

TWO VICTORIA CROSSES NEAR KRUGERSDORP

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Twee Victoriakruise naby Krugersdorp

Tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog het 'n veldslag op 11 Julie 1900 naby Dwarsvlei in die omgewing van Krugersdorp plaasgevind. Hier was die 19de Britse Brigade deur genl.-maj. H.L. Smith-Dorrien aangevoer. Die Krugersdorpse Kommando wat 'n hinderlaag vir die Britse Magte gelê het, was onder leiding van veggeneraal S.F. Oosthuizen. Die skermutseling het van 11:30 tot na sonsondergang geduur. Die grootste gedeelte van die aksie het om die twee Britse veldkanonne gedraai.

As gevolg van die hewige vuur van die Boere op die bemanningslede van die kanonne is laasgenoemde tydelik verlaat, maar 'n poging is later tog deur die Britte aangewend om die kanonne te herwin. Dit is egter elke keer gefnuik deur die akkurate vuur van Boerekant. Kaptein D.R. Younger is noodlottig gewond tydens 'n poging om die kanonne te herwin en het kort daarna aan sy wonde beswyk. As gevolg van hul poging om die kanonne te herwin, is die Victoriakruis later aan kapteins W.E. Gordon en Younger toegeken.

Na sonsonder het twintig Boere onder leiding van genl. Oosthuizen die kanonne bestorm om hulle te buit. Die aanstormende Boere is egter deur hewige Britse vuur in hul spore gestuit. Generaal Oosthuizen is tydens hierdie poging swaar gewond en het 'n maand later beswyk. Alhoewel die kanonne nie gebuit is nie, is die Britse opmars gestuit.

During the Anglo-Boer War a battle took place near Dwarsvlei in the vicinity of Krugersdorp on 11 July 1900. Here the British 19th Brigade was led by Maj.-Gen. H.L. Smith-Dorrien. The Krugersdorp Commando which laid an ambush for the British were under the command of Field General S.F. Oosthuizen. The action took place from 11:30 till after dark. The greater part of the action revolved around the two British field guns.

As a result of heavy Boer fire pouring down upon the crew the guns had to be temporarily abandoned, while subsequent British attempts to bring in the guns, were once more prevented by accurate Boer fire. In an effort to bring in the guns Capt. D.R. Younger was mortally wounded and subsequently died soon after. As a result of their efforts to bring in the guns Capt. W.E. Gordon and Younger were both awarded the Victoria Cross.

After dark Gen. Oosthuizen and twenty Boers stormed the guns in an attempt to capture them, but the Boers were stopped dead in their tracks by the heavy fire directed against them from the British. During this attempt Gen. Oosthuizen was heavily wounded, and he died a month later. Although the guns were not captured by the Boers they prevented the British from advancing any further.

Introduction

The Victoria Cross (VC) instituted on 29 January 1856, was to be a totally democratic award, available to officers and men alike. A Royal Warrant of 10 August 1858 stated that the VC could be awarded for "Acts of conspicuous courage and bravery under circumstances of extreme danger..." On 22 May 1920 a consolidating Royal Warrant was signed and the wording augmented to "Most conspicuous bravery or some daring or pre-eminent act of valour or self sacrifice or extreme devotion to duty in the presence of the enemy".¹ This indicates that the VC is a most exceptional award held in high esteem, and probably the most prestigious tribute for gallantry in the world.

P.E. Abbott and J.M.A. Tamplin, *British gallantry awards* (Enfield, 1971), pp. 310, 314, 317, 318.



Figure 1. Field General S.F. Oosthuizen (middle row, centre) and his field-cornets
Photograph: State Archives, Pretoria

When British troops marched through Pretoria, the capital of the Transvaal Republic, on 5 June 1900 the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) was anything but over. Lord F.S.R. Roberts (General Officer commanding the South African Field Force) waited in vain until 10 June for a surrender, then once more sent the British forces into battle.² Roberts found that the Boer forces had once again become active, this time to the west and north of Pretoria. In view of this he decided to clear this area, see to it that communications were made with Col R.S.S. Baden-Powell who was now in Rustenburg, and secure the area between the Magaliesberg and the Krugersdorp railway.³

It was during this period that Field Gen. S.F. Oosthuizen (Figure 1) was ordered by the Commandant-General of the Boer Forces of the Transvaal (Louis Botha) to return to Krugersdorp and re-organize the Boer commandos in that area. Accordingly, Oosthuizen who had been leading the Krugersdorp Commando near Balmoral left Balmoral and arrived at Krugersdorp with fifteen men.⁴ Here Oosthuizen roused the Boers to carry on with the fight, seeing that many of the Krugersdorp men had returned home filled with despair as a result of the British occupation of Pretoria.⁵

The district Superintendent of Police, Capt. G.M.H. Ritchie, who was also commander of the military police in the Krugersdorp district on 9 July issued a public notice in Krugersdorp to the effect that the Boers who were still in the commandos and living in Krugersdorp and district had to surrender their weapons to the Imperial authorities by 20 July, failing to do so their property in Krugersdorp and in the surrounding district would be confiscated and their families driven out of their homes.⁶ Notwithstanding this order Oosthuizen managed to spur on the Boers in this area to start fighting again.

