

# **The Poltroon History of Lord Kitchener**

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*Not once or twice in our  
rough island story  
Either Conquer or Die  
The path of duty was  
the way to glory*

Lord Alfred Tennyson

Lord Horatio Kitchener, the face on the iconic First World War recruitment poster, who urged the youth of his day to fight and die in vast numbers for Britain's empire, was incompetent, incoherent, and in command.

From a relatively humble and obscure background he rose in the ranks through publicity, publicity, and sycophancy. His is the story of what happens when men have greatness thrust upon them but are inadequate to the task.

## The Youthful Horatio

Field Marshall 1st Earl Horatio Herbert Kitchener, of Khartoum and Broome, holding The Most Notable Order of the Garter (KG), The Most Illustrious Order of St. Patrick (KP), The Most Honourable Order of the Bath (KCB), Order of Merit (OM), Order of the Star of India (GCSI), Order of St. Michael and St. George (GCMG), Order of the Indian Empire (GCIE), Aide-de-Campe (ADC), and Member of the Privy Council (PC) was a superstar of the Victorian era. His face, on what became an iconic poster, encouraged millions to enlist for the First World War. To

the people of Great Britain and its dominions his was the face of imperial might and what it meant to be British.

Horatio was born on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June 1850, in Ballylongford, County Kerry, Ireland. He was the third child of 2nd Lieutenant Henry Horatio Kitchener and Frances Anne Chevalier-Cole. Kitchener senior had recently bought land in Ireland after selling his military commission. The purchasing and selling of commissions was standard practice within the British military up to 1871. With what rank someone entered either the navy or the army depended on what they could afford, and at times what price someone wanted to sell.

While Ireland was being ravaged by the potato famine Henry Kitchener, tired of the military life, saw his future as part of the English landed gentry. Irish land was relatively cheap and plentiful as between 1845-9 over one million of the Irish had died of hunger with an equal number emigrating to either England or America. The pastures of Ireland looked very green to Henry, and a good place to make his dream of becoming part of the landed gentry come true.

Kitchener senior proved himself to be an unpopular man, epitomising the ruthless English landlord, evicting his tenants so he could improve the land by placing more sheep on it. In his home he was a strict disciplinarian with interesting notions of child rearing. One of these was forbidding his children to have blankets on their beds—he supplied them with newspapers to keep warm.

Unfortunately, Horatio's mother suffered from tuberculosis requiring the family to move to Switzerland seeking medical help in 1864. While there the young Kitchener attended an English boarding school where he was teased about his Irish accent. It is fairly likely this added to his prejudiced view, common at the time, of the Irish. As a student Kitchener proved proficient in languages, becoming fluent in French and German. His knack for languages would prove invaluable to him in later years.

In 1867 he moved to Cambridge and completed his secondary schooling while the following year he took the Royal Military Academy entrance examinations coming 28<sup>th</sup> out of 56 candidates. By 1870 he was keen to see action and joined a French Field Ambulance unit in the Franco-Prussian War. It was there that he developed pneumonia, possibly due to ascending in an observation balloon, requiring his father to send him back to England. When he returned he received a reprimand from the army for violating English neutrality.

This wasn't the most auspicious start to a promising military career.

Despite the reprimand and not being an overly bright student Horatio was commissioned into the Royal Engineers in 1871, then continued his education at the School of Military Engineering in Chatham. While there he came to the attention of Brigadier-General Richards. What stood Horatio apart from his fellow students was his capacity for work, diligence, and his doggedness. Richards was looking for someone who could get things done and he made Kitchener his aide-de-camp in 1873.

Though not displaying enormous cognitive powers Kitchener's personality displayed the characteristics of a fine intelligence officer's eye for details, gift for languages, plus being meticulous and hard working. It was these qualities that saw him a part of the Palestinian Exploration Fund (PEF) in 1874. It didn't take

long for Horatio to pick up the local languages, displaying a talent in negotiations with the inhabitants.

