

Newsletter

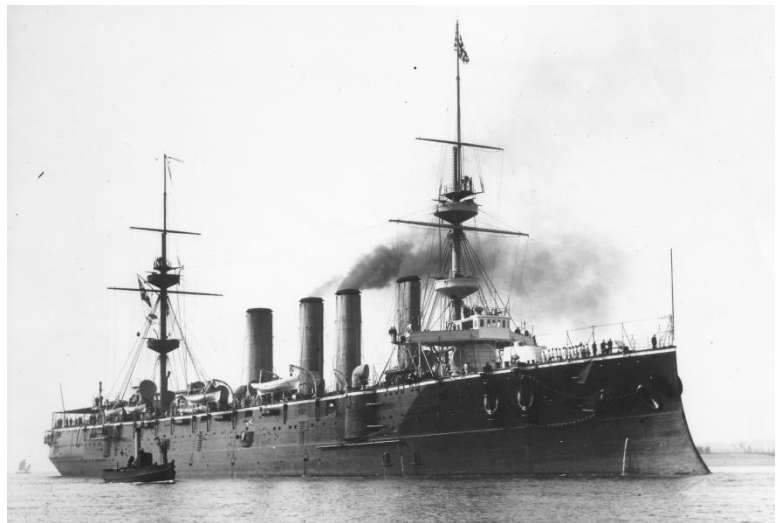
November 2022

November 1899 – whilst the Boers were tightening up their siege plans on Ladysmith, Mafeking and Kimberley, the British were building up their number of troops in South Africa.

The Brits were also seeking answers to the superior Boer 'fire-power' – the Long Toms were out-gunning everything that the British had in the field.

With the help of Captain Scott of the Battleship HMS Terrible the Navy were converting naval guns to field guns.

In addition to what he was able to get into Ladysmith (two 4.7 inch's and four Long 12's), before all access was blocked by the Boers on the morning of 8 November, Scott and his army of 'sailors', together with 30 guns landed in Durban. The guns were two 4,7 inch's, sixteen 'Long 12's', two 12-prs 8-cwt, one 9-pr, two 3-prs, two Nordenfelts and four Maxims.



Picture: HMS Terrible

These were to be used in the field, mainly by Buller, in his efforts to relieve Ladysmith. In addition to what was made available in Natal, naval guns were also in action in the Northern Cape. Naval 'Long 12's' were at Belmont, Graspan and Modder River and a 4,7 inch gun was at Magersfontein.

In mid-November 1899, Louis Botha and his force of Boers from a number of commandos, crossed the Tugela and were 'on their way to Pietermaritzburg'. As has been discussed and debated by many, had this force reached and taken Durban – would the outcome of the war have been different? I'm not sure how many ships would have managed to berth in the Durban harbour if a Long Tom had been placed in the town and targeted British troop ships. After a battle at Willow Grange, where neither side could claim victory, Piet Joubert, who was in overall command of forces in Natal, insisted that Botha returned to join the force at the Siege of Ladysmith.

Between 17 and 22 November 1899 British Troop ships arrived in Cape Town, from the U.K., with over 20 000 troops, to re-enforce the troops already in the field. From Cape Town the ships proceeded to Durban.

All three sieges were well covered in last year's November newsletter.

November 1900 saw the Boer Generals establishing themselves in the districts assigned to them after the Council of War at Balmoral and the Battle of Bergendal – de Wet in the Free State, de la Rey in the Western Transvaal, Viljoen in the Eastern Transvaal, and Botha in Northern Natal and South-Eastern Transvaal. The guerrilla phase of the war was about to gain momentum, and plans were being prepared against British convoys in order for the Boers to replenish dwindling supplies.



Paul Kruger arrived in Marseilles on 22 November 1900 having left Delagoa, the Portuguese port in South-East Africa, a month earlier.

Kruger had been put under house arrest in Lourenco Marques, and was prevented from boarding a German ship by the British consul in the town.

Thanks to the intervention of Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands, who concluded a deal with the British Government, he was allowed to board the Dutch Warship, the Gelderland, and leave the shores of Africa for Europe.

