

## Newsletter

May 2024

**May 1900:** Past newsletters have recorded the battles that were fought during the month of May 1900, but equally significant was the mobilisation of troops, both from Bloemfontein and from Ladysmith. Both forces, after the occupation of Bloemfontein by Roberts, and the Relief of Ladysmith by Buller, had been inactive for some time.



Picture: General Buller

To quote from the book 'Buller: A Scapegoat?' by Geoffrey Powell (page 178) – *"It was another nine weeks before Buller could follow up his success and seven before Roberts could do the same. In Roberts' case the delay was due to the need to bring the single railway line back into operation, accumulate thirty days' supplies for over 40 000 troops and 20 000 horses, and rest and refit his weary units."*

And then (page 179) – *"But Buller also needed time to make his preparations. For every railway bridge and culvert north of the Tugela had to be rebuilt, his near bootless troops refitted, White's weak and half-starved garrison fed, and the sick and wounded evacuated."*

Powell goes on – *"The inevitable delay stemming from all this was aggravated by a failure of understanding between Roberts and Buller, two men who barely knew one another and who could exchange ideas only by easily misunderstood coded telegrams or much delayed letters, fifty of which passed between them during that enforced wait."*

There are thoughts that Roberts wanted Buller to make his way across the Drakensberg mountains and join up with him on his advance on the Transvaal, and that Buller was having none of that. For those who have seen the Drakensberg, Buller's reluctance is well understood. However, Buller did want to advance into the Transvaal via Northern Natal, and there are quotes from letters that Buller wrote in Powell's book. One to a friend reads (page 180) – *"I know this is wicked, but I have been here for 9 weeks, stopped from pursuing a fleeing enemy and ordered a policy of strict defensive, and why I cannot conceive: and I am tired of waiting every day I see the Boers digging a new trench. It seems to me a funny way of making war."*



Picture: Lord Roberts

In May the 'movement' started. On 3 May Roberts' force consisting of 24 800 men, over 10 000 horses, and 62 field-guns left Bloemfontein. Buller's force, consisting of 45 000 men, 11 500 horses, and 110 guns, including four Naval guns, left Ladysmith. Needless to say, the Boers were waiting for the approach of these forces having had plenty of time to prepare.

**May 1901:** In mid-April 1901 the British launched a concentrated effort to rid the North-Eastern Transvaal of Boers who were concentrating on disruptions to the Pretoria/Delagoa Bay Railway Line. Lord Kitchener was now Chief of Command and requested Lieutenant-General Blood be recalled from India, for service in South Africa. He arrived in early March 1901 and spent six months in command of a division fighting in the North-Eastern Transvaal. Early in May this operation was called off.



The Times History of the War records (page 331, Vol. V) – *"General Blood returned in the middle of September to his command in India. If he can scarcely be said to have bettered his high reputation, it must be remembered that in a field so widely different from India, his gifts had had little scope. He had come to South Africa when the anti-guerrilla army was new and inefficient. He left when it was just beginning to harden to its work."*

The record of the criticism of Blood carries on and ends – *"For column-work he lacked youth and alacrity, and naturally lost enthusiasm."*

*Picture: General Blood*

However, as has already been said, past newsletters have recorded the battles of the month, and I am concentrating on figures and statistics. Recently I had to refer to Pieter Cloete's book, 'The Anglo-Boer War – a Chronology'. This is a book, that, if you don't have in your collection, you need to acquire. Cloete records the following numbers, for the end of May 1901, and I can't find any other reference to 'challenge' his records (page 242) – *"Lord Kitchener's Army: During May 1901 the army at Kitchener's disposal reaches its peak strength of about 240 000 men with 100 heavy guns, 420 horse and field-guns, and 60 pom-poms."* Breaking this down, Cloete records – *"Mounted Forces = 80 000, Infantry Forces = 105 000, and other Forces + 55 000."*

With Boer numbers being between 35 000 and 40 000, this, in boxing terminology, was a mismatch of note.

**May 1902:** The last month of the War, with the Treaty of Vereeniging being signed on 31 May 1902 at Melrose House in Pretoria. To carry on with stats and figures, I have a reference of which I am unaware of the source. What I have recorded is that it was estimated that during the course of the war, just over 60 000 Boers took up arms against the Colonial Forces. These Boers would have come from the Transvaal, Free State, Cape Rebels, and foreign volunteers.

