



On the right track

Armoured trains of the Boer War



Move on or Move Out

What's in this month's issue?

Once again there are only two articles in this month's Halifax Herald. Then again, I've been asking for articles (or at least ideas for articles) since General Motors was still a corporal.

The article on armoured trains during the Boer War is interesting. Before we used aircraft to move troops, trains were the way to go.

Did you know that during World War II, Hitler's personal armoured train was called *Amerika*. Naturally he had to change the name of his train after he declared war on America.

Jo Stanza, an old mate that has written for me in the past, sent an article that I found interesting and thought provoking.

It's about a topic that I've written about in the past and is near and dear to my own heart. What is the future of the Moths? Surely we cannot allow it to die out. And how can we go about ensuring that it survives into the future. Otherwise who will remember us?

FRONT COVER

Take a look at this memorial, and then remember the oath that we all took.

An oath that we swear every time we meet - We will remember them.

On the right track

Armoured trains of the Boer War.

By **Servaas van Breda**.

The Second Anglo-Boer War began on 12 October 1899 and would continue for two and a half years.

Both sides, in one way or another, were very dependent on the railways. The railway lines were vital life lines for transporting both civilian goods and for moving troops and supplies.

The railway lines did, however, have a fundamental flaw - they were vulnerable to both sabotage and attack. This is where armoured trains came to the fore.

The British had some 15 to 20 of them that were constructed at Salt River, Kimberley, Durban and Bulawayo.

An armoured train was basically an armoured locomotive with one or more wagons on each end. There were many different variations, depending on their function at the time.

The locomotives which were armoured on the Western Railway were CGR 3rd and 4th Class engines, while those armoured at

Durban were, naturally, NGR types.

The style of armouring depending on which workshop did the job and the availability of steel plate at the time.

The drivers of the locomotives often had no way of seeing where they were going and had to rely on an electric bell or telephone system from the train commander situated in the leading wagon.

Armoured trains came in all shapes and sizes depending on their function. One of the most simple armoured wagons was the low-sided flat car or flat wagon. It was reinforced with sandbags and was little more than a mobile slit trench.

Then there were the armoured personnel carriers. These were wagons where the sides had been built up with steel plating or lengths of rail and they offered pretty decent protection. Again details differed, depending on where they had been built. These wag-

From the editor's desk

Another month, another issue of Halifax Herald. We did this last month go to again? I seem to just finish one issue and it's time for another.

You may notice that in the two articles this month I've asked you to send me a comment. And, if past history is anything to go on, I will not receive a single comment. Do members of our Shellhole actually read the newsletter?

While I enjoy doing this and it's my small contribution to the Shellhole, I do have other things to keep me occupied. So how about a comment or two then.

I'm looking forward to our Boerwors Roll evening next month. I see the Signals Association is already promoting the event, so make sure that all of you actually attend it.

I suppose that's enough moaning for one month. Have a good month and see you at the meeting.

Until next month. YUTTH.

Matt



ons were not only used on armoured trains. Often they were attached singly to passenger or goods trains as an escort.

Occasionally they were shunted into a remote siding and left as a kind of a mobile fort or strong point.

Armoured trains were mainly used in a defensive role, but they could also be used offensively when needed.

For that reason there were numerous wagons designed for that specific purpose. For example, some wagons were fitted with one or more Maxim machine guns. These could lay down devastating fire.

There were also four-wheeled wagons armed with Pompom guns mounted on a pivot to fire in any direction.

For heavier guns there were bogie vans equipped with a pair of six or twelve pounder guns, one facing in either direction.