Picture: Paul Kruger

November 1901 focussed on 'minor' skirmishes by the Boers, in order to replace dwindling supplies of necessities. Jan Smuts seemed to be the only Boer General who was active – he was visible in the Northern Cape keeping British forces active in the area. The Boers who were in the field were suffering from the lack of supplies, not knowing what was happening to their families, and the uncertainty of whether they had a home to return to once hostilities were over. Schikkerling in his book 'Commando Courageous' records his feelings (page 333) – *"November 28th, 1901. This is my twenty-second birthday and the third I have spent on commando. On the face of things, I doubt if we shall hold the field for another birthday. I should, with all deference to my manhood, like to be out of this enterprise. I am so tired, and do so long to be home. Every day comes the longing to see dear ones who may be no more, for much may have happened during the year and a half in which I have heard no word from them."*

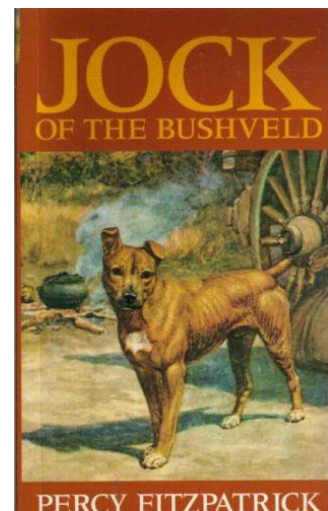
According to The Times History (Vol V, page 543) – *"The most important event in November (1901) however, was the invasion of the Colony, at de Wet's instigation, by a band of a hundred Free Staters under Commandant Naude. Evading the river blockhouses, they crossed the Orange at Sand Drift on November 22, threw off Hunter-Weston, who was sent upon their track, and on the night of November 29, owing to negligence on the De Aar-Orange River blockhouse line, crossed that railway without a shot and joined Smuts in the West."*

And talking about sieges, a farm Tontelboschkolk, about 90 km north-east of Calvinia, which was used as a remount and grain depot, held out against a superior number of Boers until help arrived. To quote from The Times History again (page 543) – *"Maritz received a severe wound in an attack on the small post of Tontelboschkolk in the Calvinia district, where the rebels seized a quantity of horses, but could not subdue the half-breed garrison, which held out stoutly for ten days."*

Other notable, and related, events which happened in November were:

- On 14 November 1914, Field Marshal Frederick Roberts died at St. Omar in France of pneumonia, having visited the Indian Army troops in the trenches at the Western Front.
- The idea of the 'One Minute Silence' on Armistice day (11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month) was the idea of Sir Percy Fitzpatrick, whose son Nugent was killed in France in 1917. When the war ended he conceived the idea of the 'two minutes silence on Armistice Day', the suggestion being adopted and acknowledged by King George V in November 1919. The two minutes were significant in that the first minute was for those who died, and the second for those who remained behind to mourn their loss. The tribute was later reduced to one minute.
- At the outbreak of the South African War (1899-1902) Fitzpatrick enrolled with the Imperial Light Horse Regiment.

As a politician he acted as liaison between Generals Botha and Smuts and the Transvaal, and he and General Hertzog, in private, worked out the agreement for full language equality. His book, *Jock of the Bushveld*, is generally accepted as a South African classic. FitzPatrick was born in King William's Town on 24 July 1862 and died in Uitenhage on 24 January 1931.



Picture: Jock of the Bushveld written by Percy Fitzpatrick

During two of the three November months of the South African War (1900 and 1901), five V.C.s were awarded, strangely none were awarded in 1899:

1900

Lt. H.Z.C. Cockburn	Royal Canadian Dragoons	Komati River (near Belfast)
Lt. R.E.W. Turner	Royal Canadian Dragoons	Komati River (near Belfast)
Sgt. E.J.G. Holland	Royal Canadian Dragoons	Komati River (near Belfast)
Pvt. C.T. Kennedy	Highland Light Infantry	Dewetsdorp

1901

Lt. L.C. Maygar	Victoria Mounted Rifles	Geelhoutboom - Natal
-----------------	-------------------------	----------------------