His work was noticed by the Foreign Office who seconded Kitchener to map Cyprus. He may not have been a shining star but he was able to follow orders and punctilios in their execution; as such was appointed as the military vice-consul to Kastamonu Province, Turkey, in 1879. In 1880 he was requested back to Cyprus by its new High Commissioner to complete the mapping assignment he'd started previously. That task completed, Kitchener was promoted to Captain and posted to Egypt in 1882 as second in command of the cavalry of the new Egyptian army.

For a middling student with a gift for languages Horatio had had a rapid rise through the ranks while making few friends along the way. Those in the military that knew him considered him cold, calculating, ruthless, arrogant, and fiercely ambitious. Kitchener chose his friends carefully, ingratiating himself to those he considered helpful. Once their usefulness was over they were quickly removed from his social circle. Personal feelings didn't interfere with decision making for his best interests.

He displayed the same characteristics to his men. If someone was below his social rank he showed no interest in them. Common soldiers were only there to take orders and he was well known for losing his temper and yelling at subordinates.

Horatio remained a bachelor apart from one romantic interlude during his middle thirties. He did maintain some female friendships with whom he used to correspond while serving overseas. In »The Victorians« by A.N. Wilson there are references to Kitchener forming warm, masculine, friendships, while in »The Generals« by Mark Urban the author writes about the barrack room gossip that Kitchener had acquired the „taste for buggery“.

During the Boer War Kitchener befriended a young cavalry captain, Frank Maxwell, whom he nicknamed, „the Brat“. Maxwell was able to tease Kitchener as no one else would dare. Some rare insights into Horatio's character come from Maxwell's letters home. To his father Maxwell wrote: „K is not the purposely rough-mannered impolite person those who have never seen him suppose. He is awfully shy, and until he knows anyone his manners—except to ladies—are certainly not engaging ... in talking to K we always say, *we made a speech, we drew so much pay, we are this or we are that.*“

Despite Kitchener's attitude towards his subordinates he insisted that Maxwell have their photograph taken. To Maxwell's consternation he made: „a vile fuss about my appearance.“ „Good heavens, your hair's all over the place,“ Kitchener said, rebuking Maxwell prior to the photo being taken.

It is open to conjecture as to what sort of relationship was held between Kitchener and Maxwell but as one of Horatio's General Staff commented on Maxwell: „Poor boy, I fear his brain is not his strongest point.“ It can be safely assumed the relationship wasn't based on military expertise.

Prior to World War One, Lord Curzon, who moved in the same social circles as Kitchener turned down a woman who wanted to marry him by stating that he had no fondness for women, having been initiated into other practices by Lord Kitchener. When Lady Diana Cooper, the daughter of the Duchess of Rutland was touched inappropriately under the dinner table by Prime Minister Asquith she

later complained to her mother. The Duchess replied to her daughter that she was fortunate it wasn't Lord Kitchener. In the aristocratic houses the single folk of either gender would have servants sleep across their bedroom doorways when Kitchener came to visit, preventing him from acquainting them to his personal, intimate, preferences.

Kitchener also liked collecting flowers and art objects, particularly porcelains, either by buying or looting them as opportunities arose.

As the Second in Command of the Egyptian cavalry Horatio had his work cut out for him as morale among the indigenous troops was low and corruption was rife. As he was trying to rebuild that part of the army, in the Sudan the Mahdi, a religious leader, was causing problems for British colonialists by linking nationalism with Islam. General Charles Gordon was sent to Khartoum in 1864 to alleviate concerns and bring British order to the situation.

Unfortunately for Gordon neither the Mahdi nor his followers were interested in British order. They laid siege to Khartoum. When news of this reached England the public wanted something to be done to relieve Gordon so the Khartoum Relief Expedition was cobbled together under Field Marshall Garnet Wolesley, with Kitchener as his intelligence officer.

Despite Kitchener's urgings, as he saw himself a man of action, pettifoggery and dithering in Parliament and by Wolesley allowed the Mahdi's troops to capture Khartoum and behead Gordon. While the Khartoum Relief Expedition made its ponderously slow march to the city the Mahdi's forces departed and disappeared before any vengeance could be extracted.

The failure of the mission didn't reflect on Kitchener. His father had also been hard at work promoting his son as a man of action to the newspapers, who wrote glowingly about him.

