

A Rhodesian Pioneer Who Became a Boer Soldier

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Unusual combinations of medals centred on the Boer War are a particular collecting interest of mine. When a very unusual pair surfaced that included a Boer and a British medal, I became very interested and paid over the market value to secure them and to do right by the family who wanted to sell them.



Picture 1: Medalje voor de Anglo-Boere Oorlog and British South Africa Company Medal to CJ van Eyk. Author's Collection.

The background

This is the story of the colonisation of what became Matebeleland. Around the 10th and 11th centuries, the Bantu-speaking Bakalanga/vakaranga arrived from the south and settled in Mapungubwe on the Limpopo and Shashi river valleys. Later they moved north to Great Zimbabwe. By the 15th century, the Bakalanga/vakaranga had established a strong empire at Khami under a powerful ruler called Dlembeu. This empire was split by the end of the 15th century and were later conquered by the Nguni people.

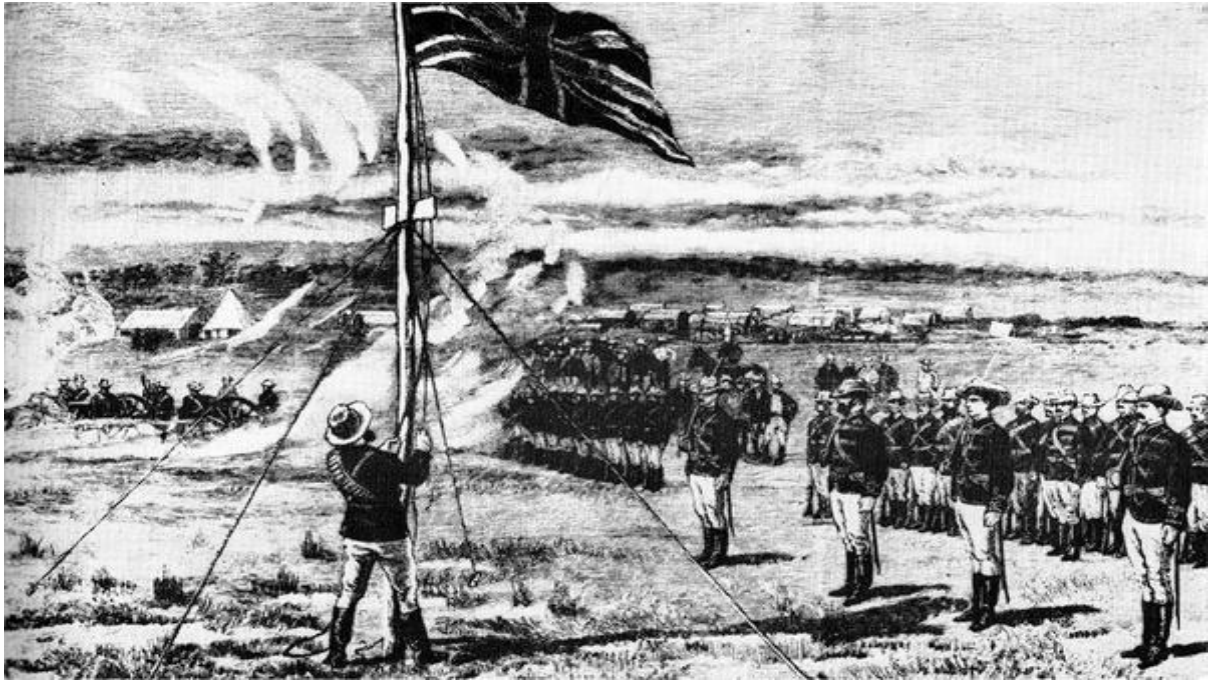


Picture 2: Map of Southern Africa showing Mashonaland (of which Matabeleland was a part). "Through Matabeleland: the record of a ten months' trip in an ox-wagon through Mashonaland and Matabeleland".

