

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 11

“Moving Like the Wind”

Transcript

(Provided by listener Joseph M.)

[music: Fanfare]

Deneys Reitz, a Boer soldier during the Second Anglo-Boer War and future South African politician, had this to say about the outbreak of the war when he was 17 years old, “I have no doubt that the British government had made up its mind to force the issue and was the chief culprit, but the Transvaalers were also spoiling for a fight. And from what I saw in Pretoria during the few weeks that preceded the ultimatum I feel sure that the Boers would in any case have insisted on a rupture.”

South Africa, 1899, both sides want a war, and now they have one.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 11. Moving Like the Wind.

When we left off last week the two Boer republics, the Orange Free State and the South African Republic, had issued a counter-ultimatum to the British: back off or it's war. Which is kind of like a cornered mouse rearing up on its hind legs and telling the cat, “Get away from me or I'm gonna smack you one!” But before we explore how that played out, I want to say a few words about Joseph Chamberlain. You may recall that I mentioned him at the end of last week's episode. At the beginning of the twentieth century he is the most important politician in Britain, even more so than the Prime Minister.

Joseph Chamberlain was born in London in 1836. His father was a shoe maker, and was well-off enough that he could afford to send Joseph to the University College School, a prestigious school open to nonconformists, which was important because the Chamberlain family were Unitarians. But it seems they didn't have the money to send him to university. Joseph left school at the age of 16 and worked for the family business. At 18 he left London for Birmingham, where his uncle had a screw-making business called Nettlefold's, and later Nettlefold & Chamberlain. As you might have guessed, Joseph and the screw-making business both prospered. At its peak Nettlefold & Chamberlain were manufacturing two-thirds of the screws used in Britain.

In 1861 he married Harriet Kenrick, a fellow Birmingham Unitarian. Together they had a daughter, Beatrice, and a son, Joseph Austen Chamberlain. Sadly, Harriet died giving birth to Joseph Austen. The boy would grow up, enter politics himself, lose his first name and become Austen Chamberlain, an important political figure in his own right. The elder Joseph Chamberlain would remarry in 1868 to Florence Kenrick, his first wife's cousin. They would have four children, a boy and three girls, and Florence too would die in childbirth. The boy, Arthur Neville Chamberlain, like his older half-brother, would grow up, lose his first name, and become an important political figure in *his* own right. Neville Chamberlain would top everyone else in the family by becoming Prime Minister. Whether or not his premiership goes down in history as a success is something we'll have to wait and see on.

Joseph Chamberlain as a commoner, a businessman, and a nonconformist Unitarian was just the sort to become a Liberal, which he did. He retired from the screw-making business a wealthy man at the age of 38 and got involved in politics. He was elected to parliament from Birmingham in 1876. He belonged to a more radical faction of the Liberal Party, advocating for such out-there causes as land reform, free universal secular public education, disestablishment of the Church of England, and universal suffrage...for men.

Education was a subject particularly dear to him. At this time millions of British children were not attending school, and many of those who were, had only religious schools, that is Catholic or Anglican, available to them. This was very unpopular with Methodists, Baptists, and other nonconformist churches, and drove those groups to support the Liberal party. Chamberlain pointed out that public education was much more advanced in countries like Germany and the United States, and maybe that could possibly have something to do with those countries emerging as Britain's economic competitors. Hmmm.

As I said, this was radical stuff for the time, and Chamberlain was denounced as a republican and an atheist and worse. But for all his radical ideas on domestic issues Chamberlain was old school about the Empire. He supported expanding British holdings and was a staunch opponent of Irish Home Rule, which he saw as the first step toward the break-up of the empire. And that's the reason why Joseph Chamberlain abandoned the Liberal Party in 1886 after Prime Minister Gladstone's unsuccessful attempt to pass Irish Home Rule through the House of Commons. He became one of the leaders of the new Liberal Unionist Party, composed of Liberals who could not stomach Home Rule. As I said in the last episode, in the general election of that year the Conservatives and the Liberal Unionists formed an alliance which took control of the House, and made Lord Salisbury the Prime Minister. When Chamberlain returned to the House after that election he was greeted with cries of "Traitor!" and "Judas!" from his former Liberal colleagues. Chamberlain became the leader of the Liberal Unionists in the Commons, and although they sat on the opposition benches, their votes kept Salisbury in office until 1892.

