

# THE CITY OF LONDON IMPERIAL VOLUNTEERS [ C. I. V. ]

Read by Deputy John Holland, C.B.E., J.P., D.L.  
29 November 1999

The first Anglo-Boer War or South African War occurred in 1880-81 when the Afrikaners [Farmers] of Transvaal under Paul[us] Kruger [1825-1904] rebelled against British rule. After a massive defeat of the British Garrison at Majuba Hill, the Transvaal regained its independence and acquired self government under the British Crown by the Pretoria Convention, which left Britain in control of foreign relations and with the power to veto legislation relating to Africans. Paul Kruger was President of the South African Republic [Transvaal] from 1883-1902.

On 12th October 1899, following the expiry of time in a Boer ultimatum calling for the withdrawal of British troops, the second Boer War began. The Afrikaners of the South African Republic and the Orange Free State invaded British territory with shots fired at Kraaipan and prepared to lay siege to Ladysmith [on the railway line to Durban and the principal British military depot in Natal and headquarters of the 12,000 strong British Force in South Africa, commanded by Sir George White], Mafeking in the north west and Kimberley in the south west, both in Cape Colony. In the first two weeks three battles were fought: Talana Hill on the 20th October [at which Major-General Sir William Penn Symons was killed]; Elandsplaagte on the 21st; and Lombard's Kop on the 30th. After this General Redvers Buller V.C. took over command. Though his strategy was sound, in execution he was completely out of his depth. At the time of his appointment he had pleaded that he was not a 'good first man' but would make a capable chief subordinate. The accuracy of this personal assessment was displayed in the three disasters of Black Week, namely Stormberg, 10th December; Magersfontein, 11th December and Colenso, 15th December 1899. Back home, Britain was amazed and dismayed. The press-begotten ideas of a cowardly enemy were banished. The Government on 17th December appointed Field Marshal Lord Roberts as Commander in Chief in South Africa and General Lord Kitchener as Chief of Staff. By the end of the year the entire Field Force of 47,000 men would arrive in South Africa, but this was not deemed sufficient and the call for Volunteers from home and the British Empire was made.

Meanwhile a ground-swell of opinion in the City and wider London warmed quickly to sending a Volunteer Force and on 13 December Colonel later Sir

Charles Boxall placed a proposal before Alfred Newton, the Lord Mayor, for the Corporation to take financial and organisational responsibility for raising such a force for service in South Africa. Two days later an interview at the War Office between the Commander in Chief, Lord Wolseley, Lord Stanley, Boxall and the Lord Mayor led to an unofficial intimation that such an offer would be accepted. At a meeting at the Mansion House on 19 December the City Livery Companies, merchants and bankers pledged their support. The Lord Mayor agreed to see the wish become a reality and the next day, and at subsequent meetings, the Lord Mayor presented the proposals and reported progress to the Court of Common Council. Here are some relative extracts from the minutes of the Court of Common Council, in all of which Newton himself addressed the Court:

20 December 1899

“... the authorities would be willing to favourably consider certain suggestions from the City of London for organizing, equipping, and despatching to South Africa a contingent of selected Volunteers.... The scheme ... was as follows:- That the City would like to provide a regiment of 1,000 men between approved ages, all chosen from marksmen in Volunteer regiments, recommended for service by their commanding officers, and medically examined, not more than 20 men to come from any one regiment.... The entire equipment and the cost of sending the regiment to be borne by the Corporation, the City of London, and the City Livery Companies, as they have cheerfully borne such expense in the past.”

11 January 2000

“... since its meeting on the 20<sup>th</sup> December last, when the sum of £25,000 was unanimously voted towards the cost of raising and establishing ‘The City of London Imperial Volunteers’, the movement then inaugurated has made rapid progress.... I am enabled to report that the sum of £100,000 originally asked for has already been subscribed.

The proposal in the first instance was to raise a regiment of 1,000 men, of whom not less than 250 should be mounted, and to equip and convey them to the seat of war; but... the scheme has now developed into one of larger proportions, and the force as at present arranged will consist of 1,400 men, of whom some 350 will be mounted infantry.

This Honourable Court will hear with satisfaction that the Ancient and Honourable Artillery Company have identified themselves with the City of London Imperial Volunteers, to which they have contributed a substantial quota of men, who will be placed in charge of a battery of 12½-pounder quick-firing guns of the newest type.... The Royal Warrant for the creation of the City of London Imperial

Volunteers, dated the 24<sup>th</sup> December, 1899, was published the following week, and ... the first contingent of 17 officers and 500 men will sail from Southampton on Saturday, 13<sup>th</sup> instant, under Colonel Cholmondeley, of the London Rifle Brigade.... A further contingent will embark by the steamer 'Gaul' on the 20<sup>th</sup> instant, about which date the s.s. 'Ariosto' will sail with the remainder of the officers and 500 men. Mr. J.R. Ellerman has offered us free transport for 100 men by the 'Armenian', due to sail 28<sup>th</sup> instant, by which date all stores and material will have been dispatched.

