this book can be bought, and it looks like Second Hand-Book Shops are the answer.

June 1900: from the Editor's Comments (page 73) – *"This is one of the darkest chapters in the history of our beloved Republic. On Tuesday a few of us were the unwilling eyewitnesses of a horrible display: a massive enemy force removing the flag of our country from our government buildings in our capital and hoisting their hateful flag in its place to loud cheers from some of our own people."*

It is important to appreciate that Pretoria was never going to be defended. The Mayor, Piet Potgieter – once President Kruger along with his government, plus archives and gold reserves had been removed to the east – was charged with preserving the lives of the town's citizens, and the infrastructure of the town. The Long Toms, that had been bought in the 1990's to protect the town and had been used at the three sieges, were certainly not going to be replaced in the forts that had been built for these huge guns. General Botha and those closest to him had decided to make a stand to the east of Pretoria at Diamond Hill and Donkerhoek, a natural fortification, through which the strategic Pretoria-Delagoa Bay Railway Line passed.



Picture: General Louis Botha

From the Editor's comments (page 78) – *"The direction the Boers will have to follow if we are to gain ultimate victory is clearer every day. Chief Commandant de Wet indicated this brilliantly with successive victories in the Orange Free State, and it was confirmed when the Transvaal forces again failed in a set-piece battle against massive Khaki forces. The lesson to be learnt from these encounters is clear: avoid confronting the enemy on their own terms. Rather concentrate on unexpected offensive operations in which the Republican burghers take the initiative. The British authorities are controlling the course of the war at present, but we have to take the initiative."*

Many of our readers will, after setbacks north of the Vaal River, think that it is madness to even talk of an eventual Boer victory. We believe that it is not madness at all. It is not glorious success on the battlefield alone that ensures an eventual victory. It is rather the capacity to impose your

will on your enemy. The British have certainly not imposed their will on us, as has convincingly been demonstrated by the burghers of the Free State."

After the Battle of Diamond Hill the Boers held a Council of War (Krijgsraad) at Balmoral. Amongst other things, it was decided that all commandos would go back to their own district, but that it wasn't to create 'Home Guards', it was to be able to control enemy activities in the greater district. General Botha then addressed the burghers who were present.



Picture: a collection of burghers at a Krijgsraad

From the Editor's comments (page 80) – *"Botha declared that General de la Rey is already on his way to the Western Transvaal with 1 200 men. General Chris Botha will concentrate on the railway line between Dundee and Newcastle and make that unserviceable. By capturing a whole trainload of supplies, we can cause more damage to Lord Roberts, than by a victory on the battle-field."*

June 1901: From the Editor's comments (page 118) – *"It is mid-winter and the elements are warring against the Boers – both the burghers in the field and the women and children in the camps. Readers who have never spent a night under the clear sky on a snow or frost covered field, wearing rugged clothing and with hardly enough food to silence the worst hunger pangs, cannot imagine what tribulations virtually our whole population has to suffer at the moment. That makes it all the more miraculous that their courage is not failing, and that they have remained full of confidence in their struggle for freedom. Some Transvaal generals have wondered if the time is not ripe for a conditional peace."*

Very little has been written about the lives of the Boer woman, those who weren't housed in Concentration Camps, during the South African War (1899-1902). By chance I came across an action on 6 June 1901, where a British Force attacked a women's laager. It is not difficult to imagine a group of Boer women, whose houses had been destroyed or were in danger of being destroyed, forming a convoy and roaming the countryside, searching out peaceful surroundings. These women were accompanied by a group of elderly men and were on a farm, Graspan, east of the town Reitz in the Free State, and west of the town Warden. The book 'The Australians at the Boer War' by R.L. Wallace describes the events (page 327) – *"On the evening of 5th June Colonel de Lisle sent Major J.R. Sladen, of the East Yorkshire Regiment, with 100 Mounted Infantry and 100 South Australian Imperial Bushmen, ahead of the main column to intercept a Boer convoy in the vicinity of Reitz. Following a night march, the convoy was captured on the morning of the 6th. Forty prisoners were taken after only a slight resistance."* Wallace carries on – *"Five miles away Generals de Wet and de la Rey on their way to the Transvaal were interrupted at breakfast by a galloper bearing the news of the capture of the convoy by a small detachment."*

Generals de Wet and de la Rey were meeting to plan a trip to the Eastern Transvaal, and on hearing the news, they gathered a force of about 350 Boers and made their way to the convoy, but attacking the British, who were now taking cover amongst the wagons, made things difficult. There was a real danger of killing or injuring the women and children in the convoy.