Secret preparations were then made by the Boer forces to the west of Pretoria which would culminate in four separate actions on 11 July 1900 - all within 50 kms of Pretoria. At Onderstepoort the British were driven out of a range of hills by Gen. F.A. Grobler and at Silkaatsnek Gen. J.H. de la Rey forced the British to surrender. A third action was undertaken by Gen. Oosthuizen in the vicinity of Krugersdorp, and to the east of Pretoria at Witpoort - this being the only action on that day where the British did not give way to the Boer forces.⁷

During the first week of July the British 19th Brigade was being re-formed at Irene under the command of Maj. Gen. H.L. Smith-Dorrien (Figure 2).⁸ On 9 July Smith-Dorrien received orders to move to Krugersdorp by rail with the 1st Battalion Gordon Highlanders and the 2nd Battalion, The King's Shropshire Light Infantry.⁹ Smith-Dorrien arrived at Krugersdorp on 10 July where he joined the 19th Company, Imperial Yeomanry, and the 78th Battery, Royal Field Artillery, with two field-guns and a Colt machine-gun including transport for his two infantry battalions. With 1 350¹⁰ men at his disposal Smith-Dorrien was to march on Hekpoort where he would be joined by the Royal Scots Greys and two guns of the Royal Horse Artillery. His task was to clear the area in the vicinity of Hekpoort.¹¹ A later telegram ordered

2. T. Pakenham, *The Boer War* (Johannesburg, 1979), pp. 433-434.

3. A.D. Greenhill Gardyne, *The life of a regiment: The history of the Gordon Highlanders III* (London, 1972), p. 217.

4. F.V. Engelenburg en G.S. Preller (eds.), *Onze Krijgs-officiëren: Album van portretten met levens-schetsen der Transvaalse generaals en kommandanten e.a.* (Pretoria, 1904), p. 56.

5. D.W. Kruger and C.J. Beyers (eds.), *Dictionary of South African biography III* (Cape Town, 1977), p. 665.

6. Transvaal Archives Depot, Pretoria: P.A. Nierstrasz: Vol. 722A, p. 985.

7. L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times History of the war in South Africa 1899-1902, IV* (London, 1906), pp. 348-355.

8. *Digest of Service, Gordon Highlanders 1st Battalion - South Africa 1899-1902* (Aberdeen, n.d.), p. 55; *Digest of Service, The Kings Shropshire Light Infantry* (Shrewsbury, n.d.), n.p.

9. H. Smith-Dorrien, *Memories of forty-eight years service* (London, 1925), p. 217; *The true history of the War, IV. Being the official despatches and enclosures from the General Commanding-in-Chief the forces in South Africa* (London, n.d.).

10. A.D. Greenhill Gardyne, *The life of a regiment: The history of the Gordon Highlanders III*, p. 217, cites 1 335 men.

11. H. Smith-Dorrien, *Memories of forty-eight years service*, p. 217; *History of the War in South Africa 1899-1902, III* (London, 1908), p. 241.

