



The South African Military History Society

Die Suid-Afrikaanse Krygshistoriese Vereniging

Founded 1966

P.O. Box 59227
Kengray
2100 South Africa

Tel (+27) 010-237-0676
Fax (+27) 086-617-8002

Email: scribe@samilitaryhistory.org
Web: <http://samilitaryhistory.org>

NEWSLETTER - FEBRUARY 2012

2012 got off to a good start for the Society when 99 people attended the January meeting. This was, as usual, opened by the Chairman, Ivor Little, who started by wishing all present the compliments of the season. A special welcome was afforded to Tim Waudby who was celebrating his 90th birthday.

On a more serious note, Ivor announced the death of two of the Society's members who had passed on during the previous month. These were the well-known South African radio personality, Robin Alexander, and Professor Mike Laing, an Honorary Life Member of the Society, resident in Durban.

Ivor then asked former Chairman, Bob Smith, to come forward and give details of the next Society tour. This will be an air-conditioned coach tour on Saturday, 10 March 2012, to Paul Kruger's farm at the Kedar Country Hotel, outside Rustenburg. A guided tour of the farm and adjoining museum has been arranged, as well as a light lunch. At the time of writing, the finer details were still to be arranged, but Bob will have more information at the February meeting and he can be contacted on 083-858-6616 for further details.

The next item on the agenda was the curtain-raiser, "The Invasion of Britannia - 43 AD" by John Molloy. John has addressed the Society before when he lectured on "The Battle of Teutoburg Forest" and is a well-known amateur historian and speaker.

Using an excellent computer-generated series of images, capably managed by his grandson, John kept the audience deeply interested in this not all that well-known part of British history. His talk started in Rome in 55 BC with Julius Caesar's unsuccessful attempt at subduing the then Britannia. Interest in conquering Britannia was aroused once more in the time of Caligula but it was his successor, Claudius, who decided to once again attempt it. This was brought about by a man named Verica, a member of the Atrebates tribe who, in the course of internecine fighting, had been deposed by one Caratacus. Verica fled to Rome and asked Claudius to help him regain his throne. Claudius, who had just ascended the throne needed a military or political triumph to consolidate his position and thus agreed to help Verica.

A Roman expeditionary force of 40 000 men, under the command of Aulus Plautius, was put together and crossed the Channel in 800 transports. They landed at modern day Richborough in Kent, with a possible diversionary landing at Selsey Bill near Portsmouth. On disembarking, the Romans were faced by the usurper, Caratacus and his brother. The two sides clashed at the River Stour and the Romans drove the Britons back 60 kms to somewhere between Rochester and Maidstone, on the River Medway. A fierce two-day battle

followed, which resulted in the Britons falling back on the River Thames, only to be defeated there as well. Caratacus was pushed back to his capital, Camulodunum (modern-day Colchester) which also fell to the Romans. They staged a victory march, led by the Emperor Claudius himself, through the city and then built it up as their new capital.

Caratacus now resorted to guerrilla warfare, making his base in the mountains of Wales, while one by one the other British tribes surrendered to Aulus Plautius. Ignoring Caratacus, the Romans continued subduing the rest of Britannia. The Roman general Vespasian (later to become emperor) led his troops into Dorset where he fought a few minor battles and destroyed a large number of British fortifications, the ruins of which can still be seen today.

In AD 47, Publius Ostorius Scapula replaced Aulus Plautius and by AD 48 had effectively subdued all British territory south of the line from the River Humber to the River Severn. He then took on Caratacus in North Wales and defeated him in two engagements. The scene was repeated in AD 51 when the Romans were once again victorious. Caratacus escaped to modern Yorkshire but his family was captured. Caratacus himself was betrayed by the local queen and also fell into the hands of the Romans. He was taken to Rome but by then had acquired such a reputation as a worthy enemy that he and his family were spared and allowed to live peacefully in Rome. It took the Romans another 100 years to fully pacify Britannia and leave the British the heritage they have today.

At the conclusion of this excellent talk there was a brief question period, after which Ivor introduced the next speaker. This was Pierre du Toit, who has also addressed the Society on a previous occasion. Pierre has had a lifelong interest in military history, especially the Anglo-Boer War.

The subject of his talk was "A Boer Lieutenant's War" and Pierre had based it on his grandfather's diary and a slide show his grandfather had used trying to make ends meet when he was destitute after the peace of 1902. Pierre has added to this slide show with images of his own and has produced a presentation of a very high order and which held the audience fascinated by his story.