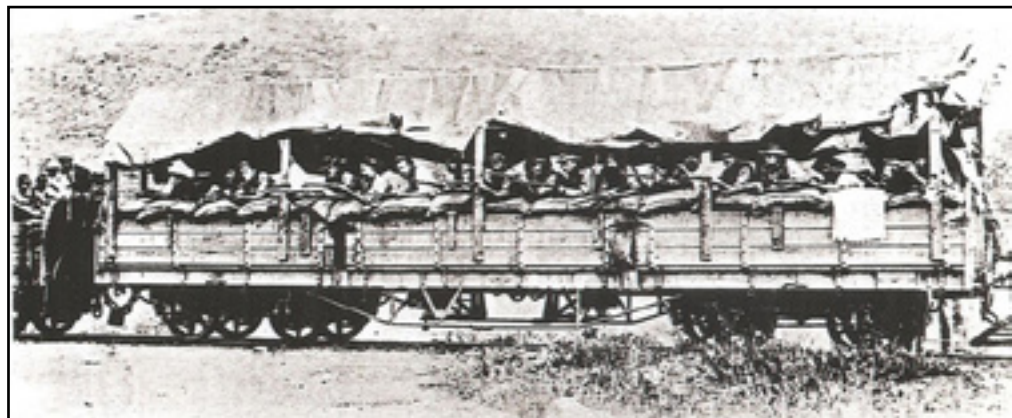
Later on special wagons, like bigger editions of the Pompom wagon,

were designed and brought into use. Often they were fitted with a canvas awning or roof which protected to gun and crew from the sun and, to a lesser extent, concealed the nature of the wagon from a distance.

Now let's take a look at another important aspect of the railway lines, and one that can still be seen today. These were the blockhouses.

In all, some 8,000 blockhouses were built during the war. Some were built from stone, others from concrete, depending on the availability of materials. Their purpose was to protect the railway lines, especially the bridges, against sabotage.

Most blockhouses followed a similar design. They were three storeys high and were about six metres square. There was no entrance from the ground floor and this area was used for storage. Entrance was via a ladder to a door on the first floor and the ladder was pulled up after them. The first



ARMOURD WAGON: A flat car that has been built up with sandbags. Note the tarpaulin roof that offers some protection against the sun.

floor served as the living area.

The top floor offered a good view of the surrounding countryside.

The roof was corrugated iron with guttering all around and downpipes that led to storage barrels on the ground floor. Many of these blockhouses can still be found today.

Finally, let's go back on the offensive. Because of the success of armoured wagons armed with machine guns, Pompoms and light artillery when used in support of the infantry, it was decided to use something a little larger.

Some six-inch guns were taken off warships in Simon's Town and mounted on specially built wagons. Being naval guns they were naturally manned by Royal Navy gunners.

These were sizeable guns and, un-

like the gun wagons that accompanied normal armoured trains, they were only taken forward when required.

Usually they were located so that they could fire straight ahead, or a section of the track could be slewed to point them at the target. It was also possible to use out-riggers to enable them to fire to the side when necessary.

The British Army's planning was based on the assumption that the Boer forces would fall back on their capital and defend it to the last.

On this basis they foresaw the need to have to besiege Pretoria and they therefore made provision for this contingency.

First they organised the equipment necessary to build a narrow-gauge railway line around Pretoria. Second-



READY TO ROLL: Make up of a typical armoured train. Note that the locomotive is in the middle of the train, with armoured wagons on either side offering protection.

ly, the plan was to bring up a 9.2 inch gun that could fire a shell a distance of nearly 13 kilometres.

As we all know, the siege of Pretoria never took place and the gun, which had been mounted on a special wagon at Salt River and test fire into False Bay, finished the war at Machadodorp without ever having fired a shot in anger.

Editor's Note:

This article is based on talk originally written and presented by David Rind at a Model Railway Convention.

Servaas assisted David with the research, as he had access to the archives at the Naval Museum.

David was tragically murdered in 2001 and Servaas was given the presentation by David's widow.

He added information about the make-up of the trains and has since presented the talk at the Military Academy in Saldanha, at the Staff Naval College, and to MTR 3 and 2 students.

If you enjoyed this article and would like to see more about the topic of the use of trains and the railway during war, we can look at some articles of the armoured trains that were used during World War I and World War II.

Let us know.