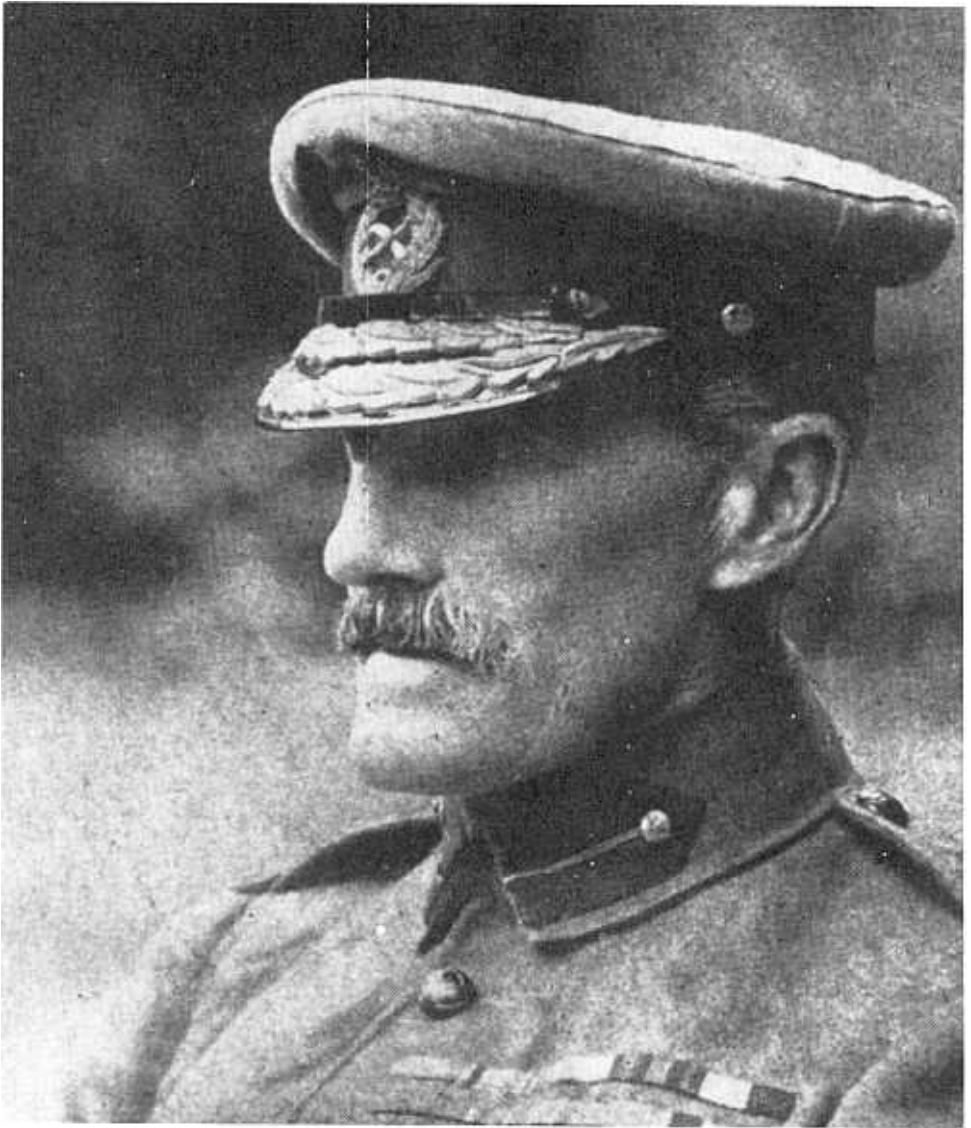


Figure 2. Major General H.L. Smith-Dorrien
Photograph: Gordon Highlanders Regimental Museum, Aberdeen, Scotland

him to Olifantsnek which he had to attack from the south while Baden-Powell attacked from the north.¹²

During the morning of Wednesday, 11 July Smith-Dorrien set out with his force, including three ambulances and five days supplies on 40 wagons in the direction of Hekpoort.¹³ The terrain was rough, with the Witwatersberg a barrier before Hekpoort. The heights of the Witwatersberg had therefore to be occupied before an advance on Hekpoort could be made.¹⁴

The skirmish near Dwarsvlei

After marching some 15 kms, with the Yeomanry acting as scouts and flanking patrols, the Yeomanry encountered heavy fire at about 11:30¹⁵ near Dwarsvlei farm.¹⁶ This fire was directed them from a hill (Z4) occupied by 120 men of the Krugersdorp Commando under Gen. Oosthuizen near his own farm (Dwarsvlei).¹⁷ Finding that the ridge (Z1, Z2 and Z3) to his left was unoccupied, Smith-Dorrien ordered the Yeomanry to seize it and moved the Gordon Highlanders with the two guns forward (to G1 and G2) with the order to open fire on the ridge (Z4) occupied by the Boer forces (Figure 3).¹⁸

Observing the British attempt to occupy the ridge (Z1, Z2 and Z3), some of the Boers galloped across a broad neck (from Z4 to Z3) singly and in pairs, to prevent the Yeomanry from reaching this ridge - a move which would have helped to halt the advance of the British. Before the Boers could reach this ridge the two guns had outrun their escort, passed between the two koppies, (G1 and G2) unlimbered, and opened fire on the ridge (Z4).¹⁹ Smith-Dorrien thought that the Yeomanry could not see the Boers galloping forward and that they would not get there before the enemy. He therefore ordered the Gordons to advance no further than the two koppies (G1 and G2) and the guns to withdraw from being exposed to Boer fire. By the time this order reached Lt A.J. Turner who was in charge of the guns, they were already under deadly fire from the Boers. The limbers had also withdrawn too far to the rear, and with the order to withdraw, they were unable to move forward for some time.²⁰

The Boer fire must have been accurate and concentrated: just after the Yeomanry were fired upon Capt. J. Miller of the Gordons described the phase of the action as follows:

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12. H. Smith-Dorrien, *Memories of forty-eight years service*, p. 218.
 13. Public Record Office, London: W.O. 105/9 Despatch from Maj. Gen. Smith-Dorrien to the Chief of the Staff, Krugersdorp, July 13th 1900, p. 1.
 14. *History of the War in South Africa 1899-1902*, III, p. 241.
 15. Public Record Office, London: W.O. 105/9 Despatch from Maj. Gen. Smith-Dorrien to the Chief of the Staff, Krugersdorp, July 13th 1900, p. 1; A.D. Greenhill Gardyne, *The life of a regiment: The history of the Gordon Highlanders III*, p. 217.
 16. Transvaal Archives Depot, Pretoria: P.A. Nierstrasz: Vol. 722A, p. 987a. Sources vary as to where the action took place, therefore the battlefield was visited personally and traced on a 1:50 000 scale map. It was found that the action took place to the south west of Dwarsvlei near Sterkfontein.
 17. J.M.H. van Aardt, *Die aandeel van die Krugersdorpse Kommando aan die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog (1899-1902)* (Unpublished M.A. thesis, Potchefstroom University College for C.H.E., 1950), pp. 115, 116; F.V. Engelenburg en G.S. Preller (eds.), *Onze krijgs-officiëren: Album van portretten met levens-schetsen der Transvaalse generaals en kommandanten e.a.*, p. 56.
 18. Public Record Office, London: W.O. 105/9 Despatch from Maj. Gen. Smith-Dorrien to the Chief of the Staff, Krugersdorp, July 13th 1900, p. 2.
 19. *Ibid.* p. 2; A.D. Greenhill Gardyne, *The life of a regiment: The history of the Gordon Highlanders III*, p. 218.
 20. Public Record Office, London: W.O. 105/9 Despatch from Maj. Gen. Smith-Dorrien to the Chief of the Staff, Krugersdorp, July 13th 1900, p. 2; *Digest of Service, Gordon Highlanders 1st Battalion - South Africa 1899 to 1902*, p. 56.

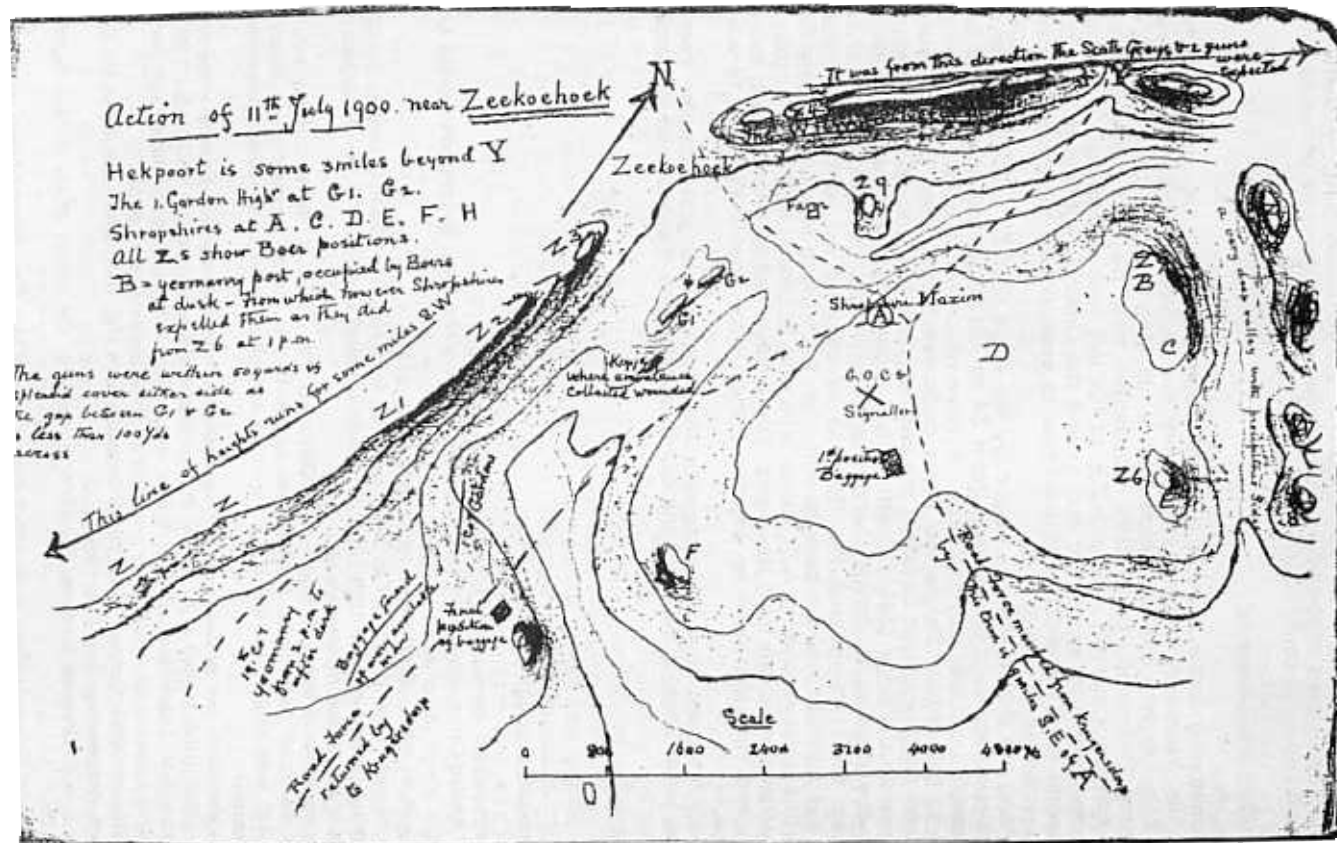


Figure 3. Map drawn by Major General H.L. Smith-Dorrien
 Photograph: Public Record Office, London