In 1885 he was again promoted, this time to Brevet Lieutenant Colonel. He promptly resigned his Egyptian commission and returned to England.

While in England with his new found fame and position Kitchener wasted no time in cultivating as many important social connections as possible. His efforts were rewarded with an appointment as Governor General of the Eastern Sudan in 1886.

In 1888 Kitchener fought his first battle against Osman Digma, a major slave trader and follower of the Mahdi. Kitchener's forces were badly beaten and he was shot in the jaw, requiring him to convalesce back in England. By contemporary accounts Kitchener made a point of visiting as many aristocratic families as possible. His ingratiations proved successful as the then Prime Minister Robert Cecil appointed him to be Adjutant General of the Egyptian Army and then as Inspector General of Egyptian Police a year later. Not everyone was happy with these appointments which were considered more to his cultivation of contacts rather than his ability. No doubt having the Prince of Wales stay with him Egypt added to the rancour.

Kitchener's military superiors were in two minds about him. A file report on him read: „A good brigadier, very ambitious... not popular, but has of late greatly improved in tact and manner... a fine gallant soldier and good linguist, and very successful in dealing with orientals.“

Despite the ill feeling towards him within certain sections of the military Kitchener set about reforming the Egyptian army with zeal; gathering around him 108 eager, young, British officers. One of those officers severely disappointed Horatio by getting married.

In 1892 he was made Commander-in-Chief (Sirdir) of the Egyptian army. Sir Evelyn Baring who had recommended him wasn't impressed with Kitchener's military abilities but was with his sense of economy, describing him as a, „...sound man of business“.

In the next few short years colonial interests and power play were to help shape, promote, and sustain the Kitchener mystique.

Illustration:  
Kitchener of Khartoum

## Making A Name

In March 1896 an Italian Brigade was wiped out by Ethiopian forces under the command of Menelik II, who resented his country being turned into an Italian protectorate. With Italy making such a poor military show of it Britain saw its chance to increase the dominions and made a preparatory move to take all of the Sudan. Parliament looked around as to who was available and as fate would have it Kitchener was their man to do it. His orders were simple: take Dongola Province, in Sudan's north, bordering with Egypt.

During the intervening years between Gordon losing his head at Khartoum and Kitchener arriving at Omdurman, on the western bank of the river Nile in 1898, the British hadn't been idle. North Africa was a prize worth some diligent effort. Firstly the British developed a rail supply line, and an efficient and effective intelligence network commanded by Major General Rex Wingate. Wingate and Kitchener spent ten years acclimatising and accustoming themselves to the local conditions, traditions, and languages. Both men were fluent Arabic speakers, even being able to adopt the dialects of different tribes.

With his orders in hand, Kitchener's initial plan to capture Omdurman was to travel by rail. This plan was foiled by the worst storms in fifty years, and ensuing flash floods washed away about 18 kilometres of railway embankment. Not to be stopped by nature his next plan was to go down the Nile via gunboat. No sooner had it left its moorings than the gunboat's engine blew up.

Remaining stoic, Kitchener, turned to the gunboat's commander and said, „By God, Colville, I don't know which of us it's the hardest luck on.“ He then retired to another vessel where a subaltern found him crying and asking, „What have I done to deserve this?“

That subaltern was to write later, 'He was always inclined to bully his own entourage, as some men are rude to their wives. He was inclined to let off his spleen on those around him. He was often morose and silent for hours together...

he was even morbidly afraid of showing any feeling or enthusiasm, and he preferred to be misunderstood rather than be suspected of human feeling.“

Not one to shirk his duty, probably chiding himself for weakness, angry at fate and the elements, Kitchener drove his men and took Dongola in September 1897; then Abu Hamed, then Berber at which they had to halt until reinforcements arrived. In April 1898, with fresh troops, Kitchener captured Atbara.

The force under Horatio's command comprised of 8,200 British regulars, a mix of 17,600 Sudanese and Egyptian troops—many officered by Britons. Among those British regulars was a young cavalry officer and correspondent for the »Morning Post«, Winston Churchill, serving with the 21st Lancers. Kitchener resented Churchill's presence and Churchill wasn't particularly fond of Kitchener. Perhaps the Churchills, with their proud military background tracing back to the Duke of Marlborough, weren't so easy to ingratiate oneself to.

