

Newsletter

November 2023

As I have done for the past few months, I am quoting from selected headlines 'From the Editor' from the book 'The War Reporter – The Anglo-Boer War through the eyes of the Burghers', by J.E.H. Grobler. This is a book that is well worth having in your library – I don't do it justice with the few quotes I record.

November 1899: from the Editor's Comments (page 11) – *"One month since the outbreak of the war, and the end is not yet in sight! Here in Pretoria the general feeling is that the war cannot continue for more than another few months. Of the eventual outcome we have no doubt: defeat is unthinkable. Sooner or later the British government will have to capitulate, since the war will totally deplete state coffers. In the meantime, everybody is speculating on British commander General Redvers Buller's strategies."*

The Editorial Comment dated 18 November 1899 records the following (page 13) – *"The siege of the British garrisons in Kimberley, Mafeking and Ladysmith is being pursued less vigorously to enable burghers to leave for the other fronts. We wholeheartedly support this strategy."*

Picture: British Guns during the Siege of Kimberley



The Editorial Comment continues – *"Transvaalers did not win the War of Independence of 1880-81 because they forced the British garrisons within the Republic to surrender. They won because they blocked the British invasion of the Transvaal. If the Republics can ward off a British invasion long enough in this war, they will win again."*

One week later the Editorial Comment recorded (page 16) – *"The Republican military authorities' decision to unite their forces to halt the British offensive is a wise tactic. The concentration of thousands of burghers around towns like Mafeking, and now even Kuruman, to besiege the British garrisons there is not only a waste of energy, but also reflects bad judgement of priorities. We should concentrate our forces where the war will either be won or lost."*

November 1900: from the Editor's Comments (page 99) – *"In the past month the Republican forces have achieved variable success. Commandant de Wet suffered his biggest setback at Bothaville, but soon afterwards restored his reputation with a good victory at Dewetsdorp. In the Transvaal General Ben Viljoen and Commandant Chris Muller gave a good account of themselves, but General Joachim Fourie's death is a tragic setback."*

The comment continues – *"The news from Europe is not very encouraging. Germany will almost certainly not intervene on the side of the Republics – and as long as Germany remains passive,*

nobody else will put pressure on the British. Our hope now rests on President Kruger, who has just been received with unequalled enthusiasm in Europe. Hopefully his stature will convince the German and other governments that it is now high time to ensure that justice and right are re-established in the Republics."



November 1901: from the Editor's Comments (page 127) – *"The best news of the past month is without doubt that the Republican forces, especially in the Cape Colony, are pursuing the struggle with undiminished enthusiasm, making life difficult for the massive British army in spite of their own limited numbers. British reaction to the presence of Commandant Manie Maritz's burghers close to Cape Town indicates panic over their inability to end the war: they seem to be transforming the whole Cape Peninsula into a defensive area."*

Picture: Commandant Manie Maritz

There are a number of other articles in the book by Grobler, and to quote just a few lines from these articles (page 130):

- *"Tens of thousands of Khakis participate in massive drives, capturing thousands of cattle, but achieving very little military success. President Steyn issued a proclamation on 2 November that lowers to 14 the age at which boys become eligible for war service."*
- *"After a series of battles in October, things became very quiet in the Transvaal Republic during November, without any side gaining a significant advantage on the other. On 11 November the Khakis captured General du Toit's laager at Doornkop. Nine days later a British unit captured the highly respected Commandant Fanie Buys of the Heidelberg Commando. This was shortly after a successful attack by Buys and his men on a British guard post of 50 soldiers near Villiers."*

As I have mentioned before J.E.H. Grobler's book 'The War Reporter – the Anglo-Boer War through the eyes of the Burghers' is a book I refer to often, just to get a different perspective on what happened at various battles I research. Occasionally I find some valuable information.

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

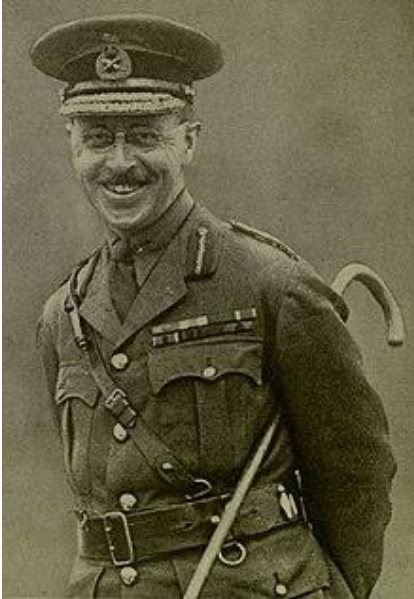
1901

Lt. L.C. Maygar	Victoria Mounted Rifles	Geelhoutboom - Natal
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Victoria Cross of the Month

Lieutenant Richard Ernest William Turner – 13th Royal Canadian Dragoons

Richard Ernest William Turner was born on 25 July 1871. He was commissioned in the Royal Canadian Dragoons and present with them in the rear-guard action at Leliesfontein, Komati River.