Colonial Forces, which would have come from the U.K. and as far afield as Canada and New Zealand were estimated to be just over 450 000. These men obviously had Terms of Service, spending the required period of time in South Africa and then being replaced. During the guerrilla phase of the war the 'Yeomanry' came to South Africa as volunteers to compliment the regular forces who had been in South Africa for some time.

**Other notable events that happened over the years in the month of May:**

- 24 May 1819 – Birth of Queen Victoria.
- 22 May 1859 – Arthur Conan Doyle was born in Edinburgh.
- 11 May 1861 – birth of Frederick Russel Burnham. Who was Burnham I hear some of you ask? While prospecting in America, Burnham received a call from London, inviting him to become Chief of Scouts for the British during the Boer War. During the war Burnham carried out over 100 sabotage or surveillance operations behind enemy lines – being wounded twice. Despite being an American, King Edward VII personally awarded Burnham the Distinguished Service Cross, the second highest award given in the British military.
- 30 May 1899 – President Paul Kruger and the British High Commissioner for South Africa, Sir Alfred Milner, met at a conference in Bloemfontein to talk about the franchise question.



*Picture: Queen Victoria*

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

**1900**

L/Cpl J.F. Mackay	1 Batt Gordon Highlanders	Doornkop
Cpl. F.H. Kirby	Royal Engineers	Eastern Transvaal
Pvt. C B. Ward	King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry	Lindley

**1901**

Lieut. F.W. Bell	West Australian Mounted Infantry	Brakpan
Lieut. G.H.B. Coulson	1 Batt. King's Own Scottish Borderers	Lambrechtsfontein

## Victoria Cross of the Month

### Lieutenant F.W. Bell – West Australian Mounted Infantry

Frederick William Bell was born in Perth, West Australia, on 3 April 1875. Bell was commissioned in the West Australian Mounted Infantry and earned his V.C. at the Brakpan Farm in the Eastern Transvaal.

#### Citation:

At Brakpan on 16<sup>th</sup> May 1901, when retiring through a heavy fire after holding the right flank, Lieutenant Bell noticed a man dismounted, and returned and took him up behind him. The horse, not being equal to the weight, fell with them. Lieutenant Bell then remained behind, and covered the man's retirement till he was out of danger.

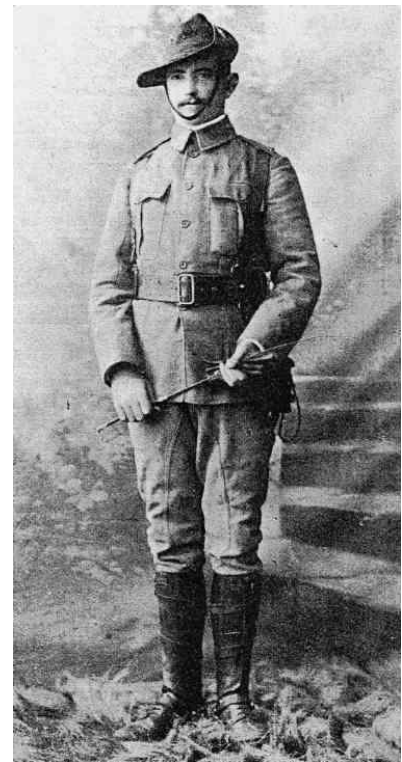
(London Gazette, 4 August 1901)

He was decorated by the Prince of Wales (King George V) in London on 11 July 1902. In 1915 he became a temporary captain in command of a rest camp, then served as commandant, Embarkation Camps, at Plymouth.

Lieutenant-Colonel Bell was an administrative officer in British Somaliland, Northern Nigeria and Kenya, and served in the Reserve of Officers during World War II. His first wife died in 1944 and he then married a widow, Brenda Cracklow. He had no children. During an investigation he criticised the colonial office's attitude towards the Swahili, so was recalled and pensioned off.

Bell died at Westbury-on-Trym on 28 April 1954, aged 79 years, and is buried in Canford Cemetery, near Bristol. His name is also commemorated in the V.C. corner, Australian War Memorial, Canberra. His medals are on display at the West Australian Museum in Perth.

