

Boer War

The following article was originally situated on my earlier website. It was written by David Humphry on 3rd May 2003 and the copyright remains with David. (Although the URLs have been updated October 2013 by Julie Goucher)

BASIC REQUIREMENTS

Not surprisingly the more information you have on an individual the better the chance you will have of a successful outcome to your research. If you have only a name it will be very difficult, if not impossible, to pursue your query. It will be especially difficult if the name is common. To have any real chance of finding out more about your man you should at least know his regiment or unit. If you know that he was a casualty (killed, died, wounded or taken prisoner) this will also help. If you have the man's Queen's South Africa Medal (QSA) and, if also awarded, King's South Africa Medal (KSA) the naming details will be of great assistance in progressing your research.

NOMINAL ROLLS

There is no single listing of British soldiers who served in the Boer War. However, men who served in Australian units can be checked at the Australian War Memorial website <http://www.awm.gov.au/atwar/boer/> and details of those who served in New Zealand units can be checked at the New Zealand website <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/war/new-zealand-in-the-south-african-boer-war/database>

MEDALS

The QSA was issued with a total of 26 clasps covering operational service in general areas or specific battles and campaigns. The maximum number of clasps awarded on one medal was 9 but more than 7 is rare and even a 7 clasp QSA is fairly scarce. Medals to the Royal Navy and Royal Marines who served in South African waters but not ashore, nurses, some local units and men who guarded Boer prisoners on St. Helena are among those who received the medal without clasps. The KSA was additionally awarded to those who served a minimum of 18 months in South Africa between 11 October 1899 and 31 May 1902 extending into 1902. The KSA normally had the clasps South Africa 1901 and South Africa 1902 but a small proportion of men qualified with split service resulting in the award of the medal with only the 1902 clasp. A few KSAs, principally to nurses, were issued without clasps. A KSA could not be awarded without a QSA.

MEDAL ROLLS

The QSA and KSA rolls for land forces are in series WO 100 at the Public Record Office (PRO) at Kew and are arranged by unit. If you do not know the unit it will be virtually impossible to find your man in these rolls as there are hundreds of them. The Royal Navy and Royal Marines rolls are arranged by ship in the Admiralty series ADM 171/53 but are also available in a published volume. Some researchers have access to the published Naval and Imperial Yeomanry rolls and certain other medal rolls but those for most units will have to be checked via the PRO.

ATTESTATION AND SERVICE PAPERS

Those of regular soldiers are in series WO 97 at the PRO but not all survive. The papers

of men who died on service were officially destroyed and a proportion was destroyed in an air raid during the Second World War. These are arranged by name but common names are likely to result in multiple possibilities so additional information such as birthplace will be helpful. These typically consist of 4 pages of personal and service details although some files contain more pages. The papers of the Militia (WO 96) and Imperial Yeomanry (WO 128) survive almost complete as do the papers of men in the Royal Navy and Royal Marines in series ADM 188. The papers of soldiers who subsequently served in the First World War, even if they left the army and re-enlisted in a different unit, may be with their WW1 papers in series WO 363 or WO 364. However a significant proportion of WW1 papers were among those destroyed in the Blitz.

CASUALTY ROLLS

Some subscribers have access to these rolls so if you know or are reasonably sure that your man was killed, wounded, taken prisoner or died of disease this can be checked. Names are almost always listed with initial, rather than first name, so common names will offer multiple possibilities. Again, if you know the unit it will narrow down the search.

1901 CENSUS

Personnel serving in South Africa at the time of the 1901 census are not included on the census. However it should not be assumed that anyone missing from the census was serving in South Africa. There could be any number of reasons for this, not least the recently disclosed fact that hundreds of thousands of names have been inadvertently omitted from the 1901 census database.

RECRUITMENT

A man did not necessarily enlist in his local infantry regiment so it should not be assumed that, for example, a man from Cheshire joined the Cheshire Regiment. There is a slightly greater chance that he did, in comparison to any other particular infantry regiment, but this would not necessarily have been the case. He might not of course have joined an infantry regiment at all but enlisted in one of the cavalry regiments, the Imperial Yeomanry or one of the corps such as the artillery or engineers.

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List of Boer War reading has been compiled by Julie Goucher and can be found at <http://www.anglers-rest.net/boer-war-books.html>