In the general election of that year the Liberal Party gained 80 seats to give them a four-vote edge on the Conservatives. Now the Conservatives still had the support of the Liberal Unionists who held 45 seats, but the Liberals had the support of the now 81 votes of the Irish Parliamentary Party. And Gladstone returned that year for his fourth premiership at the age of 82, making him Britain's oldest prime minister. Naturally the price of Irish support was Home Rule, and this time Gladstone passed Home Rule through the House of Commons by 34 votes. But there was still the House of Lords. In the House of Commons Conservative majorities come and Conservative majorities go, but in the House of Lords it is all Conservative all the time. Normally only about 50 lords actually participate in the business of their house, but on this occasion they poured in from all across the country for the privilege of defeating Irish home rule. The final vote in the House of Lords was 419-41.

The Liberal Government fell in 1895, and in the general election of that year the Conservatives and their Liberal Unionist allies took back control of the House of Commons. Lord Salisbury returned as Prime Minister. He offered Joseph Chamberlain his choice of any Cabinet position other than Foreign Secretary, which Salisbury wanted to keep for himself. Chamberlain, who was quite possibly the most popular politician in Britain at this time, chose Colonial Secretary, which he regarded as the second most important position in British government, and in view of the fact that the Colonial Secretary's decisions would determine the future course of the Empire, arguably the most important in the long run. The former champion of public education and universal suffrage would soon become the British government's most ardent imperialist.

It was only a few months later that the Jameson Raid blew up in the faces of the British government. Chamberlain was the Cabinet's point man on South Africa and he defended government policy in the House of Commons. He denied that he or anyone else in the government had involvement in or foreknowledge of the Jameson Raid, although the truth was that Chamberlain was in it up to his elbows. He had worked for months with colonial officials in South Africa planning the raid.

And that brings us back to 1899, when the British are pressing the Boer republics over citizenship rights for the foreigners in Johannesburg. I should probably mention at this point that while the British government is banging the drum over oppression of foreign workers in the gold mines of the South African Republic the British themselves are shipping indentured workers from China to work in the diamond mines in the Cape Colony. And no one dreams for a moment that any of these Chinese workers are going to get British citizenship.

It may also be worth mentioning that few of these foreign workers in Johannesburg were truly interested in becoming citizens. It wasn't as big an issue there as it was in London, although it's true that they were concerned about the taxes, and worried that their non-citizen status might mean that someday the Boers would try to deport them. Needless to say the foreign mining

companies that owned the operations didn't like the taxes very much either. It's much more likely that the British government was responding to their concerns rather than those of ordinary miners. But the public statements of the British government were focused on those British citizens in Johannesburg who, the government claimed, were living scarcely better than slaves.

And thus the British ultimatum to the Boers, citizenship or else. And they had thousands of troops massing on the borders of the South African Republic and the Orange Free State to back it up, and thousands more en route. The Boers responded with a counter-ultimatum, withdraw your troops, turn your ships around, or it will be war. You might think that this is a pretty, um, bold move for two tiny states to take on the most powerful empire on the planet. But hey, I haven't been describing the Boers as stiff-necked and independent-minded for nothing. This was the attitude that made the Boer states. Not to mention a deep-seated Dutch Reformed worldview. A worldview that takes for granted that god loves stiff-necked independent-minded Boer farmers just a little bit more than he loves any of his other children.

The initial reaction in London was delight. The British government wanted war, and the Boers were doing them the favor of starting it for them. At the beginning of the war the British had about 15,000 soldiers available in South Africa, with thousands more already on ships en route. Potentially the British had hundreds of thousands of soldiers available to draw on from all over the Empire, though it would take time to mobilize them and ship them to South Africa. And as it turned out that's exactly what they would have to do to subdue the Boers.

