

The Boer War as seen by OW's

Talking as you do, about concentration camps over a glass of red wine, I came across a reference to the Boer War to a Lieutenant General Sir Bindon Blood, who invited a certain Lieutenant Malan (on the Boer side) to inspect the Middleberg Camp. He reported that conditions were satisfactory, although six weeks later a War Commission (British) found the same camp to be badly administered!

The British sent out to South Africa a five women commission – almost unheard of in Victorian times – headed by a Mrs Millicent Fawcett, they travel around and visited all the camps and declared they were all atrocious. In fact many children died in these camps of typhoid.

What you may ask has this to do with the Worcester, well one of my term in 1949 is a many times grandson of that General, Roger Bindon Blood who lives here in Queensland.

This caused me to look at the Boer War which ran for two periods in Queen Victorias reign, the second being between 1899 to 1902. Apart from the seafarers both Royal Navy and Merchant Navy who transported the troops, stores, ammunition, and horses and mules needed for the campaign. The re-mounts, coming from all over the world India, Canada, Argentina and Burma.

There were at least participants of 26 different regiments from Great Britain, as well as Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand. I found that 18 OW's took part in the land component of the war, mainly foot regiments as well as cavalry. There was a Royal Naval Division and some of the artillery were modified naval 4.5 inch guns hauled by oxen!

Two OW's were awarded DSO's, Major R.R.C. Vernon (1888) and Major Henry P. Treby (1875) a Brigade Major in the Wilts and Dorset Regiment.

The Boer War brought two new words into the English lexicon; Commando, a small group of guerrillas, and surprisingly, concentration camp, where the British placed women and children of the Boer Commandos.

The Boers, early in the piece, isolated and then set siege to three large cities, Kimberley a gold mining town with Cecil Rhodes residing; Ladysmith with a General White and his forces, and perhaps the most recognised one, Mafeking where Baden-Powell was organising the defence.

Uncounted and unnamed OW's were involved in bringing 400,346 horses, mules and donkeys to South Africa; in the relief of Kimberley, some 213 were killed or died in one day!

The troops from Great Britain, were 7 regiments from Scotland, 2 from Wales, 16 from English counties and 4 Guards regiments.

The "Black Week" happened when the British were trounced by the Boers at Stormberg, Magersfontein and Colenso, which rather stopped the relief column which was hoping to reach Kimberley. This poor showing was seized upon by

the British press who grossly over exaggerated these losses along with further defeat at Skion Kop.

The majority of the OW's were part of the British Army, but six were not, Lieut. Col. Gilbert Godson DSO (WWI) Croix de Guerre and Ordre pour Merite (Canadian)(1889) (later to be called Godson-Godson) and became the Provost Marshall for all of Canada, an officer of the Canadian Infantry. Stuart Murray Holmden (1896) a Captain in the South African Horse. Lieut. Col. John Medley Loveband Fulford (1895) in the South African Light Horse, his other claim to fame he was to share a POW cell with Winston Churchill after the Battle of Colenso. 2nd Lieut. Edward Phelips (1887) in the Cape Mounted Rifles. Capt. Ernest William Wise (1885), in the South African Light Infantry. Finally of the Commonwealth forces, was Major John Henry Alexander Lee (1870) of the Australian Commonwealth Light Horse. Most of them seem to prefer having a horse under them rather than 'shanks pony'!

The OW's in the British Army Corps, in order of leaving the Worcester, some of which would have known each other before arriving in South Africa.

Percy Gowen Poole (1872), in the Surrey Rifles. Major Malcolm James Russell Dundas (1874). Major Henry Treby DSO (1875) Wilts and Dorset. Francis William Dawson (1877), Royal Scots Fusiliers. Frederick James Grieve (1880), Essex Regiment. Bentinck Y Bingham (1880), Lancashire Fusiliers. Major Ernest Alfred Russell Howell (1885) Dragoon Guards. Major Robert Rupert Charles Vernon DSO (1888) Royal Fusiliers. Richard Hennessy (1890) Gordon Highlander – wounded. Herbert Bernard Land (1893) Royal Irish Fusiliers. William Reginald Carey (1895) North Lancashire Regiment. Frank Moore Watney (1898) Royal Irish Rifles.

10 different Infantry regiments and 6 cavalry regiments, with 5 majors, the remainder either 2nd Lieutenants or Captains (Army)

The Boer Wars, in hindsight were a set up by Cecil Rhodes who wanted the whole of Southern Africa to be part of the British Empire, along with Sir Alfred Milner the High Commissioner for South Africa. There were too many Generals – various – involved getting each other's way or to indecisive action .

Going back to the beginning of this article, General Kitchener's harsh methods brought about needless deaths in the concentration camps. He, Kitchener later died with another OW off the coast of Scotland when the cruiser HMS Hampshire, commanded by Captain Savill (1885) sank, believed to have hit a mine.

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