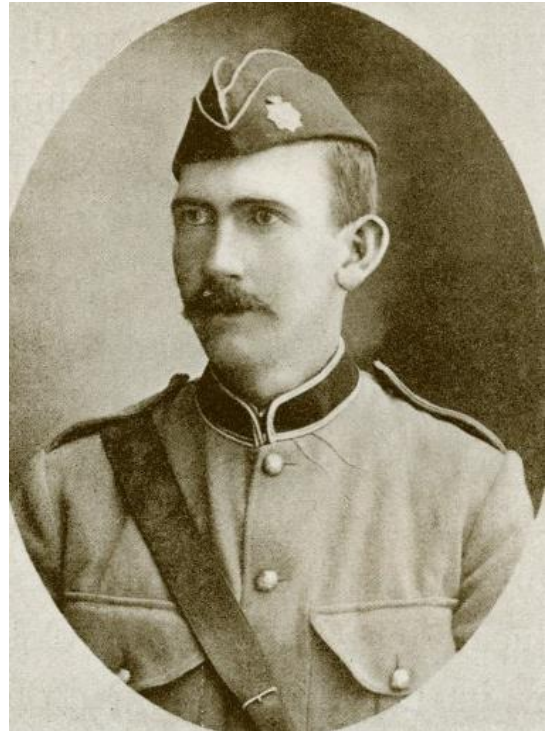
Victoria Cross of the Month

Lieutenant Leslie Cecil Maygar – 5th Victoria Mounted Rifles

Maygar was born at 'The Dean' Station, Milmore, Victoria, Australia on 26 May 1871. His father's family were originally political refugees from Hungary. He, his father and three brothers owned Strathearn Station, Euroa.

Maygar joined the Victoria Mounted Rifles in March 1891 and was commissioned in July 1900. He arrived in Cape Town with the 5th (Mounted Rifles) Contingent in March 1901.

On 23 November 1901, the Victorians took part in an engagement at Geelhoutboom in Natal. Lieutenant Maygar went forward to order the retirement of a detachment which was being outflanked. As the troopers retired Trooper A. Short had his horse shot under him.



Picture: Lieutenant Leslie Maygar V.C.

Citation:

At Geelhoutboom, on 23rd November 1901, Lieutenant Maygar galloped out and ordered the men of a detached post, which was being outflanked, to retire. The horse of one of them being shot under him, when the enemy were within 200 yards, Lieutenant Maygar dismounted and lifted him on to his own horse, which bolted into boggy ground, causing both of them to dismount. On extricating the horse and finding that it could not carry both, Lieutenant Maygar again put the man on its back, and told him to gallop for cover at once, he himself proceeding on foot. All this took place under a heavy fire.

(London Gazette – 11 February 1902)

Maygar returned to camp through a gauntlet of fire but was unscathed. Lord Kitchener presented Lieutenant Maygar with his V.C. in Pretoria on 8 June 1902. He returned to Australia and continued his commission in the Citizen's Military Force.

At the outbreak of the First World War Maygar joined the Australian Imperial Force and served in Egypt and Palestine as a Captain with the 4th Australian Light Horse. In June 1917 he was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel and received the D.S.O. and Volunteer Decoration.

He married Helen Grimshaw of Bristol.

From October 1915 Maygar commanded the 8th Light Horse Regiment. During the evacuation of Gallipoli he commanded the rear-guard and wrote, *"I had my usual luck to be given command of the last party to pull out of the trenches, the post of honour for the 3rd Light Horse Brigade."*

LC Maygar, or 'Elsie' as he was affectionately known, was a true fighting commander.



Picture: The grave and original wooden cross of Lieutenant Leslie Maygar V.C.

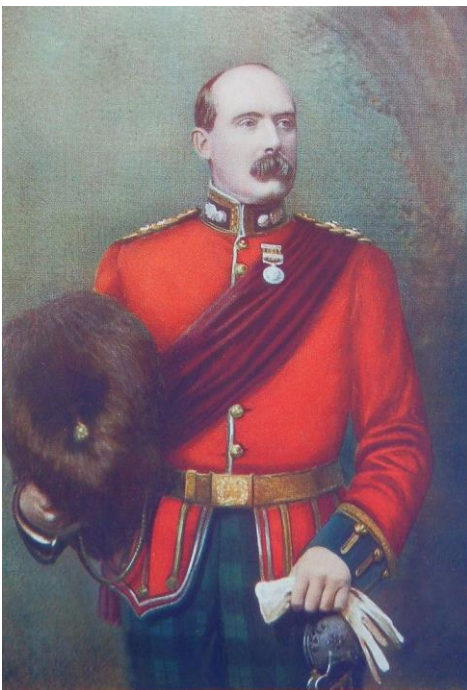
He was mortally wounded by an aeroplane bomb at Karm in Palestine on 31 October 1917.

