

THE SIEGE OF OKIEP MEDAL:

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Although no official records can be found by the Okiep Copper Company, numismatists have attempted to piece together the rationale behind, as well as the history of the medal that was issued to all gallant defenders of the town.

It appears that the Cape Copper Company decided to mint it's own medal for the defence of Okiep, once it became known that the coloured members of the town's garrison were precluded from receiving the Queen's South Africa medal. Their exclusion was due to their being of non-European descent. There may, however, be more rationale behind the minting of this medal. Other besieged company towns, for example, Kimberley, had also struck medals for their defenders, and the Cape Copper Company may have wanted to follow this example, even though their operation was on a much smaller scale. The successful defence of the town had not only contributed to the success of the British forces in the Cape Colony, but also had an effect on the Namaqua Copper-, and the Cape Copper Companies. Although relatively little damage was caused in Concordia by the occupying Boer forces, damage was done to the property of the Cape Copper Company in Nababeep. One can attribute this to the fact that Nababeep's population had all been withdrawn to Okiep before an attack was launched on the town, whereas the Concordia garrison had remained, and had surrendered with one of the conditions being that none of the Namaqua Copper Company's equipment would be damaged or destroyed.

The defence of Okiep did, therefore, serve to protect not only the local population, who were all company employees, but also company property, as the company owned the whole town. The successful defence of the town would not have been possible, had it not been for the willingness of the Coloured population to become involved in, not only their defense, but also that of the company town. Due to the paternalistic nature of company towns, whereby an employee is totally dependant on the company for everything from housing to amenities, the local inhabitants may not have had much choice but to contribute to the towns defence. The local coloured people could have refused to participate in the preparation for, and the defence of the town, as the war was essentially seen by both sides as being a "white man's" war. More recent studies have shown that this was not the case, as people of colour were involved on both sides. The company did also not supply them with housing, or with any real amenities, but their homes were built on company land. Therefore, the interests of the company and their employees may have been considered.

Today one may criticise a present-day company for issuing such a medal, rather than improving their workers living conditions, but one must look at what a medal signified in the early 1900's. Although a medal for the defence of Okiep is only a small token of appreciation, the item itself must have been highly treasured by the recipients. This non-racial act by the company to express it's appreciation, should also be commended, but at the same time, one should not overlook the fact that this very gesture was reinforcing the paternalistic nature of their relationship with their employees.

It is presumed that all ranks of soldiers who took part in the defence of Okiep received a medal. However, this is not true, as no record of the 44 men of Warwickshire Militia, nor Lt.Col. Shelton receiving this medal. Capt. Borchards of the Cape Garrison Artillery did, however, receive it. As no medal role exists, it is also presumed that all the company's men who were involved, did receive one.

The medal was minted in silver and bronze, and one would expect that the officers would have received the silver, while the ranks, the bronze. This generalisation, however, can not be made, as Pay Sgt.H. Rodda, No.60, NTGB, also received a silver medal, along with Cpl.D.R. Howard, No. 539, NTGB. The former was the Company accountant, while the latter is presumed to be Dr. R.N. Howard. These two are the only known exceptions, so the theory may be assumed true.

Unlike other military medals, these were not handed out at a parade, but appear to have been given to the company staff along with their pay packets. The medal was also not officially recognised by the military authorities, and therefore could not be worn along with others.

Description of the medal:

Obverse: A miner standing with legs crossed and holding a shovel in his right hand, with his left resting on the edge of a cocopan on rails. A rising sun above a hill in the left background. The whole surrounded by the legend THE CAPE COPPER COMPANY LIMITED 1888.

Reverse: In brief the following legend occupying 13 lines
PRESENTED TO THE OFFICERS NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICERS
AND MEN OF THE GARRISON OF O'OKIEP IN RECOGNITION
OF THEIR GALLANT DEFENCE OF THE TOWN UNDER LT.COL.
SHELTON D.S.O. AGAINST A GREATLY SUPERIOR FORCE OF
BOERS APRIL 4th TO MAY 4th 1902.

Ribbon: Dark tan, with a central dark green stripe.