With Churchill, the correspondent, being on the front line it would be so much more difficult to Horatio to sell his version of events to eager British public waiting to read about his exploits. Kitchener looked for ways to keep Churchill sidelined from any action.

After Atbara the next objective was Omdurman, the capital of the Mahdi's successor, Abdullah al-Taashi, known as »The Khalifa«. To defeat The Khalifa and take Omdurman Kitchener's army required crossing the desert. Kitchener fully realised the logistical difficulties that involved. Logistics and supply were things he understood well. While battling against hostile natives, sandstorms, and the paucity of materials, Kitchener extended his supply rail line from Wadi Halfa to Berber, over 400 kilometres, to where the Nile route and camel trains met.

Churchill was to write in »The Morning Post«: „The Khalifa was conquered by the railway.“ Not to take anything away from the British and Egyptian soldiers, Churchill was correct; however, that wasn't what Kitchener wanted the good folk back home to read. He wanted the guts and glory copy that would satisfy his need for aggrandisement and his fellow Britons need for self gratified nationalism.

In preparation for the taking of Omdurman Kitchener consulted with Major General Wingate and used the resources available to him through his extensive intelligence network. Wingate studied reports from dozens of agents—some were just traders and merchants while others were the few Europeans that lived there. An ace up Wingate's sleeve was the Khalifa's foreign advisor, a German who adopted Islam, who wasn't shy about taking British pounds in exchange for information.

Wingate prepared a report for Kitchener stating they would be facing approximately 50,000 or more of the Khalifa's men. The report also noted that fourteen years ago the Dervishes mainly fought with shields, spears, and antiquated flintlocks; now many of them had rifles and some captured cannons. How effective these weapons would be was questionable, as without proper training their potential was greatly diminished, but their potential effect still needed to be considered.

Upon reaching Omdurman Kitchener turned his particular talents to the fore: he had the Nile to the army's back and placed gunboats at either flank, backed up with cannons on the shore. He then ordered the army to be bivouacked in a crescent shape so that their fire concentrate to the front. He also sent out

surveyors to mark distances for the most effective killing ranges. Kitchener's arrangement meant that the troops could concentrate on frontal fire and any enemy flanking manoeuvre would be met with as much cannon fire that the gunboats and big guns could muster. When Wingate informed his commander that the enemy might rush them one afternoon Kitchener replied, „We want nothing better, we have an excellent field of fire and they might as well come today as tomorrow.“

Winston Churchill, in his book, »My Early Life«, stated that not all the inhabitants of Omdurman were keen fighters: „The next day all the male population of the city were compelled to join the army in the field, and only the gunners and garrisons on the river-face remained within. In spite, however, of his (the Khalifa's) utmost vigilance, nearly 6000 men deserted during the nights of the 31<sup>st</sup> of August and 1<sup>st</sup> of September.“

At 5:00pm on September 1<sup>st</sup> 1898 the Khalifa's men attacked. This is when Kitchener's planning took its full effect. With the battlefield surveyed for various weapons maximum impact the officers and men could take full confidence in their array. Kitchener had placed a 5-inch howitzer battery on the eastern bank of the Nile and ordered them to open fire with 50 pound high explosive shell into Omdurman's mud brick fortifications, effectively cutting off any retreat. As the mass of Dervishes moved forward the Royal Artillery 15 pounders opened up with shells fused to burst overhead, spraying those underneath with white-hot shrapnel and pellets.