His arm was amputated and he appeared to be recovering, then haemorrhaged and died on 17 November, aged 46 years.

He is buried in the Beersheba War Cemetery and commemorated by a memorial tree at Euroa, Victoria, Australia, a nearby hill named after him and his name in the V.C. Corner in Canberra, where his medals are displayed.

Anniversary of the death of Major-General Whitelaw Thorneycroft – 4 November 1931

Major-General Alexander Whitelaw Thorneycroft was born on 19 January 1859 in Wolverhampton in the U.K. After completing his schooling he was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant in the Royal Scots Fusiliers in February 1879. Later that year he served in the Anglo-Zulu War, followed by an involvement in the 1st Boer War, where he was part of the defence of Pretoria, which to all intents and purposes was a siege. At the end of hostilities he was promoted to Lieutenant. In July 1899 he received the brevet rank of Lieutenant-Colonel.



Expecting military hostilities, Thorneycroft was one of several officers sent to South Africa to raise volunteer units shortly before the South African War (1899-1902) broke out in October 1899.

He formed a unit, which was called Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry, in Pietermaritzburg on 16 October 1899, which comprised of 500 irregular 'soldiers'. The unit arrived at Mooi River on 18 November 1899 and fought with the relief force at the battles of Willow Grange and Spioenkop.

It was at Spioenkop that Thorneycroft really made a name for himself. Churchill was quoted to have said that Spioenkop was the bloodiest square acre in the whole war.

Picture: Major-General Thorneycroft

A quote from the book 'Ladysmith' by Ruari Chisholm records (page 181) – *"At dusk on the 23rd January the attack started, 1 700 hundred men formed the spearhead, most of them from Lancashire but some from Johannesburg, led by the gigantic Thorneycroft, whose volunteer regiment carried his name."*

General Coke, was supposed to take command of the troops but couldn't as he was still hobbling around on an injured leg, so command was given to Major-General Woodgate. However, Woodgate was mortally wounded, and Colonel Crofton, the next most senior officer on the summit, assumed command.

Buller, who was in base camp was observing the action on the summit, and Chisholm carries on in his book (page 185) – *"In the meantime, it was becoming clear to Buller, the only general on either side whose location offered a view of the whole battle area, that the man of the moment was Thorneycroft. This massive figure, something over 20 stone (over 280 pounds) was plainly identifiable through Buller's powerful telescope, galloping from one position to another,*

encouraging, urging, commanding. At 11.40 Buller drew Warren's attention to this in a signal: 'Unless you put some good hard fighting man in command you will lose the hill. I suggest Thorneycroft'. Warren immediately heliographed to the summit to this effect, but, unfortunately, no one thought of informing Crofton that he had been superseded."

This meant that there were now two people in command on the summit. Spioenkop was a disaster for both the Brits and the Boers.

Thorneycroft, with his Mounted Infantry, stayed on in South Africa for the duration of the war. They helped drive the Boers out of Natal, and were part of Buller's advance into the Eastern Transvaal. With Buller advancing to Belfast, Thorneycroft was assigned to protecting the rail link between Pretoria and Durban.

At the beginning of 1901, Thorneycroft and his unit were assigned to the Orange Free State, spending the remainder of the war in this district and surrounds. Lord Kitchener described Thorneycroft as 'an absolutely reliable officer of great experience, common-sense and force of character.'



Picture: Officers of Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry

After the South African War (1899-1902) he saw service in Ireland before retiring from active service in 1912.

Thorneycroft died in 1931, aged 72, at his home Blandford Lodge in Reading, Berkshire.

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

Allan Gordon