"We halted and lay down, and the main body of Yeomanry galloped out. They were immediately fired on very sharply and came galloping back as hard as they could lick. I was right in advance with my half company, and as the guns galloped forward into position I was told to advance and occupy a small kopje on my left front (G1). We advanced, I leading the men, and then almost immediately came into the fire area. The fire was awful. Whing! Whing! - Tut! Tut! all around, overhead, and at your feet. I shouted 'Follow me! Double!' and off we went pelting through the fire - dashen on to the kopje - got to the top - took cover and opened fire. The place was a perfect hell with bullets. I confess I did not like it".²¹

The Boers managed to seize the ridge (Z3) before the British could arrive there. The Yeomanry then tried to work their way to the left to gain a hold on the ridge but every time the Boers succeeded in holding them off. Likewise the Yeomanry prevented the Boers from creeping around the left rear of the British force. In a telegram sent by Smith-Dorrien to the Chief of Staff (Maj. Gen. H.H. Kitchener) after the battle he explained that the Boers had more or less surrounded him and that their position was one of the strongest he had seen, and even though the Yeomanry tried to outflank the Boers it was not possible.²²

The Boers were excellent marksmen and started to pick off the gunners serving the guns, and shot the horse teams which pulled the artillery. This was at a distance of just over 800 m.²³ One of the limbers had four horses shot while its crew were trying to remove a gun while the animals of the other limber took fright and galloped away. In spite of this the gunners continued firing²⁴ but after being in action for no more than an hour,²⁵ only three soldiers had not been wounded.²⁶

Lt Turner, one of the first to be wounded, continued operating the guns, in spite of a second wound, and while signalling for help was hit a third time.²⁷ The gunner who shot the last round had been wounded in the leg, and being unable to move out of the way of the gun's recoil, had his other leg fractured.²⁸ In the end fifteen out of seventeen gunners were wounded and the guns had to be abandoned temporarily. They had however, been disabled by the non-commissioned officers in charge of the guns in spite of having been wounded.²⁹

While the above-mentioned situation prevailed the Boers noticed that the British baggage train was out in the open. About forty Boers were sent out to make a counter attack upon the baggage and the troops guarding it. At this stage all eyes were on the action around the guns and the approach of the Boers in the rear of the

21. M. Miller and H.R. Miller (eds.), *A Captain of the Gordons: Service experiences 1900-1909* (London, n.d.), pp. 45-46.

22. Public Record Office, London: W.O. 105/9 Despatch from Maj. Gen. Smith-Dorrien to the Chief of the Staff, Krugersdorp, July 13th 1900, p. 4; Transvaal Archives Depot, Pretoria: Lord Roberts Papers, Vol. 38, pp. 204-210; Telegram from General Smith-Dorrien, Krugersdorp to the Chief of Staff, Pretoria, 300, July 11th, 1900, 9pm.

23. Public Record Office, London: W.O. 105/9 Despatch from Maj. Gen. Smith-Dorrien to the Chief of the Staff, Krugersdorp, July 13th 1900, p. 2.

24. *Digest of Service, The Kings Shropshire Light Infantry*, unpaginated; *Digest of Service, Gordon Highlanders 1st Battalion - South Africa 1899-1902*, p. 56; Public Record Office, London: W.O. 105/9 Despatch from Maj. Gen. Smith-Dorrien to the Chief of the Staff, Krugersdorp, July 13th 1900, p. 4.

25. *History of the War in South Africa 1899-1902, III*, p. 16, cites half an hour.

26. Public Record Office, London: W.O. 105/9 Despatch from Maj. Gen. Smith-Dorrien to the Chief of the Staff, Krugersdorp, July 13th 1900, p. 4.

27. *History of the War in South Africa 1899-1902, III*, p. 241.

28. *Digest of Service, Gordon Highlanders 1st Battalion - South Africa 1899-1902*, p. 56.

29. Transvaal Archives Depot, Pretoria: Lord Roberts Papers, Vol. 38, pp. 204-210; Telegram from General Smith-Dorrien, Krugersdorp, to the Chief of Staff, Pretoria, 300, July 11th, 1900, 9pm; *History of the War in South Africa 1899-1902, III*, p. 241.