The Freedom of the City will be conferred on the first 500 men and officers tomorrow (Friday), commencing at half-past nine."

25 January 1900

The Lord Mayor reported "that the first 500 men and 17 officers ... duly embarked on the 13<sup>th</sup> instant as intended and a further contingent of 27 officers and 800 men sailed on the 20<sup>th</sup> instant for South Africa, under Colonel Mackinnon [Grenadier Guards] (Commandant) and Lieutenant-Colonel The Earl of Albemarle. A third contingent of 140 men with 4 officers will depart next Saturday from Southampton... Next Saturday the Battery of quick-firing guns will be ready for embarkation. After the departure of this Battery, the Corporation and the City of London will have carried out, beyond the fullest extent, the obligation which in the first instance they took upon themselves. Previous to embarkation the Freedom of this Imperial City has been and is being conferred upon officers and men."

8 February 1900

"The total numbers despatched are 1,559 men and 50 officers, upwards of 350 being Mounted Infantry... Field and land transport with Tent and Camp equipment have also been furnished. Military experts have expressed their admiration at the physique and bearing of the men, as well as their entire satisfaction with the completeness in every respect of the equipment, which includes field telescopes, binoculars, range-finders, wire-nippers, &c., &c. Helmets for the entire Corps are being forwarded. Promptness and exactitude, so vitally important in military matters, have been adhered to."

The speed of the operation was indeed impressive. Colonel Boxall undertook the practical military organisation of the new unit from two rooms loaned for the purpose at the Mansion House, with the Lord Mayor's son, Harry K. Newton, providing the administrative support. The Lord Mayor himself cabled his agent in Cape Town, Abe Bailey, with instructions to purchase 400 infantry mounts and 100 transport horses, drawing on a sum of £12,500 held at the local branch of the

Standard Bank of Africa. Writing to the Lady Mayoress in January 1900, the Earl of Albemarle, the Commander of the CIV Infantry, enthused “I do not think any Regiment ever left England better equipped, in better spirits and with kinder send off than the City Imperials”. The Commandant of the Regiment, Colonel Mackinnon, shortly afterwards confided to his diary that the only parts of the outfit found to be defective were their rifles, the only thing the War Office supplied!

The Honourable Artillery Company (HAC) contributed greatly to the success of the Regiment, supplying a total of 154 men, of whom 26 served in the Battalion, 30 in the Mounted Infantry and 98 in the Battery. The Mounted Infantry landed on 29 January 1900 at Cape Town and were joined in the middle of February by Colonel Mackinnon and the Battalion. When Colonel Hamilton stormed the Boer lines at Doornkop in May, during the British advance on Johannesburg, he gave the Regiment a place of honour in the front of the battle line. Thomas Pakenham in his history of **The Boer War** notes that the CIV suffered fewer casualties than regular units, having “...little of the Balaclava mentality to unlearn. They had made their charge in short rushes... and took care to offer as little of a target as possible”. There was a great deal of hard and continuous marching during the campaign and the CIV did their share, at one period covering no less than 523 miles in 40 marching days. In addition to skirmishing, convoys and garrison duty, the Battalion served with distinction at the Battle of Diamond Hill in June 1900.

When the Volunteers returned to London in October 1900, the enthusiasm was unprecedented. Erskine Childers, who served as a driver in the Battery, wrote about “that wonderful journey to London, with its growing tumult of feelings, as station after station, with their ribboned and shouting throngs, flashed by... The rest seems a dream, a dream of miles of upturned faces, of dancing colours, or roaring voices...”. The Volunteers were received and welcomed by the Lord Mayor and the Corporation at the Guildhall on 29 October, an event commemorated in the painting by J.H.F. Bacon in the Guildhall Art Gallery collection.

Returning to South Africa, in March 1901 peace negotiations failed at Middelburg, principally because the Boer leaders refused to give up their countries’ independence. In April 1902 the Boer governments again put proposals to Kitchener from Klerksdorp but these were again rejected. The guerrilla leaders felt unable to enter detailed negotiations so they called a conference of sixty representatives of the Transvaal and Orange Free State with British approval at Vereeniging, a railway town on their south/north border. These began on 15th

May 1902 and ended with the signing of the peace treaty just before midnight on 31st May 1902. Independence was surrendered and the authority of King Edward VII recognised in exchange for the repatriation of prisoners of war; a general amnesty, with a few exceptions, was declared; the Dutch language was given limited protection in the Courts; various economic safeguards were agreed, including the honouring of the Republican War Debt; and a promise of eventual self government was made, together with an agreement not to extend the franchise to Blacks until responsible government had been introduced. Both sides longed for peace and Louis Botha [1862-1919] and Jan Smuts [1870-1950] recognised this window of opportunity to wring concessions before their side was totally defeated.

