

Newsletter

March 2025

The major battles that took place during the months of March 1900, 1901 and 1902 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 'March' events.

March 1900: The occupation of Bloemfontein took place on 13 March and Lord Roberts decided that, being the capital of the Free State Republic, the opportunity was appropriate to establish British administrative control of the Republic and set the stage for the eventual control of the two Republics into the British Empire.

The book 'Methods of Barbarism' by SB Spies records (page 84) – *"Milner suggested that it should not be difficult to persuade the local newspaper, The Friend, which he maintained had always had British leanings, to come right round to their side. Arthur Barlow, the 24-year-old son of the proprietor and editor of the newspaper, who had acted as editor while his father was overseas, refused the request to assist in the production on the grounds that he was not prepared to work for the enemy."*



Picture: Lord Roberts

Roberts then established a newspaper under military auspices. It bore the name of Barlow's defunct paper, and the editorial committee consisted initially of four war correspondents. The first issue appeared on the 15th March. Two days later, the poet and novelist Rudyard Kipling was summoned from Cape Town by Roberts to join the newspaper. He arrived at Bloemfontein to take up his duties on the 21st March."

I have been producing this newsletter for five years, and for three and a half years have featured a 'V.C. of the Month'. During the month of March 1900, there were five V.C.s awarded for gallantry at the Battle of Koornspruit/Sannah's Post, and I decided to 'dig into' the background of these awards. The award to Lieutenant Maxwell seemed fairly straight forward – he had gone out on five different occasions and assisted in bringing in two guns and three limbers, with the help of fellow members of the battery. In the recommendation for the V.C. award to Maxwell, the names of Captain Humphries and Lieutenant Stirling were mentioned, but the eventual awards to the other four recipients of the V.C., didn't include these two individuals. The book 'South Africa and the

Transvaal War' by Louis Creswicke records (page 194, Vol. VI) – *"After full consideration of the circumstances of the case, the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief in South Africa formed the opinion that the conduct of all ranks of Q Battery, Royal Horse Artillery, was conspicuously gallant and daring, but that all were equally brave and devoted in their behaviour. He therefore decided to treat the case of the battery as one of collective gallantry under Rule 13 of the Victoria Cross Warrant and directed that one officer should be selected for the decoration of the Victoria Cross by the officers, one non-commissioned officer by the non-commissioned officers, and two gunners or drivers by the gunners and drivers.*

A difficulty arose with regard to the officer, owing to the fact that there were only two un-wounded officers – Major Phipps-Hornby and Captain Humphreys – available for the work of saving the guns, and both of these had been conspicuous by their gallantry and by their fearless manner in which they exposed themselves, and each of them nominated the other for the decoration. It was ultimately decided in favour of Major Phipps-Hornby, as having been the senior concerned.

Sergeant Charles Parker was chosen by the non-commissioned officers as the one among them most deserving the distinction. Gunner Isaac Lodge and Driver Horace Harry Glasscock were selected in the like manner by the vote of their comrades."

Fair???

March 1901: When looking for new material for the month on March 1901, I seem to have started all my past newsletters with – *"As I have recorded before, nothing much (other than skirmishes/engagements) happened during this month."* I have covered most of the engagements/battles that took place during this month. I have also covered the Middelburg Conference, from both sides. I have been through the various diaries that I have, and nothing worth reporting has been recorded. So, going through some Facebook posts that I have printed out, I came across the fact that Lovat's Scouts sailed for South Africa on 16 March 1901.



Wikipedia records – *"The regiment was formed in January 1900 for service in the Second Boer War by Simon Fraser, 14th Lord Lovat, Chief of Clan Fraser of Lovat, as the Lovat Scouts. Recruited initially from gamekeepers and professional stalkers on Highland estates, the unit was commanded by the Honorable Andrew David Murray from his appointment by Lord Lovat in February 1900 until killed in action in September 1901.*

Picture: The Lovat Scouts' Crest

After his death Lord Lovat, who had hitherto served as second-in-command of the regiment, took command himself (aged 29), and in such a role he remained till the end of the war. Well-practiced

in the arts of marksmanship, field-craft and military tactics, they were also phenomenal woodsmen 'always ready to tempt fate', but also practitioners of discretion: 'He who shoots and runs away, lives to shoot another day.' The Lovat Scouts have the distinction of being the first military unit to wear a Ghillie suit. The Scouts were attached to the Black Watch.

A Ghillie suit is a type of camouflage clothing designed to resemble the background environment – such as foliage. Typically, it is a net or cloth garment covered in loose strips of burlap (hessian), cloth, twine, or jute sometimes made to look like leaves and twigs, and optionally augmented with foliage from the area."