Early that afternoon Colonel de Lisle arrived with reinforcements and the Boers retreated. Wallace continues (page 328) – *"Both sides lost heavily. The British had 20 killed and 25 wounded, including Eight South Australians killed and six wounded. The Boers left 14 dead and six wounded on the field. The others they took away in Cape carts. Many women were trekking with the captured convoy, which yielded 114 wagons and carts, 10 000 rounds of ammunition, 4 000 head of cattle and a large stock of food."*

More research is needed.

Picture: Colonel de Lisle

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

1900

Pvt. C.B. Ward

King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry

Lindley

1901

Sgt. J. Rogers

South African Constabulary

Thaba 'Nchu

Victoria Cross of the Month

Private C.B. Ward – King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry



Charles Burley Ward was born on 10 July 1877, at Hunslet, Leeds, Yorkshire.

In April 1897 he enlisted in the Yorkshire Light Infantry and served in the Cape. He was serving under Major-General Paget in the Orange Free State in June 1900, shortly after the towns on the route of advance had been garrisoned.

Picture: Private Charles Ward V.C.

Citation:

On the 26th June 1900, at Lindley, a picquet of the Yorkshire Light Infantry was surrounded on three sides by about 500 Boers at close quarters. The two officers were wounded, and all but six of the men were killed or wounded. Private Ward then volunteered to take a message asking for reinforcements, to the signalling station, about 150 yards in the rear of the post. His offer was at first refused, owing to the practical certainty of him being shot: but on his insisting, he was allowed to go. He got across untouched through a storm of shots from each flank, and having delivered the message, he voluntarily retired from a place of absolute safety and re-crossed the fire-swept ground to assure his commanding officer that the message had been sent. On this occasion he was severely wounded. But for this gallant action the post would certainly have been captured.

(London Gazette – 28 September 1900)

Due to his serious wound, he saw little further action. He was the last recipient of the V.C. to be decorated by Queen Victoria before her death. On his discharge the citizens of Leeds presented him with a commemorative gold medal and 600 Pounds. He served as an instructor during the 1914-18 War.

Ward died at the Glamorgan County Asylum, Wales, on 30 December 1921, aged 45 years. He is buried in St. Mary's Churchyard, Whitchurch, Cardiff, and in 1986 the British Legion erected a headstone over his grave.

Picture: Private Charles Ward V.C.'s grave

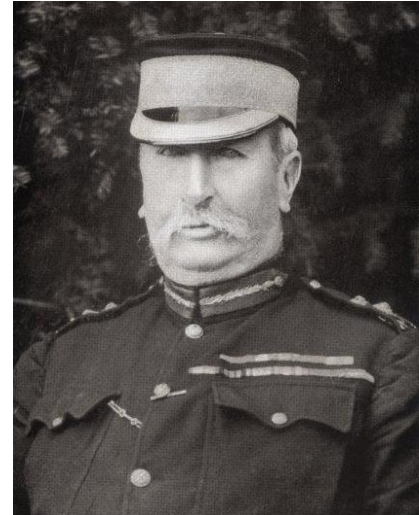


(Acknowledgement – Ian Uys)

Anniversary of the death of General Sir Redvers Henry Buller – 2 June 1908

Redvers Buller was born on 7 December 1839 at the family estate of Downes, near Crediton in Devon.