On the opposite page are some photographs of armoured wagons of the Second Anglo-Boer War. We apologise for the quality but, as you probably guessed, cameras were not all that great back then.



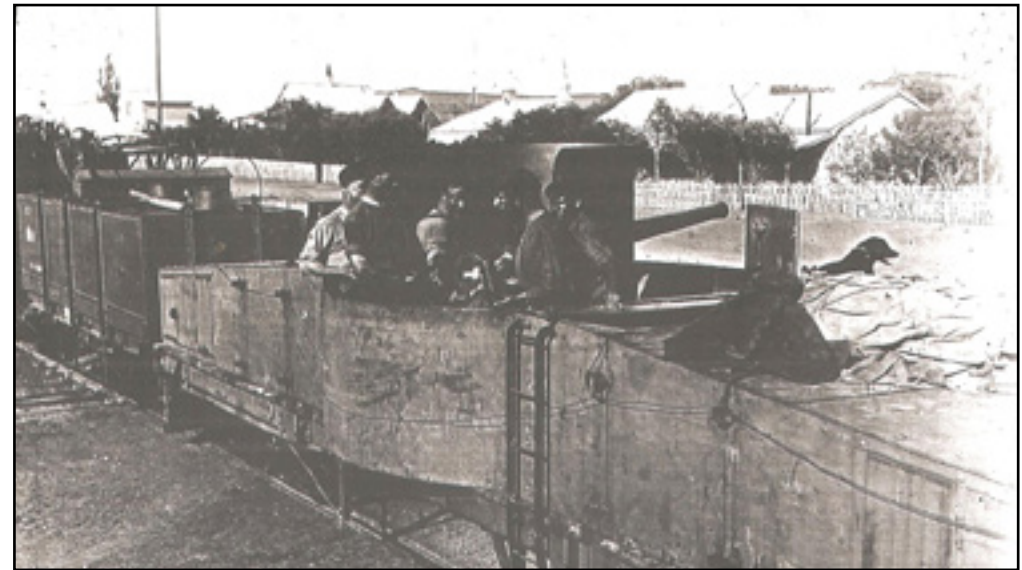
BLOCKHOUSE: One of the nearly 8,000 blockhouses that were built during the Second Anglo-Boer War. This one is near Lainsburg.



POMPOM: An armoured wagon containing a Pompom gun. This wagon was named 'Cock o' the North'.



BIG BOYS: An armoured wagon with two six pounder guns. This wagon was named 'John Bull'.



ALL ROUND PROTECTION: This 12 pounder gun was mounted on a pivot so that it could fire in any direction.

Move on, or move out

By Jo Stanza.

Recently, I came across two thought provoking articles. The first was of a young British officer (a certain Lt Graham Vincombe Winchester Clowes of 1st Battalion Gordon Highlanders) who was killed in the Cedarberg during the Anglo Boer War.

He was deployed (together with a small group of his comrades) to prevent any Boer infiltration from the North into the Cape Colony via what today is known as Pakhuis Pass.

Unfortunately for this

group of obedient soldiers, they happened to run into a reasonably large group of Boers (under command of Smuts) who had chosen this unlikely route to the Cape in the hope of being undetected, as their mission was to recruit sympathisers to the Boer cause from the farming community just South of the Cedarberg.

An intense fire fight ensued during which said young British soldier was killed, crudely buried where he fell and whose grave was subsequently move to “a more auspicious spot” nearby, by his grieving mother, who made the arduous journey from England to the Cedar-

berg especially to honour her son and, subsequently, returned every year on the anniversary of his death.

His grave and handsome tombstone still remain (known as “The Englishman’s grave”) as a testimony to a fallen soldier and an ever loving mother.

My first reaction to the story was “We Will Remember Him” before I realized that his death was some years before Moth “0” was to form the MOTH. Furthermore, the MOTH constitution clearly states “He who fought by my side, is my comrade still” and, obviously, at the time of his death this soldier was an enemy and certainly did not fight by my figurative side.