March 1902: Last year's newsletter, for this month, started – *"One cannot just 'gloss over' March 1902 without repeated reference to the capture of Lord Methuen – the Boers' major 'prize' in the whole war. What would have happened if, as many of de la Rey's senior officers wanted, Methuen had been executed? Could Methuen have been used to negotiate a better peace deal? We will never know."* I then wrote about the battle – but what of the capture? The book 'De la Rey – Lion of the West' by Johannes Meintjies is a book I refer to often. Meintjies records the capture (page 236) – *"The stricken Methuen was not immediately recognised by the burghers. In much pain he spoke to Japie de Villiers, who was hurrying past: 'have you seen our doctor?' – 'Yes, he is tending to the wounded soldiers, behind the wagons.' De Villiers then got the surprise of his life when the Khakie said: 'I am Lord Methuen, and am wounded. Please tell my doctor to come here at once.' Japie de Villiers rushed away to get the English doctor and returned with him. The doctor cut open the leg of Methuen's breeches. 'My Lord, it is a nasty fracture' he said with concern. 'Well patch it up somehow' Methuen said and looked up as de la Rey came riding towards them, followed by his Adjutant, Charles Rocher, to act as interpreter. De la Rey's dark eyes were gleaming.*

'Good day, Lord Methuen' he greeted his enemy and scrutinised the wound. 'I'm sorry to make your acquaintance in such a condition.'

Methuen sighed. 'This is the fortune of war.' His gaze swept over the famous sunburnt face, the nose, the eyes, the beard. 'But, de la Rey, you are a better man. We've been fighting for nearly three years and now you have got me down. Incidentally, that was a magnificent charge. If those are going to be your tactics in future, you still have a chance to win the war'."



Picture: Lord Methuen

It is common knowledge that, after this humane act, the Methuen's and de la Rey's remained in contact for many years.

Methuen's defeat had adverse effects in Britain. Meintjies carries on (page 237) – *"In Britain, where the war was believed to be at an end, Methuen's capture and defeat caused a wave of depression. The British found it incredible that with their enormous numerical superiority such a disaster could have happened. Broderick took it very seriously. 'An utter rout of two columns in ten days, the loss of material, and the re-arming and equipment of the Boers, the loss of prestige by Methuen's capture, and the misconduct of the mounted troops, seem to us to make it the worst business since Colenso. Moreover, it comes at a very bad time and shows what a fine fighting spirit still exists in the remaining Boers.'"*

Just over two and a half months later, the war was over.

Other interesting events during the month of March:

- **12 March 1879** – Battle of Intombe Drift (Anglo-Zulu War).
- **16 March 1900** – after the successful escape of Winston Churchill from the Staats Model School in Pretoria, Captain Aylmer Haldane, Lieutenant le Mesurier and Sergeant-Major Brockie escaped – hiding under the floorboards when the other prisoners were being transported to the PoW camp at Waterval.
- **19 March 1900** – two Scandinavian Volunteers (Johansson and Petterson-Janck), taken prisoner by the British, escaped on a swimming outing in Cape Town having buried themselves on the beach.
- **6 March 1901** – General Louis Botha's elder brother, Phillip Rudolf, was killed in action near Ventersburg.
- **15 March 1902** – Vecht-General Cherry Emmett, brother-in-law of Louis Botha, was captured by the British.
- **18 March 1902** – a member of Jack Hindon's 'Train Wrecker Corps' was captured near Boschmanspruit.
- **19 March 1918** – Captain Jack Hindon died and is buried in the Middelburg Cemetery.

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

1900

Sgt. H.W. Engleheart	10 th Royal Hussars	Bloemfontein
Major E.J. Phipps-Hornby	Royal Horse Artillery	Koornspruit/Sannah's Post
Sgt. C.E.H. Parker	Royal Horse Artillery	Koornspruit/Sannah's Post
Gunner I. Lodge	Royal Horse Artillery	Koornspruit/Sannah's Post
Driver H.H. Glasock	Royal Horse Artillery	Koornspruit/Sannah's Post
Lieut. F.A. Maxwell	Indian Staff Corp	Koornspruit/Sannah's Post

1901

Lieut. F.B. Dugdale	5 th Lancers	Derby (TVI)
---------------------	-------------------------	-------------

Victoria Cross of the Month

Gunner I. Lodge – 'Q' Battery, Royal Horse Artillery

(one of 5 V.C.s awarded to the Regiment for bravery at the Battle of Koornspruit/Sannah's Post, fought on 31 March 1900)



Isaac Lodge was born at Great Canfield, Essex, on 6 May 1866, and attended school there. From the age of 11 he worked on farms and as a game-keeper.

In December 1888 he joined the Royal Garrison Artillery and was transferred to the RHA for service in India. He came to South Africa with his battery in 1899.

Lodge was presented with his V.C. by Lord Roberts in Pretoria in October 1900. He served with his battery in the Transvaal, then in the Cape where they were in action against Commandant Scheepers.

He later became a bombardier.

Picture: Gunner Isaac Lodge V.C.