The British Army was small by European standards. Britain was the only major power in Europe that did not have conscription. But the British Army was a well-trained force with experience campaigning in colonial wars across Africa and Asia. On the other hand, the British had not fought an enemy armed with modern weapons since the Crimean War, almost 50 years ago now, and the British Army had become ossified with tradition. British officers were highly educated, but they earned their promotions more from their social graces and their care in filling out paperwork than from combat experience.

Twenty years earlier Gilbert and Sullivan had satirized the British Army officer corps in the well known Major General Song from *The Pirates of Penzance*. "For my military knowledge, though I'm plucky and adventure-y, has only been brought down to the beginning of the century./But still in matters vegetable, animal and mineral I am the very model of a modern major general." And keep in mind that when the Major General says "the beginning of the century," he means the beginning of the 19th century.

I find it astonishing that the British Army was only at this point, in 1899, transitioning away from the traditional red coat that had been part of British army uniforms since at least the English Civil War. Yes, in response to literally decades of pleas from officers in the field, command had

finally decided that British soldiers would henceforth wear a color actually found in nature. The conversion to khaki uniforms began in India, and I am happy to report that British soldiers who fought in the Second Anglo-Boer War were the first to go into battle dressed in khaki, a light tan fabric. The name derives from the Hindi word for dust.

In contrast to the professional British Army, the Boer Republics did not have standing armies. Military service was compulsory for all men between the ages of 16 and 60. There was no pay, and soldiers were expected to provide their own horse, rifle, 30 rounds of ammunition, and a ten day supply of food. Boers did not wear uniforms; they went into battle in their civilian clothes. The Boer army was organized into units called *commandos*. A typical commando might have a couple of thousand soldiers, although the units varied in size. Commandos were generally organized by community, but a citizen was free to join whatever commando he wished. The members of the commando elected their own officers, and after three months' service, soldiers could go on leave at times of their own choosing, usually because they had to go back home and take care of farm business or because they needed a break. But soldiers seldom left the field just before battle, although sometimes commandos would lose a lot of soldiers right after one.

Of course the Boers were committed fighters, since they were fighting for their independence and way of life, and so these privileges were seldom abused. But as you can imagine it made it difficult for commanders to plan the war when they could never be sure exactly how many soldiers would show up on a given day, or how popular their decisions might be with the rank and file, who had the power to elect different officers.

As I mentioned before, the Boers received reparations payments after the Jameson Raid, and they spent the money buying quality rifles, about 80,000 of them, and 80 million rounds of ammunition. Most of the rifles were Mausers, which used smokeless powder, a cutting edge innovation, which the British had not yet adopted. You see, up until this point in the history of rifle, combat rifles produce a puff of smoke with every shot, and large battles quickly become a smoky mess. It's hard to be a sniper when three or four shots produce a cloud of smoke big enough to give away your position. The Boers would not have that problem, and they would take full advantage of the edge that gave them. Not to mention that the new smokeless powder produced a higher muzzle velocity and longer range.

The rifles were necessary because although soldiers were theoretically required to provide their own when mobilized, the Boer governments discovered that less than half of their citizens actually owned firearms, and so the government had to supply the rest. The government also bought state-of-the-art military pieces from the French and the Germans for their field artillery units. And the French and the Germans were making the best field artillery in the business at this time. Field artillery units were the one component of a standing army that the Boers actually had.

The Boer republics are located in the Highveld, an arid, dusty region of rolling plains and scrub vegetation. The Boers grew up there, they knew the land, and many of them hunted there. They were skilled horsemen, and the horses were much better adapted to the terrain and the climate than were British horses. Now the Boers were not cavalry units, they were mobile infantry units, meaning they used the horses for transportation, but then got off them to fight. But given the vast, sparsely populated veldt, and their knowledge of the terrain, their mobility gave them a huge advantage.