Cape Town Medal Group Talk 30/3/90
Glenn von Zeil

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS SURROUNDING THE SIEGE OF OKIEP:

31 March: British patrol almost wiped out 25km east of Okiep at Grootkau.

1 April: Springbok attacked and surrendered 17 hours later. Okiep Town Guard called out. Nababeep Town Guard and inhabitants withdrawn to Okiep.

2 April: Mining work halted except for the pumping of the mines. Boers occupied Nababeep after the garrison had withdrawn to Okiep.

3 April: Okiep outposts attacked.

4 April: Concordia surrendered without firing a shot. Okiep completely surrounded and cut off. Gen. Smuts demanded the towns surrender.

6 April: Enemy spy entered the town.

7 April: All occupants placed on siege rations. All schools were closed.

8 April: Curfew imposed on all civilians. Sniping started.

9 April: Boers fired on Red Cross flag. Sniping continued. Blockhouses attacked.

10 April: Women and children refuse to be moved to Port Nolloth. Sniping continued. Night attack by the Boers.

11 April: Sniping continued. Gen. Smuts suggested that all non-combatants be moved to a safer place. This suggestion was declined. The Boers attacked the viaducts between Anenous and Klipfontein.

12 April: Sniping continued. Rations adjusted. Boers attacked blockhouses. 6398 rounds of ammunition was fired in order to repulse the attack. Col. Coopers relief force landed at Port Nolloth.

13 April: Sniping continued. Relief column left Port Nolloth.

14 April: Sniping continued. Blockhouses attacked. Relief column arrived at Anenous.

15 April: Sniping continued. Red Cross flag again fired upon. Relief column engaged the Boers at Klipfontein.

16 April: Sniping continued. Blockhouses attacked.

17 April: Sniping continued.

18 April: Sniping continued.

19 April: Sniping continued.

20 April: Sniping continued.

21 April: Sniping continued. Relief column occupied Klipfontein.

22 April: Boers in Crows Nest blockhouse attacked.

25 April: Smuts offered a 3 day armistice to remove non-combatants from the town. Offer turned down.

26 April: Smuts came through the British lines en route to Port Nolloth.

27 April: Sniping.

28 April: Sniping continued. Nababeep reported clear of enemy.

29 April: Boers request to play rugby against the Okiep garrison.

30 April: Sniping. Wounded man brought in from Concordia.

1 May: Boers attempt to blow the town up by sending in a train loaded with dynamite.

2 May: No shots fired. Boers retired from Springbok and Concordia. Prisoners from these towns arrived at Okiep. Relief column reached Padegat.

3 May: Women allowed back to their houses during the day. Relief column reached Rattlepoort.

4 May: An advance guard of the relief column reached Okiep and raised the siege. Garrison church parade.

7 May: Parade of troops.

11 May: Mine hooter blew for work.

O'OKIEP MEDALS:

Jones, C.A.: - Capt. Awarded a silver medal.
- Refered to in Jane Henwoods diary on the 31 March 1902 that he would not allow any of the Nababeep refugees to bring in any of their personal items.
- Refered to in the Cape Colonial Forces Order No. 435 of 13 June 1902. Rank of Capt. dated 19 October 1901.

Cloete, C.: - Pte., No. 284.

Thomas, D.R.: - Pte., No. 212, D. Thomas / Pte., No. 140, R. Thomas, (Okiep Vol.)

Holman, W.: - Sgt., No. 43, NTGB.

Cruywagen, D.: - Pte., No. 259.

Burrows, J.: - Capt. Awarded a silver medal.
- Joseph Burrows was born on the 10 February 1865 and died in June/July 1937.
- He worked on the C.C.C. railway and played the organ at St. Augustines Anglican Church in Okiep.
- He married Annie Heath and they had four children; Marian (b. 3 May ????), Morris (b. 8 February ????), Harold (b. 11 December 1900) and Phyllis (b. 20 February 1904)

Trent: - Possibly Pte. A.E. Trent, No. 35 or Cpl. J.T. Trent, No. 36.

Sinclair: - Pte. W.J. Sinclair, No. 317.

