

The 2nd Anglo-Boer War - "Tuesday, Nov 28, 1899, on the high grassland, where the air is clear as a bell, you see the British line approaching in the far distance and line your sights up, and, as they cross 1200 yards, you hear 'FIRE!'..."

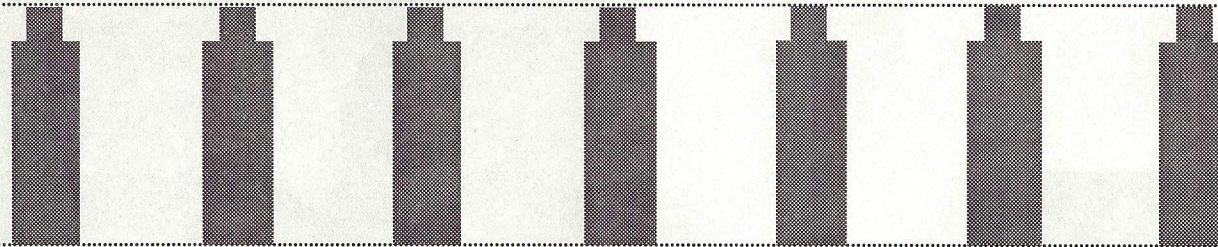
The Boers were farmers of Dutch origin who migrated to the southern tip of Africa to settle. Fiercely independent, when the British took over, they migrated to the interior - the "Great Trek" - and resettled on a high plateau. To keep the British out, they formed two countries, the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. But Britain was at the height of her imperialist period, and dreamed of a British Africa from "the Cape to Cairo". When gold was discovered in the Transvaal in 1887, events were put into motion which led to the 2nd war in 1899 (the first was the result of the British annexation of the Transvaal in 1877. A revolt by the Boers - the 1st Anglo-Boer War - re-established their independence).

The Boers were remind some of the American colonists, and the war, our War for Independence. Certainly, the marksmanship of the Boers, along with the incompetence of British commanders, bears a striking comparison with our own history. Had we not been in the midst of our own imperial period, having just seized the Philippines and fighting a revolt there, it is quite possible that we would have supported the Boers. Historical fate decreed otherwise, and they were worn down by British persistence and the absence of outside support such as we received from France in our war, and the Union of South Africa became part of the Empire. But with their Mauser rifles, the

Boers gave a good account of themselves. Consider an early engagement, with the British frontally attacking, and the Boers concealed along a river bank. On the high veld, visibility was extremely clear, and the Boers opened fire on the line of advancing British infantry at 1200 yards with such accuracy that the British soon went to ground, and stayed there the entire day under the hot sun. The Boer line was 3 miles long - one British soldier called it "three miles of sunken teeth". Remember that the "modern Mauser" rifles the Boers used were clip-fed, which gave them a relatively high rate of fire (the British were still using the early Lee-Medford, loading individual rounds into

their magazines) but were open-sighted, and predated most of the 'old' Turkish Mausers now being sold. You are probably using a modern peep- or scope-sighted rifle, not a pre-1900 open-sighted Mauser, and should do well under the same conditions. So imagine you are there, along the bank of the Modder River with the Boers, looking across a grassland 'level as the ocean floor' stretching 4 miles in front of you. It's the morning of Tuesday, Nov 28, 1899, and the air is clear as a bell as you watch the British forces build their line of attack. As they advance toward you, they cross the 1200 yard mark, and you are ordered to "Fire!" See how you do, shooting a modern rifle.

(All shots between the two dotted lines are correct in elevation)



Set this target up 25 meters (82 ft) away. Targets represent silhouettes of British soldiers advancing on line at a range of 1200 yards, when the Boers opened with small arms fire so effective that the advance was halted. Each soldier is assumed to offer a target about 60" high and 18" wide. At 1200 yards, where an MOA equals 12 inches, that means each target is 5.5 MOA high and 1.5 MOA wide. At 25 meters, where an MOA is 1/4", each target is 3/8" wide and 1.25" high. Because your bullet makes a large hole in relation to the target, you count as 'hits' only those where the center of the bullet hole is within the target area. Unless clearly on the target, score it a

miss. Like the Boers, when you open fire, you open rapid fire. Try 10 shots (which for the Boers would have been two 5-rd mags) in 30 seconds, and see if you can hit every target. It's not easy shooting, and when you get done, you might have a new respect for the marksmanship exhibited over a hundred years ago.

As a guide to how well you perform:
9-10 hits: Outstanding! A real Rifleman!
The Boers want YOU!!

7-8 hits: Good solid performance!

5-6 hits: Good, but no impressive

Under 5 hits: Better practice more before you cover yourself with shame.

An officer from the 62nd battery of Royal Artillery, on the line that day:

"We took up our position 800 yards from the Boer trenches, and by Javel the Boers let us have a fearful reception. Before I got my horses out they shot one of my drivers and two horses...and brought down my own horse. We then got my gun around on the enemy, when one of my gunners was shot through the brain and fell at my feet. Another of my gunners was shot whilst bringing up a shell..."

Were the Boers trained snipers? Did they have match ammo? Were they using

scoped M21s or M24s? The answer to all these questions is "NO". They were farmers, some younger than 16, and some well over 50. [The youngest prisoners taken by the British were 7 years old; the oldest, 79] Compare to what the average American rifle shooter of today expects of himself, using modern equipment, from the bench. It's an eye opener. And you 'old guys' complaining about your eyesight? Just wait until you're 79 years old, and fight for your freedom! (quote from Byron Farwell's *The Great Anglo-Boer War* - good book on the war)