Figure 4. Captain David Reginald Younger
Photograph: Gordon Highlanders Regimental Museum, Aberdeen

British right flank went unnoticed. At 12:45 the Boers opened fire (from Z6) at the baggage train and the troops guarding it. Four of the British were wounded before Smith-Dorrien ordered the train to safety. The British attacking the Boers in the flank and forcing them to retire (to Z7 and Z8) then occupied the position previously held by the enemy.³⁰

By 14:00 Smith-Dorrien adjudging his force to be surrounded by the Boers signalled to Gen. G. Barton at Krugersdorp (from where his messages were sent to the Commander-in-Chief) that he would have to withdraw unless reinforcements were sent. Gen. Barton, however, did not have any, and Smith-Dorrien decided to withdraw after receiving a message from the C.-in-C. that the Scots Greys and two guns which he was expecting to take the Boers from the rear had been counter ordered. Actually the Scots Greys were captured by Gen. De la Rey at Silkaatsnek. The C.-in-C. thus notified Smith-Dorrien that the operation was cancelled and he had to return to Krugersdorp.³¹

Action of the VC's

Smith-Dorrien's order to retire reached Col F. Macbean of the Gordons at about 14:30. Upon hearing this Lt Turner insisted that they could not abandon his guns and Col Macbean therefore called for volunteers to bring the guns to safety. A small party of men led by Capt. D.R. Younger (Figure 4) went forward and managed to bring back a limber in spite of the rocky ground and the dead horses lying about. After this attempt Capt. W.E. Gordon (Figure 5) rushed out, managed to get a drag-rope to a gun, and signalled to the volunteers who were ready to go. Capt. Younger with ten men following him immediately went out, but now the Boers were waiting for them and the group rushing out was met with accurate fire.³²

Six of the ten men who rushed out were hit, amongst them Capt. Younger, who was mortally wounded. Capt. R.S. Allan also joined the party but the effort was fruitless and Capt. Gordon sent them back. Capt. Younger was lying in the open next to the gun. Seeing this Cpl J.F. MacKay (Figure 6) ran out from the koppie (G2) on the right across the area swept by fire, hoisted Younger on to his back and carried him to the safety of the koppie (G1) on the left, while under concentrated fire.³³ Realizing that further efforts to retrieve the guns would only bring about higher losses Macbean gave up any further attempts. As it was Capt. Younger died of his wounds shortly after this. Col Macbean now helioed to Gen. Smith-Dorrien asking to remain in position as long as his flanks could be secured, whereupon the guns could be brought in safety under the cover of darkness that evening. Smith-Dorrien agreed to this and countermanded the order to withdraw.³⁴

The later phase near Dwarsvlei

At 15:00 the Boers occupying a koppie (Z9) and a farm in front of the Gordons, brought down a heavy fire on them. However, this was quelled by the Shropshires and a Maxim machine gun which inflicted heavy losses upon the Boers. During the rest of the day the Boers made unsuccessful attacks against the British flank on the right. As night fell Smith-Dorrien ordered some of the Yeomanry back where they held a koppie on the front flank on the right (B). The Boers taking advantage of this,

30. *Digest of Service, The Kings Shropshire Light Infantry*, unpaginated; Public Record Office, London: W.O. 105/9 Despatch from Maj. Gen. Smith-Dorrien to the Chief of the Staff, Krugersdorp, July 13th 1900, p. 3.

31. A.D. Greenhill Gardyne, *The life of a regiment: The history of the Gordon Highlanders III*, pp. 219-220; Public Record Office, London: W.O. 105/9 Despatch from Maj. Gen. Smith-Dorrien to the Chief of the Staff, Krugersdorp, July 13th 1900, p. 3.

32. A.D. Greenhill Gardyne, *The life of a regiment: The history of the Gordon Highlanders III*, p. 220; *Digest of Service, Gordon Highlanders 1st Battalion - South Africa 1899-1902*, p. 57.

33. *Digest of Service, Gordon Highlanders 1st Battalion - South Africa 1899-1902*, p. 57, cites that Cpl MacKay ran from the left koppie to the right koppie.

34. A.D. Greenhill Gardyne, *The life of a regiment: The history of the Gordon Highlanders III*, pp. 220-221; *Digest of Service, Gordon Highlanders 1st Battalion - South Africa 1899-1902*, p. 57.