Mooney, E.: - C/Sgt., No. 395, NBS.
- Reference to him in the Krapohl diary on 12 April; " not fire at snipers to NW of Kings arm Block House in vicinity of residency as Sgt. Mooney's trenches in line of fire."

Macazay, W.: - Pte. , No. 684.

Eden Henry: - No reference found to this man.

Peters, K.: - Pte. , No. 184, Medal to be found in the Nababeep Museum in 1986.

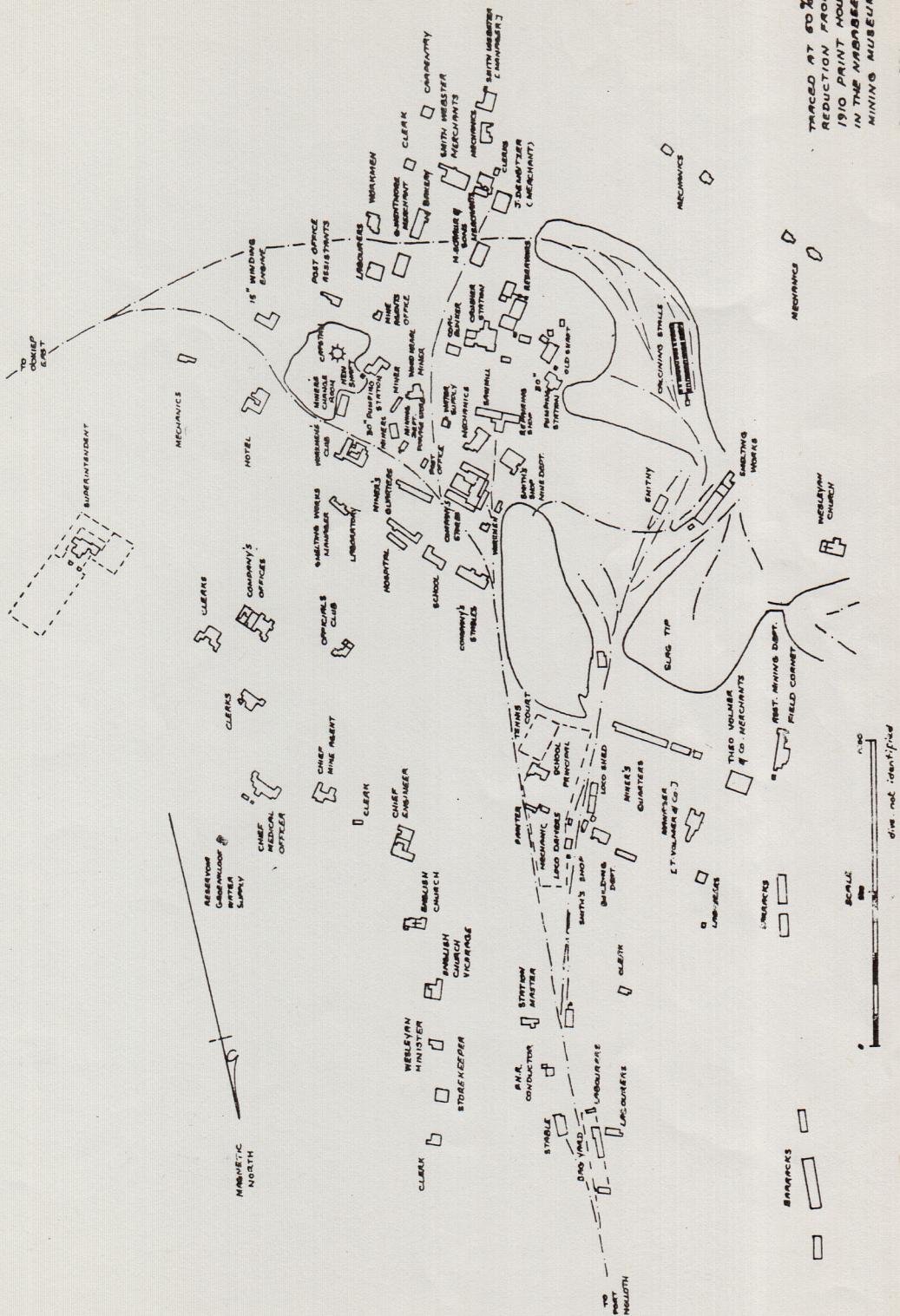
Kaman, J.: - No reference to this man, but his medal was in the Nababeep Museum in 1986.