Pierre's grandfather, known as "Mike" du Toit, was born in Hopetown in 1868 and commissioned as a lieutenant in the Transvaal Staats-Artillerie in 1897. He was a keen young soldier and shortly after joining the Regiment was entrusted with the task of editing the Staats-Artillerie's monthly journal "Voorwaarts". Rumblings of an approaching war with the British could already be heard clearly and the Transvaal Commandant-General, Piet Joubert, chose Mike and a companion for an undercover mission to spy out the British military positions and ascertain their future intentions. This mission turned into a bit of a comic opera farce as it was leaked to the press before they set off. Notwithstanding this, Mike and his colleague managed to complete their assignment and return home with the necessary information.

In the continual build-up to the war, Mike's regiment was put under the command of General Lucas Meyer and took part in an advance along the Transvaal bank of the Buffalo River, entering Natal when war was declared and the Second Anglo-Boer War commenced. The Boers pushed forward and it fell to Mike's battery to fire the first shell into the British camp at Dundee.

Pierre then gave a detailed account of the Battle of Talana, which resulted in a British withdrawal to Ladysmith. During this battle Mike was wounded by shell fire, receiving a shattered leg. He was carried off the battle field by a comrade by the name of Fred Rothman, who ran a gauntlet of fire to get him to the nearest field hospital. There he was operated on by a British surgeon, Major F A B Daly, who, together with the

British patients and staff, had been captured by the Boers. Daly managed to save Mike's leg and he was safely evacuated by hospital train to Pretoria. There he was placed in the Volkshospitaal where the remaining shrapnel in his leg was removed. This procedure was successful and Mike was discharged to convalesce. He was still hobbling around on duties in Pretoria when the city fell to the British and Mike became a prisoner of war, spending the rest of the war on parole in Gordon's Bay. He had played a short part in a major war but his diaries and photographs proved to be the basis of an excellent talk by his grandson, many years later.

After the usual question period, Ivor called upon committee member David Scholtz to come forward and thank both speakers, before adjourning the meeting for refreshments.

*Ivor Little,
Scribe.*

* * * * *

December 2011 Journals

Paid up members will have their December Journals posted during January. If you do not receive your Journal by the beginning of February please contact joan@trolleyscan.com because you MIGHT be one of the handful of people who deposited directly into the Society account during 2011 without giving sufficient identification for the subscription to be correctly credited.

* * * * *

Annual Prizes in Johannesburg

Please would members who attended the Johannesburg lectures vote for the best lecture in 2011 by **e-mailing Colin Dean at chdean@icon.co.za (preferred method)** OR completing the form on the web-site OR filling one in at the lecture meetings on 8 February or 9 March OR printing out and completing the form in this newsletter and posting it to PO Box 59227 Kengray 2100 or fax it to 086 617 8002.

The prizewinners will be announced at the AGM in April.

* * * * *

STOP PRESS - MARCH 10th TOUR

Bob Smith was advised on Monday 30th January that the Museum at President Kruger's farm had been closed. The intended tour thus can no longer take place.

However Mrs Felicia Fourie has offered to guide a morning tour with the theme "Pretoria - 100 days of siege" about the FIRST war of independence on that Saturday. Cars will be parked at the Museum and the group will travel in an air-conditioned bus around Pretoria.

Bob will have cost details and lists at the lecture meeting on 9th February but anybody wanting more details may phone him (only after 6pm, **please!**) on 082 858 6616.

FORTHCOMING LECTURES

Johannesburg:

9th February

CR Colin Harris

The American Civil War on Water: Introduction to the naval aspect

ML John Myburgh

All Quiet on the Western Front

8th March

CR Marjorie Dean

Military Miscellany

ML Robin Smith

The Campaign of Vicksburg

KZN in Durban:

9th February 2012:

DDH: Rob Crawley

Jackie Fisher and the Dreadnaught

Main: Capt. (SAN) Charles Ross

The Work of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

8th March

DDH Charles Whiteing

The twilight of the U-boats

Main: Stephen Coan

Rider Haggard and the Anglo-Zulu War

Cape Town:

9th February

Rear Admiral C H Bennett

The South African Navy's Role in Operation Savannah

8th March

Dr Rodney Warwick

The Rand Revolt, 1922

SAMHSEC:

13th February

Curtain raiser Alan Montgomery

The Battle of Algoa

Main John Lemon

The Military Origins of the Volkswagen Beetle

Contact details

For Cape Town details contact Ray Hattingh 021-592-1279(am) ray@saarp.co.za

For Eastern Cape details contact Malcolm Kinghorn 041-373-4469 culturev@lantic.net

For KwaZulu-Natal details contact Ken Gillings 031-702-4828 ken.gillings@mweb.co.za

For Gauteng details contact Joan Marsh 010-237-0676 scribe@samilitaryhistory.org