*Picture: Lieutenant Bell V.C.*



(Acknowledgement – Ian Uys)

## **Anniversary of the birth of Lieutenant-General Sir Michael Frederic Rimington – 23 May 1858**

Lieutenant-General Rimington was born in Penrith, close to the Lake District, England on 23 May 1858. He attended Highgate School in London and then studied at Keble College, Oxford, graduating in 1881. He joined the 6<sup>th</sup> (Inniskilling) Dragoons as Lieutenant and was posted to South Africa. His first active service was the Warren Expedition in 1884 to recapture Stellaland, a Boer 'claimed' Republic, close to British Bechuanaland, from the Boers. He was promoted to the rank of Captain on 26 October 1887. On 3 April 1897 he was appointed Major, and the same year appointed to a staff position overseeing remounts.



Following the unsuccessful Jameson Raid, which increased tensions in South Africa, Rimington was sent out to South Africa in July 1899 on special service. When war was declared in October 1899, he was appointed to raise a force of irregular mounted scouts, known as 'Rimington's Guides'. His guides however were more commonly known as 'Rimington's Tigers' due to the wildcat fur bands on their hats.

Rimington's Guides became part of Lord Methuen's force and fought at the Battles of Belmont, Enslin, Modder River and Magersfontein in the Relief of Kimberley. After the relief, his Guides formed part of General French's force, and saw action at the Battles of Paardeberg and Poplar Grove. The Guides stayed on as part of this force all the way through to the Battle of Diamond Hill.

*Picture: A member of Rimington's Guides*

With guerrilla warfare being the order of the day in the Free State, Rimington was assigned to this area and saw service there until the end of 1900. Rimington was recalled to the 6<sup>th</sup> Dragoons and his guides were reorganised as Damant's Horse under Major Frederic Damant, who had been Rimington's second-in-command during the course of the war thus far.

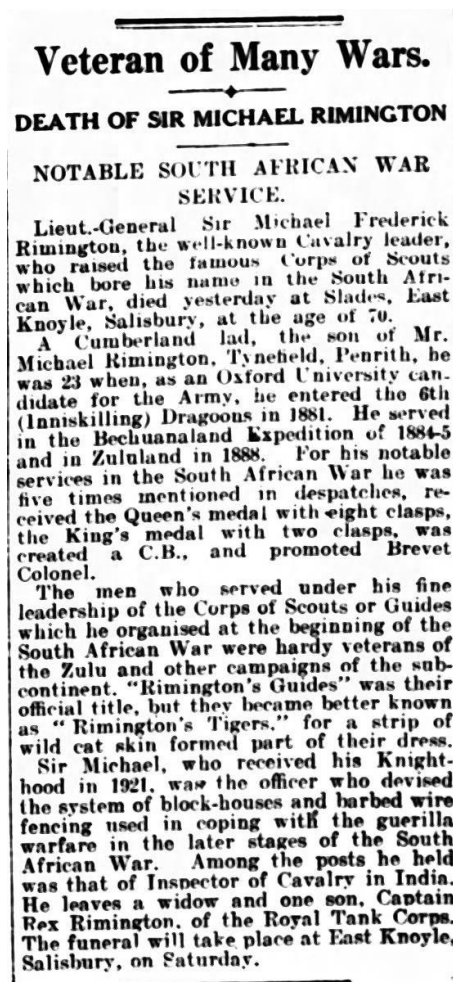
Rimington was promoted Lieutenant-Colonel and took command of the Dragoons for the remainder of the war. For his services in South Africa, he was mentioned in despatches five times, and appointed a Companion of the Order of the Bath (CB). He received the Queen's South Africa Medal and King's South Africa Medal with ten clasps, and for those who collect medals, this is the highest clasp achievement possible.

After the war, on his return to England, in January 1903, he was promoted to command the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Brigade. In 1907 he was given command of the Secunderabad Cavalry Brigade in India,

and in March 1911, when his tenure in command of the brigade expired, he became the Inspector-General of Cavalry Units in India.

At the outbreak of the First World War, Rimington commanded the 1<sup>st</sup> Indian Cavalry Division as part of the Indian Expeditionary Force to France. When the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Division arrived in December 1914, he was promoted to command the Indian Cavalry Corps, remaining with it until it was disbanded. Following the disbandment of the corps, Rimington was given command of a reserve centre in the United Kingdom. He retired from the Army in 1919.

Rimington died on 9 December 1928, aged 70 and is buried in St. Mary's Churchyard, Wiltshire, England.



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**Allan Gordon**