Figure 5. Captain William Eagleson Gordon. His Victoria Cross is the first medal on the left
Photograph: Gordon Highlanders Regimental Museum, Aberdeen

quickly appeared and opened fire, but the Shropshires immediately drove them off.³⁵

While this was taking place Col Macbean received reports that the Boers could be seen moving on the skyline (Z1, Z2 and Z3).³⁶ Gen. Oosthuizen at the head of 20 men under cover of darkness, lit up by a full moon, stormed the two guns in an attempt to capture them,³⁷ whereupon Macbean gave orders to fix bayonets and to hold fire. When the Boers started firing from about 200 m, Macbean ordered "Rapid, Magazine, Independent." They could hear the Boers shouting: "Voorwaarts! Mense, Voorwaarts!" The British fire drowned the sound of the Boers' shouting and stopped them dead in their tracks. Then the whistle blew, the signal to make the Gordons stop firing, and silence fell on the battlefield.³⁸ Under this tremendous fire Gen. Oosthuizen was badly wounded and had to be carried off the battlefield. He subsequently died of his wounds on 14 August 1900 at Sanddrift on the Crocodile River - a great loss to the Krugersdorp Commando.³⁹

The Boers being held at bay, fresh gun teams went forward and evacuated the guns and wounded to the rear. The British pulled out company by company as quietly as was possible without a shot being fired.⁴⁰ By 20:00 all this was accomplished and the troops were able to eat their emergency rations at the baggage train, the first meal they had since the beginning of the action.⁴¹ Thereafter the column was formed up and marched off to Krugersdorp. To prevent an ambush by the Boers a longer route was followed, and Krugersdorp was reached the next day, 12 July, at approximately 04:00.⁴²

The 12th was a day of rest for the British force and all men possible attended the funeral of Capt. Younger which took place that afternoon in Krugersdorp. A bunch of white heather given to him when he embarked at Liverpool,⁴³ with a laurel wreath was placed on his grave.

Awards of the VC

Gen. Smith-Dorrien reported to the C.-in-C. that his force had suffered 34 men wounded and one killed.⁴⁴ He also sent a list of special recommendations to the C.-in-C. amongst them two for the Victoria Cross (VC). One was for Capt. W.E. Gordon of the 1st Battalion Gordon Highlanders, who was the adjutant of his battalion. The recommendation by Smith-Dorrien read: "For his gallantry in attempting to save the guns. A special recommendation is being submitted for a Victoria Cross."⁴⁵ The other recommendation for the VC was to Cpl J.F. MacKay of the 1st Battalion Gordon Highlanders. The recommendation by Smith-Dorrien read:

35. Public Record Office, London: W.O. 105/9 Despatch from Maj. Gen. Smith-Dorrien to the Chief of the Staff, Krugersdorp, July 13th 1900, p. 5.

36. A.D. Greenhill Gardyne, *The life of a regiment: The history of the Gordon Highlanders III*, p. 221.

37. Transvaal Archives Depot, Pretoria: P.A. Nierstrasz Vol. 772A, p. 987a; *Digest of service The Kings Shropshire Light Infantry*, n.p.

38. A.D. Greenhill Gardyne, *The life of a regiment: The history of the Gordon Highlanders III*, p. 221.

39. Transvaal Archives Depot, Pretoria: P.A. Nierstrasz Vol. 772A, p. 987a; J.M.A. van Aardt, *Die aandeel van die Krugersdorpse Kommando aan die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog (1899-1902)*, p. 116.

40. *Digest of Service, Gordon Highlanders 1st Battalion - South Africa 1899-1902*, p. 58; A.D. Greenhill Gardyne, *The life of a regiment: The history of the Gordon Highlanders III*, p. 221.

41. *Digest of Service, Gordon Highlanders 1st Battalion - South Africa 1899-1902*, p. 58; Public Record Office, London: W.O. 105/9 Despatch from Maj. Gen. Smith-Dorrien to the Chief of the Staff, Krugersdorp, July 13th 1900, p. 6; A.D. Greenhill Gardyne, *The life of a regiment: The history of the Gordon Highlanders III*, p. 221.

42. *Digest of Service, Gordon Highlanders 1st Battalion - South Africa 1899-1902*, p. 58; *Digest of Service, the Kings Shropshire Light Infantry*, n.p. Three different times are given by these two digests of service and Smith-Dorrien's despatch.

43. *Digest of Service, the Kings Shropshire Light Infantry*, n.p.; A.D. Greenhill Gardyne, *The life of a regiment: The history of the Gordon Highlanders III*, p. 221.

44. Transvaal Archives Depot, Pretoria: Lord Roberts Papers Vol. 38, pp. 204-210: Telegram from General Smith-Dorrien, Krugersdorp to the Chief of Staff, Pretoria, 300, July 11th, 1900, 9pm.

45. Public Record Office, London: W.O. 105/9 Special Recommendations by Maj. Gen. H.L. Smith-Dorrien Com. g a mixed Force at an action near Zeekoehoek on the road to Hekpoort on the 11th July 1900, p. 1.