A reporter for *The Morning Post* described the Boer fighters this way: “What men they were! Thousands of independent riflemen thinking for themselves, possessed with beautiful weapons, led with skill, living as they rode without commissariat or transport, or ammunition column, moving like the wind.” That reporter’s name is Winston Churchill, you may recall him from Episode 4, he is out of the British army now and working as a journalist, and we’ll be hearing more from him later.

And we shouldn’t overlook the fact that many of the Boer fighters had black African servants, who did not fight, but provided support to the Boers, such as hunting and cooking and looking after the horses. There were also foreign volunteers. Mostly Dutch, German, Scandinavian, and a few Irish and Americans. No one knows exactly how many fighters the Boers had, but it’s estimated that they began the war with something like 60,000 soldiers. This gave them a considerable advantage over the British, but they knew that more British troops were on the way, and that meant that they would have to strike fast and strike hard, and that’s what they did.

The war began October 11, 1899, after the Boer ultimatum expired. This is springtime in South Africa, the perfect time to launch a war. The Boers launched two attacks westward, into the northern part of the Cape Colony, aimed at the towns of Kimberly and Mafeking. Within a month the Boers had both towns under siege. They must have been particularly delighted to learn that their arch-enemy, Cecil Rhodes, the quintessential British imperialist, proponent of that pink trail from Cape Town to Cairo, the man who gave his name to Rhodesia and Rhodes Scholarships, diamond magnate, ardent advocate for the annexation of the Boer republics, and co-conspirator in the Jameson Raid, was among the British now under siege in Kimberly.

But the main Boer offensive was eastward into the Natal. That was where most of the British soldiers were and it was the location of Durban, the British port town on the Indian Ocean. This is where British reinforcements and supply would most likely land. But between the Boers and Durban was a force of 4,500 British soldiers under the command of General Sir William Penn Symons at Dundee. And behind him, 10,000 British soldiers under the command of Lieutenant General Sir George White, stationed at Ladysmith, the second largest town in Natal, after Durban. Attacking them were some 18,000 Boers under the command of Commandant General Piet Joubert.

The first engagement of the war was the Battle of Talana Hill on October 20th. The Boers had taken the hill and stationed artillery there. Penn Symons ordered a British attack on the hill which succeeded in pushing the Boers back, but at a cost of 447 British lives, including Penn Symons himself. The Boers lost around 150. This battle was the first indication that the Boers were more dangerous than the British believed and that the usual British tactics were not going to be effective.

Penn Simons's successor, Major General James Yule, decided that there was nothing in Dundee worth the casualties that they were taking and the following day the British forces withdrew toward Ladysmith. The Boers pursued them as they moved south, but fresh British troops sent north from Ladysmith intercepted them. The Boers did not fare as well in the second battle and the troops from Dundee made it safely into Ladysmith.

Joubert established siege lines around Ladysmith, sending troops to occupy hilltops around the town. White attempted a night attack to disrupt the Boer's preparations on October 29th. But a combination of confusion on the British side with withering sniper fire from the Boers led to heavy British casualties. So White and his troops hunkered down. They were some 15,000 soldiers and servants occupying a small town with a civilian population of 5,400, and it was getting crowded. Another Boer force about 3,000 strong headed south across the Orange River into the Cape Colony along the main rail line that ran to Cape Town. But they stopped at Colesberg, the first town of any size on the rail line south of the border and dug in.

The Boers are sometimes criticized for not being more aggressive. Sieges are time consuming, and time was not the Boers' friend. On the other hand, the British units that had been deployed in proximity to the Boer states for the purpose of bullying them have found themselves surrounded and cut off by the Boers they were supposed to be intimidating. Maybe this was all they thought they needed to do to make their point. After all, this is all it had taken back in 1880. But they underestimated British resolve. Should they have pressed on? Perhaps they could have taken Durban and deprived the British of their best port. Maybe they should have struck deeper into the Cape Colony, seizing railroad junctions and hampering British logistics. But they didn't. Maybe they lacked imagination, maybe the civilian army with its democratically elected officers had no enthusiasm for striking deep into enemy territory and leaving their farms and families far behind. Would it have made a difference? Or were the British determined to win, no matter the price?