One of his men, Trooper Hilder, recalled, *"The guns were in great danger of being captured. Lieutenant Turner galloped up and shouted, 'dismount and hold back the enemy!'*

I remember distinctly him saying, 'never let it be said the Canadians had let their guns be taken' ... again Lieutenant Turner galloped up, and now seriously wounded in the neck and his arm shattered ... but the important thing was, the guns of D Battery had not been captured; they had been saved by the stubborn resistance of the Royal Canadian Dragoons."

Picture: Lieutenant-General Richard Turner V.C.

Turner's diary recorded, *"then things began to happen. About 200 mounted Boers charged down on our rear-guard shooting wildly from horseback in an effort to capture our two guns. In the meantime I had picked up a bullet in my left arm but used this as an example to the men to rally. As we fell back, I dismounted the handful with me, about a dozen men and then just got another bullet through my neck, my horse was twice wounded."*

Citation:

Date of act of bravery 7 November 1900. Later in the day when the Boers again threatened seriously to capture the guns, Lieutenant Turner, although twice previously wounded, dismounted and deployed his men at close quarters, and drove off the Boers, thus saving the guns.

(London Gazette 23 April 1901)

The rear-guard was abandoned by British infantry. When Lieutenant Turner heard of this, he rallied 12 Canadians and appealed to their patriotism. Using his wound as an example he shouted, *"never let it be said that the Canadians let their guns be captured."* They then ambushed 100 men of the Carolina Commando, killing their commander.

Turner received another wound, in his neck, and was captured with his surviving men but later released with them. The Boers were impressed by the Canadians and treated them so humanely that they were specially thanked by General Smith-Dorrien afterwards.

Turner was later mentioned in despatches three times and promoted Lieutenant-Colonel. In 1900 he married Harriet Gooday of London and had a son and a daughter. On 19 April 1901, Turner was created a Companion of the DSO. During World War 1 he commanded the 3rd Canadian Infantry Brigade in France until August 1915, then as a Major-General commanded the 2nd Canadian Division for over a year.

Turner was recalled to England in 1917 to command the Canadian Forces in Great Britain. By June 1917 he was a Lieutenant-General and by May 1918 Chief of the General Staff Overseas Military Forces of Canada. For his services he was mentioned in despatches and created a CB and a KCMB.

Lieutenant-General Sir Richard Turner attended the 1956 V.C. Reunion in London.

He died at Quebec on 19 June 1961, and is buried in the Mt. Hermon Cemetery. His medals were bequeathed to the Royal Canadian Dragoons Museum in New Brunswick.

Picture: Lieutenant-General Richard Turner V.C.'s grave



Anniversary of the birth of Boer General – Lucas Meyer – 19 November 1846



Lucas Johannes Meyer was the grandson of his namesake, a Voortrekker leader who trekked to Natal in the late 1830's. As a young man, Meyer lived in Ladysmith and Newcastle, but in the mid 1860's he settled in the Northern Natal district of Utrecht.

In 1877, when Britain annexed the then Transvaal Republic, Meyer was one of the leading Boer figures who agitated for the Boers to rebel against British rule.

When the First Boer War (1880-81) broke out, Meyer took up arms and was seriously wounded at the Battle of Ingogo (also known as the Battle of Schuinshoogte), near Newcastle on 8 February 1881. This injury prevented him from taking part in the Battle of Majuba.

Picture: General Lucas Meyer

In 1884 Meyer commanded a commando of Boers who assisted the Zulu Prince Dinuzulu during the power struggle against his brother Zibhebhu. Meyer's help enabled Dinuzulu to defeat his brother, and as compensation, Dinuzulu gave a portion of land in Northern Natal to the Boers. Meyer named this land the Nieuwe Republiek (New Republic) – which, according to references, was only recognised by the Transvaal and Germany. After the First Boer War the old Transvaal Republic was named the South African Republic, and in the mid 1880's the New Republic was incorporated into the South African Republic as the district of Vryheid. Meyer played a major role in the governing of this district.



Picture: Prince Dinuzulu

Meyer was a friend and confidant of Commandant-General Piet Joubert, who appointed him as General and Commander of the South-Eastern commandos of the Republic, after the disastrous Jameson Raid had alerted the Boers to the intentions of Great Britain.

When the South African War broke out in October 1899 Meyer was ready for the invasion of Northern Natal. He commanded the Boer forces that attacked Dundee at the Battle of Talana on 20 October 1899. However, soon after this success, he had to return to his farm due to ill health, and Louis Botha took over command of his force. In February 1900 he was well enough to resume battle duties and he was present at the Battle of Vaal Krantz. After the Relief of Ladysmith he

organised the Boer defence of the Biggarsburg which delayed General Buller's advance into the Transvaal.



In June 1900 ill health again took its toll and Meyer took no further part in the war. However, at the conclusion of the war, Meyer was part of the Boer Executive Council, and was one of the signatories of the Treaty of Vereeniging.

After the war, many of the senior Boers travelled to Europe soliciting help to re-establish their economy, and it was on a visit to Europe that he suffered a heart attack and died on 8 August 1902. He was 55 years old.

He is buried in the cemetery in Vryheid, Natal.

Picture: General Lucas Meyer's grave

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

Allan Gordon