After completing his schooling at Eton, he purchased a commission in the King's Royal Rifle Corp (60th Rifles) in May 1858, and saw service in China, Canada, and later in the Ashanti campaign under Viscount Wolseley. He then served in South Africa from 1878, taking part in the Anglo-Zulu War and the Battle of Hlobane, where he was awarded the V.C.. In June 1879, he commanded the mounted troops at the Battle of Ulundi, the final battle of the war.



Picture: General Sir Redvers Buller V.C.

The citation for his V.C. records:

For his gallant conduct at the retreat at Inhlobana, on 28th March, 1879, in having assisted, whilst hotly pursued by Zulus, in rescuing Captain C. D'Arcy, of the Frontier Light Horse, who was retiring on foot, and carrying him on his horse until he overtook the rear guard. Also for having on the same date and under the same circumstances, conveyed Lieutenant C. Everitt, of the Frontier Light Horse, whose horse had been killed under him, to a place of safety. Later on, Colonel Buller, in the same manner, saved a trooper of the Frontier Light Horse, whose horse was completely exhausted, and who otherwise would have been killed by the Zulus, who were within 80 yards of him.

He saw service in South Africa during the 1st Anglo-Boer War as an intelligence officer under Sir Evelyn Wood. He then returned to the U.K., spent some time in Ireland and at Aldershot, and during this time was knighted.

Buller was in command of troops stationed at Aldershot when the South African War (1899-1902) broke out, and as a 60-year-old, was sent to South Africa as Commander of the Natal Field Force. He arrived at Durban at the end of October 1899. On 15 December 1899 his troops were defeated at the Battle of Colenso, and this defeat, coupled with the British defeats at Magersfontein and Stormberg, became known as 'Black Week'. Lord Roberts' son was killed at Colenso trying to rescue the guns – and this didn't help future matters. Negative reports regarding Buller's command resulted in Lord Roberts coming to South Africa in January 1900 to take over overall command of all British troops in the country. Further setbacks at Spioenkop and Vaal Krantz delayed the Relief of Ladysmith until 28 February 1900.

Buller's last major battle was the Battle of Bergendal (27 August 1900), where together with Roberts' force, they defeated the Boers in the last set piece battle of the war. After the battle, Buller pursued the Boers who were under the command of General Botha, to Lydenburg, Pilgrim's

Rest and Kruger's Pos, before returning to Lydenburg, from where he returned to the U.K. on 2 October 1900.

Once back in Britain, Buller busied himself with giving speeches and lectures on the war in South Africa. However, the war was far from finished as the guerrilla phase was in full swing. John Broderick, who was the war minister, and Lord Roberts were starting to ask questions about the prolonged war. In September 1901 'The Times' published a letter (signed by *Reformer* – Amery's pseudonym), copied from the book 'Buller: A Scapegoat' by Geoffrey Powell (page 197) – "*The utter fatuity of Colenso, the unnecessary abandonment of the guns, the message to Sir G. White suggesting the surrender of Ladysmith, the want of decision at Spioen Kop, the half-hearted attempt at Vaal Krantz, the costly blundering back into the Colenso death-trap after the capture of Monte Cristo might have shown the way to the blindest, the inexcusable failure to pursue a demoralised enemy – is this the record for which the Government and Lord Roberts, who know all, have chosen the Commander on whom the first shock of the next war may fall.*"

Buller responded to this and other attacks on him, in a speech in October. He was asked to apologise, which he refused to do, which resulted in him being dismissed from his post at Aldershot and reduced to half pay. Buller requested a court martial, and an audience with the King – both requests were refused.



Buller then busied himself with public affairs – he was a councillor in his district.

To quote from Powell (page 207) – "*Monuments to famous men are rarely erected in their lifetime, but in September 1905, Buller watched the unveiling of the superb bronze thirteen-foot-high equestrian statue of himself that stands at the end of Queen's Street in Exeter.*"

Picture: Statue erected in honour of General Buller

Buller died on 2 June 1908, at Downes House, Crediton, Devon, and is buried in the churchyard of Holy Cross Church in the town. The entire western side of the chancel arch inside the church forms an elaborate monument to Sir Redvers.

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

Allan Gordon