Citation:

On the occasion of the action at Korn Spruit on the 31st March, 1900, a British force, including two batteries of the Royal Horse Artillery, was retiring from Thabanchu towards Bloemfontein. The enemy had formed an ambush at Korn Spruit, and before their presence was discovered by the main body had captured the greater portion of the baggage column and five out of the six guns of the leading battery. When the alarm was given Q Battery, Royal Horse Artillery, was within 300 yards of the Spruit. Major Phipps-Hornby, who commanded it, at once wheeled about and moved off at a gallop under a very heavy fire. One gun upset when a wheel horse was shot, and had to be abandoned, together with a waggon, the horses of which were killed. The remainder of the battery reached a position close to some unfinished railway buildings and came into action 1 150 yards from the Spruit, remaining in action until ordered to retire. When the order to retire was received Major Phipps-Hornby ordered the guns and their limbers to be run back by hand to where the teams of uninjured horses stood behind the unfinished buildings. The few remaining gunners, assisted by a number of Officers and men of a party of Mounted Infantry, and directed by Major Phipps-Hornby and Captain Humphreys, the only remaining Officers of the battery, succeeded in running back four of the guns under shelter. One or two of the limbers were similarly withdrawn by hand, but the work was most severe and the distance considerable. In consequence all concerned were so exhausted that they were unable to drag in the remaining limbers or the fifth gun. It now became necessary to risk the

horses, and volunteers were called for from among the drivers, who readily responded. Several horses were killed and men wounded, but at length only one gun and one limber were left exposed. Four separate attempts were made to rescue these, but when no more hordes were available the attempt had to be given up and the gun and limber were abandoned. Meanwhile the other guns had been sent on, one at a time, and after passing within 700 or 800 yards of the enemy, in rounding the head of a donga and crossing two spruits they eventually reached a place of safety, where the battery was re-formed. After full consideration of the circumstances of the case the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief in South Africa formed the opinion that the conduct of all ranks of Q Battery, Royal Horse Artillery, were conspicuously gallant and daring, but that all were equally brave and devoted in their behaviour. He therefore decided to treat the case of the battery as one of collective gallantry under Rule 13 of the Victoria Cross Warrant and directed that one Officer should be selected for the decoration of the Victoria Cross by the Officers, one non-commissioned officer by the non-commissioned officers, and two gunners or drivers by the gunners and drivers. A difficulty arose with regard to the Officer because there were only two unwounded Officers – Major Phipps-Hornby and Captain Humphreys – available for the work of saving the guns, and both of these had been conspicuous by their gallantry and by the fearless manner in which they exposed themselves, and each of them nominated the other for the decoration. It was ultimately decided in favour of Major Phipps-Hornby as having been the senior concerned. Sergeant C. Parker was elected by the non-commissioned officers, as described above. Gunner I. Lodge and Driver H.H. Glasock were elected by the gunners and drivers, as described above.

(London Gazette 26 June 1900)

After 21 years of service, he retired from the army and became a Keeper at the Royal Parks, first at Regent's Park, then Hyde Park. Among his medals the George V Coronation Medal was the type awarded to Royal Park's Keepers. His daughter, Gladys, died in 1916, aged 11.

Lodge died in Hyde Park, London, on 13 June 1923, aged 57.

His medals were presented to the National Army Museum by his daughter-in-law, Mabel Parker.



Picture: Gunner Isaac Lodge V.C.'s grave

Anniversary of the death of Lieutenant Francis Newton Parsons V.C. – 10 March 1900

Lieutenant Parsons, Essex Regiment, was killed in action in the engagement at Driefontein, on 10 March 1900. He was the third son of Doctor Charles Parsons, Dover, born in March 1875 and educated at Dover College.



He entered the Essex Regiment in February 1896, being promoted Lieutenant, March 1898. He was present at the Battle of Paardeberg, when he was awarded the V.C. – London Gazette 20 November 1900, for gallantry under the following circumstances – ‘On the south bank of the river Modder, Private Ferguson, 1st Battalion Essex Regiment was wounded and fell in a place devoid of cover. While trying to crawl under cover he was again wounded in the stomach. Lieutenant Parsons at once went to his assistance, dressed his wound, under heavy fire, went down twice, still under heavy fire, to the bank of the river to get water for Private Ferguson, and subsequently carried him to a place of safety.’

Picture: Lieutenant Parsons V.C.

At Driefontein Lieutenant Parsons again displayed conspicuous gallantry, and was mentioned in despatches – London Gazette, 8 February 1901.

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

The Battle of Driefontein is described as (reference – page 62 of ‘A Gazetteer of the Second Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902’ by Huw M. Jones and Meurig G.M. Jones) – *“A series of koppies, principally those called Vieh Kraal Hill and Alexandra Berg, but collectively referred to as Driefontein Koppies or Driefontein Ridge, on the farm, formed part of the Boer left, their position stretching from Abraham’s Kraal on the Modder River in the north to the Boschrand further south. By a series of turning movements, the British army forced the Boers on the koppies at Driefontein into an action.”*

British losses were significant with over 50 killed in the action and a further 360 wounded. The Essex Regiment’s casualties totalled two Officers, and 15 men killed, and two Officers and 72 men wounded.

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

Allan Gordon