The British Army lost 22,000 men during the War, 13,250 from disease, mainly enteric fever, and 8,750 from wounds. In addition 31,000 medical cases had to be evacuated home. Another source (Randolph S. Churchill) states a cost to Britain of 30,000 lives and £250 million.

A famous commentator and active participant in the war was Winston Churchill. In his maiden speech to the House of Commons on Monday 18th February 1901, four days after taking his seat, the newly elected Tory member for Oldham, then aged 26, referring to the Boers, had said “No people in the world received so much verbal sympathy and so little support. If I were a Boer fighting in the field - and if I were a Boer I hope I should be fighting in the field - I would not allow myself to be taken in by any message of sympathy, not even if it was signed by a hundred Honourable Members. Of course we can only promise, and it rests with the Boers whether they will accept our conditions. They may refuse the generous terms offered them, and stand or fall by their old cry, ‘death or independence’. { IRISH CHEERS !! } [ but now the trap!! ] I do not see anything to rejoice at in that prospect, because if it be so, the war will enter upon a very sad and gloomy phase. If the Boers remain deaf to the voice of reason, and blind to the hand of friendship, if they refuse all overtures and disdain all terms, then, while we cannot help admiring their determination and endurance, we can only hope that our own race, in the pursuit of what they feel to be a righteous cause, will show determination as strong and endurance as lasting. It is wonderful that Honourable Members who form the Irish Party should find it in their hearts to speak and act as they do in regard to a war in which so much has been accomplished by the courage, the sacrifices, and, above all, by the military capacity of Irishmen. There is a practical reason, which I trust Honourable Members will not think it presumptuous in me to bring to their notice: it is that they would be well advised cordially to co-operate with His Majesty’s Government in bringing the war to a speedy conclusion,

because they must know that no Irish question or agitation can possibly take any hold on the imagination of the people of Great Britain so long as all our thoughts are with the soldiers who are fighting in South Africa”.

Turning to the war itself, Mr Churchill welcomed the decision to send new reinforcements, and pressed for more. He praised his military patron, Sir Bindon Blood, and swiped at the persistent and venomous critic of his subaltern days, Henry Labouchere, the editor of Truth and one of the members for Northampton. “Some Honourable Members have seen fit, either in this place or elsewhere, to stigmatise this as a war of greed.... If, as the Honourable Member for Northampton has several times suggested, certain capitalists spent money in bringing on this war in the hope that it would increase the value of their mining properties, they know now that they made an uncommonly bad bargain. With the mass of the nation, with the whole people of the country, this war from beginning to end has only been a war of duty”. { And now the PERORATION ! } “ I think that if any Honourable Members are feeling unhappy about the state of affairs in South Africa I would recommend them a receipt [? recipe] from which I myself derived much exhilaration. Let them look to the other great dependencies and colonies of the British Empire and see what the effect of the war has been there. Whatever we have lost in doubtful friends in Cape Colony we have gained ten times, or perhaps twenty times, over in Canada and Australia, where the people - down to the humblest farmer in the most distant provinces - have by their effective participation in the conflict been able to realise as they never could realise before, that they belong to the Empire, and that the Empire belongs to them”.

[NOTE. Young Winston by mid September 1899 was convinced there would be war as was a large body of opinion in England].

On 18th September he was offered the post of war correspondent by Alfred Harmsworth of the Daily Mail but telegraphed his friend Oliver Borthwick and persuaded him to engage him [WSC] for the Morning Post. Churchill sailed from Southampton on RMS ‘Dunottar Castle’ on 14th October. On the same ship was General Sir Redvers Buller VC as Commander of British Forces in South Africa. On 31st October the ‘Dunottar Castle’ arrived in Cape Town.

## **Sources and bibliography**

**Common Council Minutes**, 20 December 1899, 11 January 1900, 25 January 1900, 8 February 1900, 28 June 1900, 18 October 1900, 15 November 1900, 13 December 1900, 20 December 1900  
W.H. Mackinnon **The Journal of the C.I.V. in South Africa** (1901)  
Leonard Thompson **A History of South Africa** (1995)  
Raymond Sibbald **The War Correspondents. The Boer War** (1993)  
Thomas Pakenham **The Boer War** (1997 ed.)  
Peter Warwick (ed.) **The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902** (1980)  
Field Marshal Lord Carver **The National Army Museum Book of the Boer War** (1999)  
G. Goold Walker **The Honourable Artillery Company** (1954)  
G.S.P. Freeman-Grenville **Atlas of British History** (1979)  
Randolph S. Churchill **Winston S. Churchill** (vol.2., 1967)

TransGHA, vol.VIII, no.6