THE FOLLOWING NAMES CAN BE SEEN CARVED OUT ON A ROCK IN THE OKIEP EAST MINE AREA. (The rock has a date of 28 February 1901 engraved on it.)

S. Logan, C. Reilly, J. Dillon (C.G.A.), T. Jones (C.G.A.), S. Gibson & S.D. Borsor (N.F.F. & C.T.H.), D. Kruger (C.T.H.), R. Schirrer (C.G.A.)

It is presumed that the letters stand for Cape Garrison Artillery, Namaqualand Field Force and Cape Town Highlanders.

PLAN OF O'OKIEP



INTERESTING SOURCES ON THE SIEGE OF O'OKIEP:

(Cape Town Medal Group: 30/3/90)

A. MANUSCRIPT SOURCES:

A.1. Papers in Private Possession:

List of names of the Namaqualand Town Guard and Okiep Volunteers which had been crossed off the official medal role. (In the possession of Dr.F. Mitchell, 21 Duke Road, Rondebosch, Cape Town)

A.2. Private Papers in Archives and Museums:

Cape Archives Depot:

Diary of Hal Leonard Rodda, The siege of Okiep, Ref A 1934.

Diary of Mrs.J. Henwood, The siege of Okiep, Ref A 1782.

A.3. Unpublished Official Papers:

Cape Archives Depot:

Pension: Anna Thomas, widow of Jan Thomas, member Okiep Town Guard, Source T, Vol 818, Ref 1727.

Siege of Okiep Defence Orders, Ref A 838.

District Order No.1. 2 April 1902.

District Order No.2. 3 April 1902.

District Order No.3. 4 April 1902.

Defence Order No.3. 5 April 1902.

Defence Order No.4. 6 April 1902.

Defence Order No.5. 7 April 1902.

Defence Order No.6. 8 April 1902.

Defence Order No.7. 9 April 1902

Defence Order No.8. 10 April 1902.

Defence Order No.9. 11 April 1902.

Defence Order No.10. 12 April 1902.

Defence Order No.11. 13 April 1902.

Defence Order No.12. 14 April 1902.

Defence Order No.13. 15 April 1902.

Defence Order No.14. 16 April 1902.

Defence Order No.15. 17 April 1902.

Defence Order No.16. 18 April 1902

Defence Order No.17. 19 April 1902.

Defence Order No.18. 20 April 1902.

Defence Order No.19. 22 April 1902.

Defence Order No.20. 23 April 1902.

Defence Order No.21. 25 April 1902.

Defence Order No.22. 28 April 1902.

Defence Order No.23. 30 April 1902

Defence Order No.24. 3 May 1902.

Defence Order No.25. 4 May 1902.

Defence Order No.26. 5 May 1902..

B. OFFICIAL PRINTED SOURCES:

B.1. Blue Books:

South African despatches by Gen. Lord Kitchener, 1 June 1902, relative to military operations in South Africa, Ref A 1782(1).
(Cape Town Archives)

Cape Colonial Forces Order by Col.P. Ffolliot, No. 435, Cape Town, 13 June 1902, Ref A 838. (Cape Town Archives)

C. UNOFFICIAL CONTEMPORARY PRINTED SOURCES:

C.1. Printed Collections of Documents:

Moffatt, R.H., Extracts from Mrs.J. Henwood's personal diary during the siege of Okiep April - May 1902, Quarterly Bulletin of the South African Library, September 1984, pp 2 - 12.

South African Field Force Casualty List 1899 - 1902, - Compiled from official sources in the London Records Office. (pp 3,19 28, 32, 75, 76, 82, 91, 92, 94)

The relief of Okiep, The Royal Engineers Journal, 2 March 1903, pp 1 - 4.