Figure 6. Corporal John Frederick MacKay. His Victoria Cross is the first medal on the left
Photograph: Gordon Highlanders Regimental Museum, Aberdeen

"For carrying wounded men including Capt. Younger away from the guns under a very heavy fire. His action was applauded by his comrades. He is a peculiarly gallant man and hardly an action takes place that he does'nt distinguish himself. Being orderly to the medical officer he is always in a position to help the wounded. I recommended him for the Victoria Cross in the action of the 29th May at Doornkop, and I certainly consider that his conduct on the 11th July fully merits a bar in addition to the V.C. which I trust he is going to be granted for Doornkop."⁴⁶

Capt. William Eagleson Gordon was awarded the VC for his action at Dwarsvlei. The award was published in the *London Gazette* on 28 September 1900. The end of the citation on Capt. Gordon reads as follows: "Capt. Gordon's conduct under a particularly heavy and most accurate fire at only 600 yards' range was most admirable, and his manner of handling his men most masterly; his devotion on every occasion that his battalion has been under fire has been remarkable." Lord Kitchener (who succeeded Lord Roberts) presented Capt. Gordon with the VC at Pretoria on peace Thanksgiving Day, June 1902. Cpl MacKay was awarded the VC for his action at Doornkop, but was not awarded the bar to his VC that Smith-Dorrien had recommended for his action near Dwarsvlei.⁴⁷

Capt. D.R. Younger of the 1st Battalion Gordon Highlanders was also recommended by Gen. Smith-Dorrien, "For his gallantry in attempting to save the guns, in which I regret to say he was killed."⁴⁸ An extract from the Brigade Orders of 15 July 1900 stated that if Capt. Younger had lived he would have been recommended for the VC due to his courage in trying to rescue the guns.⁴⁹ From the beginning it was decided that the VC would not be awarded if the potential recipient who performed the act was killed, or died shortly thereafter. The *London Gazette* in which the names of the recipients of the VC was published, would in such a case announce that had the person survived, the VC would have been recommended to him.⁵⁰

When during 1900 a VC was awarded to Lt F.H.S. Roberts even though he died approximately 24 hours after performing his act of bravery, a precedent had been set. On 8 August 1902, three months after the conclusion of the war, the *London Gazette* published citations of posthumous VC's approved by King Edward VII whereby he approved that six posthumous VC's could be issued to the personal representatives of the deceased concerned. All six VC's were awarded for gallantry in the Anglo-Boer War.⁵¹ One of them was to Capt. David Reginald Younger. The citation in the *London Gazette* read: "Date of act of bravery: 11 July, 1900. This officer, during the action near Krugersdorp on the 11th July, 1900... (the *London Gazette* goes on to describe his deed of valour) ... His cool and gallant conduct was the admiration of all who witnessed it, and, had Capt. Younger lived, the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief in South Africa would have recommended him for the high award of the Victoria Cross, at the same time as Capt. W.E. Gordon, of the same regiment."⁵²

Aftermath and conclusion

The incident at Dwarsvlei, insignificant as it was, showed that at that late stage of the war an offensive spirit persisted amongst the Boers. It also hardened the attitude of the Boer farmers towards the British. Due to the successes west of Pretoria at

46. Public Record Office, London: W.O. 105/9 Special Recommendations by Maj. Gen. H.L. Smith-Dorrien Com. g a mixed Force at an action near Zeekoehoek on the road to Hekpoort on the 11th July 1900, p. 3.

47. O.M. Creagh and E.M. Humphris (eds.), *The VC and DSO I* (London, n.d.), pp. 118-119.

48. *Ibid.* p. 2.

49. *Digest of Service, Gordon Highlanders 1st Battalion - South Africa 1899-1902*, p. 60.

50. P.E. Abbott and J.M.A. Tamplin, *British gallantry awards*, pp. 316-317.

51. P.E. Abbott and J.M.A. Tamplin, *British gallantry awards*, p. 317.

52. O.M. Creagh and E.M. Humphris (eds.), *The VC and DSO I*, p. 133.

Onderstepoort, Silkaatsnek and Krugersdorp, Gen. Botha wanted to move more Boers into that area. Gen. De la Rey was then able to operate freely in the vicinity of Hekpoort and therefore it was necessary for the British to increase their forces at Krugersdorp.⁵³

Smith-Dorrien declared that to him this action was the most trying fight in the war.⁵⁴ Gen. Oosthuizen had ambushed him and the ensuing fight lasted the best part of the day with the British firing 32 000 rounds of small arms ammunition. The British were also under the impression that they were opposed by a force of 1 500 to 2 000 Boers,⁵⁵ who also had the advantage of knowing the terrain whilst the British were, it seems at a loss. They were not sure where the action took place, their guides seemed uncertain and their map was inaccurate. Seekoeihoek was amongst the various places they thought the action had taken place.⁵⁶

53. *History of the War in South Africa 1899-1902, III*, pp. 242-243.

54. H. Smith-Dorrien, *Memories of forty-eight years service*, p. 218.

55. Public Record Office, London: W.O. 105/9 Despatch from Maj. Gen. Smith-Dorrien to the Chief of the Staff, Krugersdorp, July 13th 1900, p. 7.

56. Public Record Office, London: W.O. 105/9 Attachment to despatch from General Smith-Dorrien to the Chief of the Staff, Krugersdorp, 15th July 1900, n.p.