Churchill, behind cover with his men stood on a biscuit box and recorded what happened: „The white flags were nearly over the crew. In another minute they would become visible to the batteries. Did they realise what would come to meet them? They were a dense mass, 2,800 yards from the 32nd Field Battery and the gunboats. The ranges were known. It was a matter of machinery... About twenty shells struck them in the first minute. Some burst high in the air, others, exactly in their faces. Others, again, plunged into the sand, and, exploding, dashed clouds of red dust, splinters, and bullets amid their ranks... it was a terrible sight, for as yet they had not hurt us at all, and it seemed an unfair advantage to strike so cruelly when they could not reply... A ragged line of men were coming on desperately, struggling forward in the face of pitiless fire—white banners tossing and collapsing; white figures subsiding into the ground... valiant men were struggling on through a hell of whistling metal, exploding shells, and spurting dust—suffering, despairing, dying.“

For those who survived the opening barrages and continued to move forward, Kitchener's German made Maxim machine guns, selected for the reliability and range, opened up. One machine gun section fired over 54,000 rounds.

As those still alive pushed forward, at approximately 2000 meters the Grenadier Guards opened up with their Lee Metford rifles. Those rifles fired a hollow-point bullet that, literally, blew gaping holes in the torso or took arms and legs off. That type of bullet, after the Boer War, was banned by international convention as inhuman and cruel. While Horatio looked down with pride his brother, Walter, who was also there wrote: „One's feelings went over to the enemy, they just struggled on.“



Not one of the Khalifa's men made it closer than 200 meters of the British lines. With the slaughtering battle nearly over and the remnants of the attackers escaping as best they could, Kitchener mounted his horse and rode up to the nearest hill to survey the thousands of dead, dying, and wounded. „Well, we've given them a damn good dusting,“ he said.

The damn good dusting wasn't over yet. There were still columns of the Khalifa's men within Omdurman so Kitchener ordered an advance into the city. He was confident of his victory so didn't have anybody reconnoitre the terrain. To stop any surviving fleeing Dervishes reaching Omdurman Kitchener sent in the 21st Lancers to cut them off. Winston Churchill, who served with the Lancers recorded, in his book »The River War« what happened next: „A deep crease in the ground—a dry watercourse, a khor—appeared where all had seemed smooth, level plain; and from it there sprang, with the suddenness of a pantomime effect and a high-pitched yell, a dense white mass of men nearly as long as our front and about twelve deep. A score of horsemen and a dozen bright flags rose as if by magic from the earth.“

Kitchener sent the lancers into 2000 tribesmen, concealed in a deep gully. Winston and his fellow lancers were soon fighting hand to hand, in their maiden battle. Out of 350 lancers 70 were killed or wounded with the loss of 119 horses, the highest casualty rate of any British regiment there. Three Victoria Crosses were awarded to Lancers who had helped to rescue their wounded comrades during the fighting. This action made huge headlines in Britain, much to Kitchener's annoyance who constantly tried to downplay the event. After all, it was he who sent them to their potential doom and the British public didn't need to know that.

With the way finally cleared into Omdurman Horatio ordered an advance into the city. Inside Omdurman the fighting was fierce, at one time Horatio was almost killed, perhaps accidentally, by one of his own men, but the battle's outcome was inevitable. When the fighting was over and the city was in his hands Kitchener set about to eradicate the last vestiges of the Mahdi, whose tomb was in the city.

Kitchener ordered that the Mahdi's body be removed from its tomb, the skull removed, and remnants of the body burned with the ashes to be thrown in the river. He then ordered the tomb to be destroyed. Churchill was a witness: „By Sir H. Kitchener's orders, the Tomb has been profaned and razed to the ground. The corpse of the Mahdi was dug up. The head was separated from the body, and, to quote the official explanation, *Preserved for future disposal.*“

What Kitchener did with the skull was to use it as a paperweight until Queen Victoria told him to throw it away.

With his macabre souvenir safely in his saddlebag Kitchener and his army entered nearby Khartoum where they freed incarcerated christians. The local population having witnessed the ferocity of Kitchener's style of warfare, fearing for their lives, started prostrating and rubbing dust into their hair as a gesture of abasement and submission. Finally, Horatio felt, Gordon had been avenged.

With his usual thoroughness and love of numbers Kitchener tallied the „Butcher's Bill“. He had won Omdurman with 28 British dead and fewer than 500 wounded. On the opposite side of the ledger were the Sudanese with over 11,000 killed outright and over 16,000 wounded.