C.2. Newspapers:

London Times: 3 May 1902
5 May 1902
8 May 1902
9 May 1902

The Cape Argus: 5 April 1902
11 April 1902
14 April 1902

C.3. Contemporary Printed Sources:

Amery, L.S. and Childers, E. (eds), The Times History of the War in South Africa, Vol 5, (London, Samson Low, Marston and Co., 1907, pp 538 - 555)

De Kersauson de Pennendreff, R., Ek en die Vierkleur, (Johannesburg, Afrikanse Pers, pp 107 - 140)

De Wet, A. and Doornick, V., Im Kampf um Suid Afrika, (Photocopy, pp 231 - 232)

Ferreira, O.J.O., Memoirs of Gen. Ben Bouwer, (Pretoria, HSRC, 1980, pp 228 - 237, 256 - 288)

Maritz, M., My lewe en my streewe, (Johannesburg, The Author 1939, pp 42 - 54)

Maurice, F.M. and Grant, M. H., History of the War in South Africa 1899 - 1902, (London, Hurst and Blacket, 1910, pp 453 - 474)

Preller, G.S., Scheepers se dagboek en die stryd in Kaapland, (Kaapstad, Nasionale Pers, 1938, pp 156 - 172)

Reitz, D., Commando, (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 1983)

C.6. Maps:

Reconnaissance Series of the Cape Colony, Port Nolloth and Okiep, Sheets 127 K&L, Scale 1: 250 000, War Office, 1907.

D.LATER SOURCES:

D.1. Printed Sources:

Breytenbach, J., (ed), Gedenkalbum van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog, (Kaapstad, Nasionale Pers, 1949, pp 223 - 242)

Doyle, A.C., The Great Boer War, (Cape Town, Struik, 1976, pp 659, 739)

Gibbs, P., Death of the Last Republic, (London, Fredrick Muller Ltd, 1957, pp 275, 284 - 285)

Hibbard, M.G., Boer War Tribute Medals, (Cape Town, Constantia Classics, 1982, pp 171 - 175, Appendix 12)

Orpen, N., The Cape Town Highlanders 1885 - 1970, (Cape Town, CTH History Committee, 1970, pp 47, 48, 53, 54, 60)

Smalberger, J.M., A History of Copper Mining in Namaqualand, (Cape Town, Struik, 1975)

Tylden, G., The Armed Forces of South Africa, (Johannesburg, Trophy Press, 1982, pp 118)

D.3. Periodicals:

Burke, P.E., The siege of Okiep, Minet News, July 1978, pp 30 - 33.

De Villiers, s. and De Villiers, M., Okiep saved - by ignorance, Personality, 8 October, 1970, pp 94 - 96.

Hawkes, G., The elusive Okiep medal, The Military Collectors Club of Canada, Summer 1976, Vol 12, No. 6.

Mitchell, F.K.M., The Cape Copper Company's medal for the defence of Okiep, SANS Newsletter, March 1953, Vol 4, No. 5.

Dorlog Gestaak om Sokker te speel, Die Byvoegsel tot die
Oosterlig, 26 Januarie 1968.

D.4. Unpublished Projects and Theses:

Cornelissen, A., Namaqualand: Copper History, 1966.

Forsyth, D.R., The Cape Company Medal 1902, 1986.

Moffatt, H.R., An account of the siege of Okiel, Namaqualand, by the Boer forces under the command of General Smuts and its relief by the British forces under the command of Colonel Cooper during the latter stages of the Anglo-Boer War (1902), 1971.

Moffatt, H.R., Addendum to the memoir on the siege and relief of Okiel, Namaqualand, during the Anglo-Boer War (March - June 1902), 1975.

Pyper, P.A., Generaal J.C. Smuts en die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog 1899 - 1902, (MA Thesis, University of Potchestroom, 1960)

Shearing, H.A., The Second invasion of the Cape Colony, 1901- 1902, during the Second Anglo-Boer War, (MA Thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1989)

von Zeil, A - G, Okiel: An example of the urban lifecycle of a mining town, (Honours Thesis, University of Cape Town, 1989)

von Zeil, A - G, Jane Henwoods Diary: The Siege Of O'kiel, 31 March - 21 May 1902, (History Project, University of Cape Town, 1989)

D.5. Newspapers:

The Cape Times: 11 May 1988