But, somehow, I have a burning desire to pay homage to a forgotten casualty of war. After all, it is not soldiers who start wars or who end them – this is the sordid domain of politicians – soldiers merely do what they are told, believing that they serve the good of greater humanity.

The second story is about the writer’s grandfather who perpetually carried an old, stained white handkerchief peeping out of his breast pocket and which he always cupped in his hands in moments of deep contemplative thought.

When the old man passed, he was buried with the self-same handkerchief between his folded hands as was the deceased wish.

The writer then admits to once,

shortly before his grandfather died, asking him of the significance of the white handkerchief. It turns out that, during the Anglo Boer war, his granddad fought as part of Gen De La Rey’s guerrilla force, disrupting the progress of the British forces.

During such a skirmish he was shot through his nose (it doesn’t come closer than that!!)

He was forced to withdraw on his trusty steed to a nearby stream so as to attend to his wound and in an attempt to quell some of the blinding pain he was experiencing.

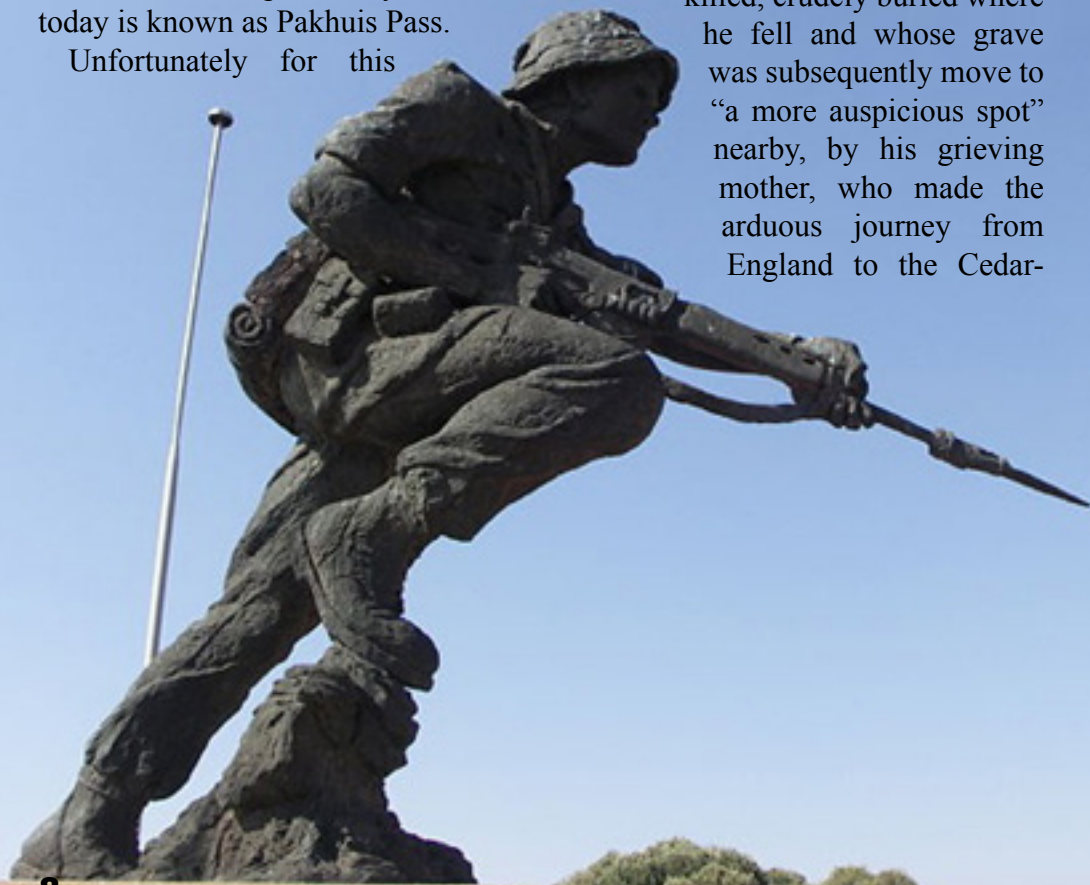
While he was so engaged, a shadow fell on his position and, turning, he saw a British Officer aboard a magnificent steed with his pistol drawn.