Very few of the wounded survived and word filtered back to the British press that they were killed where they lay. Tales of the ensuing slaughter even made it to Otago, in New Zealand where the Otago Witness, 23<sup>rd</sup> of February 1899, wrote: „...the Sirdar (Kitchener) had given instructions that the wounded should be killed by advancing battalions... and that there had been widespread butchery at Atbara... the streets of Omdurman included the massacre of women and children, whose corpses lay thick...“

To corroborate the newspapers of the day we have an eye witness, Winston Churchill, who wrote to his mother on the 26<sup>th</sup> of January 1899: „Our victory was disgraced by the inhuman slaughter of the wounded and Lord Kitchener was responsible for this.“

Kitchener’s action didn’t seem to worry the upper echelons of British society, as no doubt this was the way that savages should be treated. To show her gratitude for a job well done Queen Victoria made him a Lord after his victory at Omdurman.

It is controversial to say that Kitchener ordered the killing of the wounded at Omdurman, as he would have never written such an order down; however, at Atbara he told his troops to show no mercy and to remember Gordon. Perhaps he didn’t order any slaughter but he also didn’t try to stop any in his quest to recapture Khartoum.

Despite the bad publicity, refuted by Kitchener and others, the British press preferred to lionise him and turn him into a hero—the Avenger of Gordon. In early 1899 Queen Victoria further rewarded him bestowing a title of Lord, Parliament elevated him to Governor General of Sudan alongside a grant of 30,000 pounds.

Kitchener was then given a brief to rebuild the Sudan and remove any remnants of the Mahdist state. In keeping with British interests he banned slavery, allowed foreign investment so British business interests could be satisfied, and made enormous investments in education.

If Britain was to rule the Sudan, akin to India, she would need a compliant, educated, civil service and obedient military. Education in the dominions was never for equality or civil rights, as a school notebook of the times explains: „To the natives... the British flag means protection and security. It does not mean complete equality before the law, still less does it mean political equality. In a land where the natives are so many more in number than the whites, and where the natives are not by nature either intelligent or law-abiding, they must be restrained in matters where white men are left free.“

Illustration:

The Mahdi’s Tomb after Kitchener had finished with it

Illustration:

The Mahdi’s Tomb after the battle

## **Power And Fame**

Britain acquired the southern tip of Africa during the Napoleonic Wars. The area was shared by British colonialist and the original Dutch-Afrikaner settlers known as Boers. The Boers were fiercely independent and resented the British. When Parliament introduced the anti-slavery legislation in the 1830s it was the straw that broke the Boer camel's back. They packed up their belongings, including slaves, and moved north and east from the Cape to settle in what became known as the Transvaal and the The Orange Free State. As Orange was the colour of British protestants the message couldn't have been clearer. There followed an uneasy relationship with Britain annexing Natal in 1845. Tensions between Briton and Afrikaner flared in 1880-1 when the two sides fought a war, with the Boers inflicting some defeats on the British; thereby, effectively maintaining their independence.

All the underlying tensions boiled over in 1899 with the Boers refusing to grant British mining rights in Witwatersrand, where some of the largest gold mining reserves in the world were found. The importance of this gold to Britain's empire can't be overstated. British gold reserves were the basis of the Pound Sterling and world credit after 1815, plus in 1816 gold was declared the sole measure of value in the empire. In 1886 gold shipments, particularly those from South Africa were offloaded at London, making London the world's unchallenged gold leader.

In 1871 England was joined by other industrialising countries who linked their currency to the gold standard. Germany quadrupled its gold stock in 1871 and by 1878 France, Belgium, Switzerland had followed Britain and Germany to the gold standard for international trade. Russia also was a major gold producer and used gold in its official cash reserves.

In 1899 the Transvaal had become the world's largest single producer of gold. The French and the Germans were also there but British miners controlled between 60-80% of gold output.

Where previously issues such as slavery and independence could be turned a blind eye to Her Majesty's Government now looked seriously at what could be done to bring the Boers to heel and fill the imperial coffers.