On October 31st, General Sir Redvers Buller arrived in Cape Town. He brought with him the British First Army Corps, 47,000 strong, and a mandate to defeat the Boers once and for all. Buller's plan was a simple one. He intended to march north along that main railroad line that ran to Bloemfontein, the capital of the Orange Free State, and from there to Pretoria, the capital of the Transvaal, trusting that his force would have numerical superiority over any conceivable

Boer opposition. But when he arrived in South Africa and learned about the three towns under siege he judged it was time for a change in plan. Buller felt that for any of these three British garrisons to fall would have been an unacceptable blow to British morale and prestige. So he made his first priority the relief of the towns under siege.

Now he may have been right about the morale thing, but by dividing First Corps into three parts he frittered away his numerical advantage. The first force, commanded by Lieutenant General Lord Methuen, was sent up the western rail line toward Kimberly to relieve that town, and then on to Mafeking, the second force under Lieutenant General Sir William Gatacre proceeded north along the main rail line with the intent to take back Colesberg, and then press on into the Orange Free State. Meanwhile the remainder of First Corps, about 21,000 soldiers commanded by Buller himself traveled by sea to Durban with the intent of driving up into the hills and relieving the siege of Ladysmith.

Most of November was quiet as Buller spent time planning and organizing his three attacks, while the Boers were content to maintain their sieges. At Ladysmith Joubert had sent troops to reconnoiter the route from Durban and chose the town of Colenso, about 10 miles south of Ladysmith where the road crosses the Tugela River as the best spot to make his stand against the inevitable British drive inland from Durban, and he set to work digging trenches and building fortified positions for their artillery pieces.

The most significant event of this period was probably the capture of a British armored train doing a reconnaissance run up from Durban toward Colenso. Aboard that train was that war correspondent I mentioned before, Winston Churchill, who had arrived in South Africa with First Corps. Churchill and the 50 or so soldiers aboard that train were taken to Pretoria as POWs. Now as I said, Churchill was working as a reporter, he was not a soldier and he should have been released, he even had press credentials. But when the Boers saw his name they recognized that he was the son of Sir Randolph Churchill, and decided he was too valuable to let go. Churchill later reported having this exchange with one of his guards at the prison in Pretoria:

“No, no old chappie, we don’t want your flag, we want to be left alone. We are free, you’re not free.”

“How do you mean not free?”

“Well is it right that a dirty kaffir should walk on the pavement without a pass? That’s what they do in your British colonies, brother, equal, ugh! Free, not a bit. We know how to treat kaffirs. Fancy letting the black filth walk on the pavement. Educate a kaffir, oh that’s you English all over. No, no old chappie, we educate ‘em with a stick. Treat ‘em with humanity and consideration, I like that. They were put here by God Almighty to work for us. We’ll stand no

damn nonsense from them, we'll keep them in their proper places. What do you think? Insist on their proper treatment, will you? Well that's what we're going to see about now, we'll settle whether you English are to interfere with us before this war is over."

In December, Churchill escaped and he managed to make the 300 miles to Lorenzo Marques in Portuguese East Africa, ultimately rejoining the British troops in Natal and becoming something of a celebrity in the process. Buller gave him a field commission as a lieutenant in the South African Light Horse regiment.

By the last week of November, Methuen, with 10,000 under his command and more arriving every day, pressed north along the rail line toward Kimberly. His first encounter with the Boers was at the Modder River crossing, about 25 miles south of Kimberly. The Boers had dug in, and had a clear field of fire across an open plain, but Methuen pressed forward anyway, launching a frontal infantry assault on November 28th.