Closing his eyes the wounded man prayed for God to grant him a quick death and awaited the inevitable.

Nothing happened at first until he felt a light fluttering on his face. Opening one eye, he noticed that the pistol had been holstered and the British Officer was at the salute!

Somewhat bewildered the Boer guerrilla glanced around, looking for some explanation and came across the officers white handkerchief lying at his feet. His adversary quickly turned his horse about and swiftly galloped away.

My immediate reaction on reading this story was one of great pride in the honouring of one soldier to another, irrespective of the “side” on which



each found himself – this was the stuff on which legends are built!!!!

Neither one fought by the side of the other. Yet there was a mutual respect of a soldier for a soldier. There was no hatred between the two but rather an inexplicable bond between two adversaries – the Brit in his mercy and compassion; the Boer in his gratitude.

I bet if the two had met after hostilities had ceased, there would have been lengthy celebrations that would have cemented an undying friendship. For those who have fought for it, life has a quality such as the uninitiated can never understand!!

Yet, if there had been an Order such as the MOTH at the time, these two soldiers could not have both been members – simply because of “He who Fought by my Side”. What could Moth O have really meant in penning those words? Did he really intend that foes should be foes for life? I think not.

I believe that us Moths of today stand at a cross road facing a decision of whether to continue laterally, going nowhere until eventually simply fizzling out ; whether to retreat into oblivion, always wondering where the other options might have lead us ; or going on boldly toward an unknown future, adapting to whatever challenge awaits us.

I believe that we have a duty to keep the memory of the sacrifices in war, the devastation of war in all its hor-

ror and the memory of those who gave their very lives for, what they hoped, would be a better life for those who were lucky enough to survive.

You see, Moth O, in drawing up the oath that we all took when joining the MOTH, intended that all Moths would remember the fallen FOR EVER. That is way he decided on the words “We WILL Remember Them” and not “We will remember them for a certain finite period” or even - We will remember them until our government no longer recognises imperialist wars.

The word “will” implies a certainty and an obligation – and rightly so because when we no longer remember war, there’s a good chance that we might do it all again!

In South Africa, the order cannot survive longer than the date of death of the last Border Boy, simply because there is no more war and therefore no one to have fought by each other’s side.

Editors’s Note:

How do you feel about things? Do you think that the Memorable Order of Tin Hats should simply cease to exist when the last Border Boy answers the Sunset Call. Or do you feel that we need to look at a way to ensure that we continue to exist and ensure that the oath “We will remember them” survives. Let me know how you feel about it.



VISIT TO JAN SMUTS: A photograph from our Shellhole visit to Marshall Smuts Shellhole a few years ago.



HELPING HAND: Commander Ollie Lewis, skipper of the US Navy Los Angeles Class nuclear submarine USS San Juan, helps build a creche at Red Hill.

WHERE CAN YOU GET "DINNER AND A SHOW" FOR R70?

FRIDAY 10 MAY 2019

Come and enjoy a light supper of **BOEREWORS ROLLS** and a selection of **HOMEMADE SALADS**

Followed by a concert by

THE CAPE WELSH CHOIR



WHERE ? Rosedale, SA LEGION, Lower Nursery, Road, Rosebank

WHEN ? Friday 10 May 2019

TIME ? Supper from 6:30 pm

Cape Welsh Choir from 8:00 pm

COST ? Supper only R35 ! Choir only R35 !!

" Dinner and a Show " R 70 !!!

CASH BAR

RESERVATIONS: John 082 318 6560

IF YOU SNOOZE YOU LOSE !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Brought to you by



Admiral Halifax
Shellhole