In the late 1830s, Mzilikazi Khumalo led a group of Nguni and other ethnic groups from present-day South Africa into the Rozvi Empire of the Bakalanga. Many of the Bakalanga people were incorporated to create a large state called Ndebele Kingdom. Mzilikazi, a former general under Shaka, organised this ethnically diverse nation into a militaristic system of regimental towns and established his capital at Bulawayo ("the place of killing"). Mzilikazi was a statesman of considerable stature, able to weld the many conquered tribes into a strong, centralised kingdom.

In 1852, the Boer government in the Transvaal made a treaty with Mzilikazi. Gold was discovered in northern Ndebele in 1867. The area, settled by the Zezuru people, remnants of the Mwenemutapa kingdom, while the European powers increasingly became interested in the region. Mzilikazi died on 9 September 1868, near Bulawayo. His son, Lobengula, succeeded him as king. In exchange for wealth and arms, Lobengula granted several concessions to the British, but it was not until twenty years later that the most prominent of these, the 1888 Rudd Concession gave Cecil Rhodes exclusive mineral rights in much of the lands east of Lobengula's main territory. Gold was already known to exist, but with the Rudd concession, Rhodes was able in 1889 to obtain a royal charter to form the British South Africa Company.

In 1889 a charter was granted to the BSAC to develop what we know as Zimbabwe today, but was called Mashonaland. In 1890 Rhodes sent the Pioneer Column into Mashonaland, and that is where our story begins.



Picture 3: Lieutenant Edward Tyndale-Biscoe hoists the Union Jack on the kopje overlooking Fort Salisbury on the morning of 13 September 1890. The British South Africa Company Historical Catalogue & Souvenir of Rhodesia, Empire Exhibition, Johannesburg, 1936–37.

The Pioneer Column

Lobengula mistrusted outsiders, but allowed mining exploration because Leandar Star Jameson had treated him for beer and beer induced gout, and promised that miners would live under his rule.

In reality Rhodes intended on annexing the territory. At the same time the Portuguese moved 4000 troops in, and treated it like a colony. Salisbury objected, and the Portuguese withdrew when he threatened to evacuate the British Legation in Lisbon.

In July 1890 the British realised they needed to get a presence up there beyond prospectors and missionaries and hunters.

Rhodes's advisers estimated that it would take 2,500 men and about one million pounds as Lobengula would resist occupation.

Frank Johnson, a 23-year-old adventurer, however, undertook to deliver the territory in nine months with a mere 250 men for £87,500. He has prospected but not been given a claim by Lobengula. Johnson believed there was gold in Mazoe, in the North. He tried to get a claim from the Portuguese but could not.

Several British companies were trying to gain concessions. There was dispute as to who this belonged to and who to gain a concession from. It was not conclusively the territory of the Matebele.

Johnson was driven by gold. He met Selous who also formed a gold company. Selous would be a guide. This was all happening because of Rhodes and a 23 year old's belief there was gold. There wasn't.

Johnson recruited in Kimberley offering each volunteer 3,000 acres 15 mining claims. One of these recruits was my man van Eyk. Interestingly, rich men were selected as they were more likely to get help if captured.

The column consisted of :

- 180 civilian colonists
- 62 wagons
- 200 volunteers (who formed the nucleus of what became the British South Africa Police).

A further party of 110 men, 16 wagons, 250 cattle and 130 spare horses later attached itself to the column. The members started in Macloutsie Bechuanaland (middle of Botswana).

The troopers were equipped with Martini-Henry rifles, seven-pound field guns and Maxim machine guns, as well as an electric searchlight (which they later used to good effect to intimidate Matabele warriors shadowing the column).

The effects of the Pioneer Column were immense. Mashonaland and Matabeleland ceased to be the poorly developed backwaters they had slipped into since the decline of the Mwenemutapa state began about 400 years earlier with the arrival of the Portuguese.

The Shona and Matabele were forcibly compelled to join the modern world of the West. This was accomplished through a hut tax aimed at forcing African men to leave their herds and their barter economy to join the cash economy of the West via wage labour.

A new elite snatched control from the Iron Age monarchy.