[sound effect: gunfire plays in the background]

The Boers laid down withering rifle fire, and the British soldiers, lacking any cover, were forced to fall to the ground and lie prone in the hot sun for as long as ten hours without food or water. It is said that the Scottish units dressed in kilts suffered terrible sunburns on the backs of their legs. Those who tried to crawl away were picked off. The British were helpless until darkness fell and suffered some 500 casualties. But the Boers also withdrew that night after being bloodied by British artillery fire. They took up a new defensive line across a ridge across a rail line a few miles to the north. A place called Magersfontein. But the Boer commander, Koos de la Rey, had his soldiers dig their trenches not on top of the ridge, the expected place, but in front of the ridge, and used piles of brush for camouflage. The trick worked, the British shelled the ridge assuming that was where the Boers had dug in.

This time, Methuen tried a night attack, early in the morning of December 11th. But it was pouring rain, and the British had trouble finding their way through the thorny brush, and they weren't advancing as fast as they were meant to. They kept in close formation, the soldiers holding on to each other so no one would get lost in the dark. When dawn broke they were well short of their goal, but closer to the Boer trenches than they realized. Then a British soldier tripped an alarm wire, alerting the Boers, who fired on the tight formation of British. The result was a calamity: nearly 1000 British casualties as against 200 or so Boers. The British were forced to withdraw, reorganize, and await more reinforcements.

Meanwhile, on that main railway line, an assault at Stormberg Junction by Gatacre's force against the Boers blocking the way into the Orange Free State on the previous night failed just as

badly. Here the British got lost in the dark and were disorganized and helpless when the sun rose. The Boers took 600 prisoners, more than 20% of the entire force.

Over in Natal, General Buller was advancing along the road to Ladysmith when he received word of the defeats at Magersfontein and Stormberg Junction. The news left him more determined than ever to break through the Boer defenses at Colenso and relieve Ladysmith. Unfortunately for Buller, like the other generals, he was hampered by poor quality maps and lack of information about the terrain. He chose to begin the attack with two days of artillery bombardment, which, as at Magersfontein, served only to alert the Boers that an attack was coming. And then he reached into his bag of tricks and pulled out... a frontal infantry assault. It was a disaster.

When the attack began on December 15th, the British artillery in the center of the line got out too far ahead of the infantry and found themselves pinned down by Boer rifle fire. A British infantry unit went off in search of a drift, which I gather is a South African way of saying a ford, off to the British left in the hopes of flanking the Boer lines. But they got themselves stuck in a bend in the river and exposed themselves to sniper fire from three angles. Sir Redvers seems to have freaked out at about this point. He first ordered his artillery to withdraw, then the entire force. The British suffered about 1,100 casualties against the Boer's 38. British troops began to refer to Sir Redvers mockingly as "Sir Reverse".

And the freak-out wasn't over yet. Buller advised the war office in London that he could not relieve General White in Ladysmith with the forces available, and announced that he was giving up on the town and concentrating on defending what was left of British Natal. He also sent a message to White, recommending that he open surrender talks with the Boers. White refused to consider it.

These three defeats on December 10th, 11th, and 15th came to be known as the Black Week. It was now clear that the war would not be won easily or quickly. The call went out for fresh volunteers, and in spite of, or maybe because of, the discouraging news from South Africa there were plenty of volunteers. But it was alarming how many of them were too sick or malnourished to meet army standards; again, isn't Britain supposed to be the richest country in the world? And the War Office began looking for a new commander.

On January 6th the Boers assaulted the Ladysmith garrison, but the defenders held them off. Reinforcements were arriving regularly in Durban, and by mid-January Buller was up to 30,000 soldiers in Natal. Resentful of the damage the last 6 weeks had done for his reputation he decided to take another crack at crossing the Tugela. He had learned of another ford, called Trichardt's Drift, about 15 miles upstream from Colenso. That is to say on the British left. He dispatched a force of about 13,000 with artillery support under the command of General Sir Charles Warren to

cross the drift and take the ridge on the opposite side of the river. Once the British secured that bridgehead they would be in a position to flank the Boer defenses and march on Ladysmith.

Unfortunately for the British the movement of soldiers and equipment up the south bank of the Tugela was easily detected by the Boers. They anticipated the British move and reinforced the ridge. The opening move came the night of January 23rd, when a force of 2,000 British under the command of Major General Edward Woodgate crossed the drift. Their goal was a hill called Spion Kop, which is Afrikaans for “lookout hill”. It was the highest point on the ridge, and Sir Redvers calculated that if the British could take it and position artillery there they could rake the Boer flank and collapse the enemy defenses.

The execution went beautifully at first. Woodgate’s force crossed the river in darkness and fog, climbed the hill undetected, and drove off the handful of Boer defenders they found there. Woodgate sent a message to Warren that Spion Kop was in British hands. But when dawn broke and the fog lifted it became clear the plan had gone horribly wrong. The British soldiers creeping forward through unfamiliar terrain in the dark of night with only vague and incomplete maps to guide them had found not the summit of Spion Kop; they were on a lower hilltop, meaning that before them was a semicircle of other hilltops occupied by Boer artillery and sharpshooters, many on higher ground than the British.

[sound effect: artillery fire plays over]

The British attempted to dig in and hold their position, but hilltops tend to be rocky places not well suited to entrenchment. And incredibly, this British unit of 1,000 soldiers had all of 20 shovels among them. Some British artillery up there might have helped turn the tide, but there was no hope of moving guns in before nightfall, meaning that the soldiers would have to endure a long, hot, summer day of intense Boer fire. It didn’t help that General Woodgate himself had been killed by an artillery shell before 9 AM. Other officers fell as the day wore on and the lines of command became unclear.

By afternoon some of the British soldiers were attempting to surrender. They were stopped by Alexander Thorneycroft, a British officer who had begun the day as a Lieutenant Colonel but by this time had received field promotions to Brigadier General. But the newly minted general had no news or orders from his superiors. He was sending pleas for reinforcements as well as for water against the heat, and new supplies and ammunition, as the men on the hill were running out. Some of the messengers were getting killed before they could deliver his messages. Others got through but Thorneycroft got no response. At dusk he ordered a withdrawal. Just then, who but Lieutenant Churchill would arrive with the news that guns and reinforcements were on the way. Thorneycroft replied bitterly, “Better six good battalions safely down the hill than a bloody mop-up in the morning.” The withdrawal proceeded.

Ironically the Boers had thought their efforts to dislodge the British had failed and were withdrawing themselves. The next morning they were amazed to discover that the enemy position had been abandoned. The British lost about 1,500 killed, wounded or captured that day, and about 2,000 over the course of the operation, and nothing to show for it. Boer losses were under 400.

Spion Kop was the largest and best-known battle of the Second Anglo-Boer War. Some Boers thought that the war was as good as over, and the British would now have no choice but to negotiate. But the British were in no mood to swallow their pride. They poured more troops into the conflict from across the empire, including soldiers from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, the first time these Dominions, or soon-to-be Dominions, deployed soldiers outside their own territories.

But we'll have to stop there for this week. This coming Thursday is Thanksgiving in the United States, so I'm going to take some time off. The next episode will be available in two weeks' time but rest assured, that although I will not be posting an episode next week, I will continue reading and researching for more episodes to come. To my American listeners, happy Thanksgiving, to the rest of you, well, I wish you a happy Thanksgiving too, it's just that you're going to have to enjoy that day at work. So I hope you'll join me in two weeks' time on *The History of the Twentieth Century* as we continue our look at the Boer War, and as British numbers begin to tip the balance and as the rest of the world looks on with alarm. That's in two weeks' time, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. There was a considerable number of Indians living in Natal during this time. Many were indentured laborers, and had no more rights or respect than was given to black Africans, which is to say hardly any. But when the war broke out the Indians organized a volunteer ambulance corps to support the British. At Spion Kop they were instrumental in rescuing British soldiers. Sir Redvers was impressed and praised them in his reports. And 38 members of this corps were awarded medals after this war. Including their leader, a young lawyer named Mohandas Gandhi, we will be hearing more from him as the century unfolds, I am sure.

[music: closing theme]