A new moral order was also imposed that has dramatically altered the culture and beliefs of the indigenous people.

van Eyk

van Eyk joined when the column picked him up in Rustenberg, where he had a horse for Nicholson the leader (The Pioneers of Mashonaland) and they went to Macloutsie together.

They travelled 650km into Mashonaland, after travelling about 1000km to get to the start point. There were no roads. They stopped on the 12th September at what is now Harare.

He was born in Phillopolis, Xhariep, Orange Free State, in September 1868. He was one of 12 children. His parents were born in the 1830's in the Cape Colony. There is some unconfirmed evidence that they were 1820 settlers.

Membership of the Pioneer column became a celebrity status later on, and he is listed as member of the pioneer column in the Frederik Clayton Trust will. This was not a pure English affair. van Eyk is mentioned in *Die Geskiedenis van die Afrikaaner in Rhodesia*. Pg 21, as an example of an Afrikaaner on the column. 1 of 14 were Afrikaaners, for a total of approximately 60. He is further confirmed as a member of the pioneer column and on the roll of *The Pioneer Corps* (by Robert Cary, published by Galaxie Press, Salisbury, Rhodesia, 1975. Mentioned Pg 104. Cornelius John. No 87. Attested 7th May 1890 as a Trooper).

As a reward he was given 3000 acres and 15 mining claims. He prospected in the Mazoe Valley after the pioneer corps was disbanded on 1 October. However there was no gold, and he returned to South Africa.

During the Boer war he was living in Marico, in the Northern South African Republic. He served as a Burger from October 1899 to June 1902, seeing out the entire war.

He besieged Mafeking, and was at Buffelshoek.

The Medals

The Medalje voor de Anglo-Boere Oorlog was awarded, upon certified application, to veterans who had served in the Boer forces between 11 October 1899 and 31 May 1902 and who remained in service until 31 May 1902, without surrendering or taking either parole or the oath of allegiance, or were captured. We will abbreviate it to ABO Medal.

He applied for his ABO medal in 1921 when they were first issued. This would have been his first and only medal at the time.

In 1927, the government of Southern Rhodesia issued a new British South Africa Company Medal to commemorate the earlier 1890 Pioneer Column. This medal was identical to the prior British South Africa Company Medals issued for the First Matabele War and Second Matabele War, except that it was struck without any campaign details on the reverse.

There were about 88 Pioneer Column medals issued and 112 BSAP.

3 members of the Pioneer Column were issued the ABO. It is unknown how many fought on the British side.

2 are known to exist, but one is not likely to surface too soon as it appears lost.

Of interest is the order of mounting. The ABO came about in the Government Notice no. 2307 dated 21 December 1920, and published in the Union of South Africa Government Gazette of 24 December 1920. It was back dated for events between 1899 and 1902. It appears to be more recent than the BSAC Mashonaland 1890 Medal as the BSAC Mashonaland 1890 Medal was issued for events in 1890. But it was only issued in 1927. However, none of this matters as in South Africa when it was issued it was a foreign medal, and the ABO Medal takes precedence as it was issued by the Union of South Africa.

A roll exists for the BSAP medal, and the ABO medal. I went through these manually as unfortunately they were not electronic at the time, and found matches of names.

This process has led to the following being identified as potential recipients of both medals:

Surname	Name	History	Other	Rhodesia Medal Issued?
Borrius	John Phillip	Present in Mashonaland in 1890 and confirmed on pioneer column.	On Pioneer roll On BSAP roll On ABO roll	Unknown. The rolls are inconsistent. No knowledge of the physical medal found.
Nicholson	Richard Glanville	Present in Mashonaland in 1890 and confirmed on pioneer column.	On Pioneer roll On BSAP roll On ABO roll	Yes. Medal was extant.

Van Eyk	Cornelius John	Present in Mashonaland in 1890 and confirmed on pioneer column.	On Pioneer roll On BSAP roll On ABO roll	Yes. Medal extant.
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Table 1: Men who may have received both the ABO Medal and BSAC Mashonaland 1890 Medal.