In the lead up to hostilities, that Boers and the British knew was inevitable, the Boer commander Jozua Joubert, bought 30,000 Mauser rifles as well as a number of field guns and automatic weapons from the German armaments manufacturer, Krupp, and the French firm, Creusot. Joubert and the other commanders knew they needed modern weapons. The British army, however, belonging to the most technologically advanced nation, remained firmly rooted in the past, in using ordinance, weapons, and materials that were outdated. Added to this what ever advanced technology the British did have they didn't use.

At the beginning of the war the British and Boers thought the war would be short. Britain believed it would knock the Boers over in a few months while the Boers thought the rest of Europe would come to their aid. Both were wrong.

In the early stages of the war the Boers had all the advantages: they were familiar with the country and outnumbered the British and Indian troops; their Krupp made rifles were superior in quality, held a magazine of five bullets, and the Boers, generally, were excellent marksmen. The shooting prowess of the Boers

came from their practically grown up with a gun in hand, out in the plains of Africa they called their own.

Much to the British military commander's consternation was the discovery that their rifles were still single shot; were poorly sighted, placing a bullet over 30 centimetres left of the target at 400 meters and, generally, their soldiers were poor marksmen.

Much to British command's annoyance, as well as the common soldier's, the Boers didn't fight like a modern army of the time. What was expected was that they fight in massed formations with strict discipline along British lines, and in uniform. The Boers were farmers and countrymen who were used to living off the land and their horses' backs, with their rifles in hand, fighting in their everyday clothing (aside from the regular uniformed Staats Artillery and Police units).

The Boers, in the vast majority, were all volunteers who would form bands under agreed leadership. It was common among them to discuss the up and coming battle, battle tactics, time, and so on. A band could quickly form, devise and carry out an attack, and just as quickly disappear.

In 1899 the Boers successfully invaded Northern Natal and by October they'd outmanoeuvred the British at the Battle of Ladysmith, besieging the city until February 1900. They did similarly at Kimberly, on the northern border of Cape Colony, the western border of Free State, and Mafeking. In effect they immobilised three British forces and had the opportunity to take Cape Town. If they had they could have forced the British to terms, instead, they chose to take Durban for its seaport. This proved to be a tactical error.

Also in October 1899 Sir Redvers Buller was made Commander-in-Chief of the British forces. Buller came from landed gentry and was suspicious of „suburban bred“ officers, politicians, and civil servants. He'd served during the Zulu War with distinction and exceptional bravery, winning the Victoria Cross. He was made Aide-de-Camp to Queen Victoria, with whom he had good relations. His relationship with her son, The Prince of Wales, was one of enmity. Buller loved soldiering so much that he interrupted his honeymoon to serve under General Garnet Wolseley in Egypt. After the Egypt campaign he didn't see active service, being promoted to Quartermaster General and then Adjutant General. As the Quartermaster, and Adjutant, General he established the Army Service Corps and tried to improve the ordinary soldier's lot.

Buller's appointment as Commander-in-Chief for the Boer War came as a surprise, as he hadn't seen any action for a decade and the army was the largest ever sent abroad. His initial actions proved he wasn't fit to command. His army suffered heavy casualties. During „Black Week“, in December, Lieutenant General Sir W. F. Gatacre was defeated at Stormberg, the following day the 3<sup>rd</sup> Lord Methuen was driven back at Magersfontein, and four later Buller, while advancing to relieve Ladysmith, was beaten at Colenso (where he had to abandon his guns). At Colenso the son of Lord Roberts (Buller's future replacement) was killed.

As a further demonstration of his incompetence in the field Buller sent a telegram to the commander at Ladysmith that he should surrender, and cabled it to Cabinet in London. Cabinet's response was immediate. They sacked Buller and put Lord Roberts, whose son died at Colenso, in command. To support Roberts Kitchener was made his Chief of Staff. The first thing Roberts did was telegram

orders that Buller should not take any further action until his arrival in Cape Town on January 10<sup>th</sup> 1900.

Soon after Roberts' arrival Buller attempted to redeem himself. On January 24<sup>th</sup> he fought the battle of Spion Kop, leading to the greatest British defeat since the Crimean War with over 1200 men killed or wounded. The next morning the Boers took photographs of the battlefield, strewn with English dead, and published them all around the world.

Understandably, the images of trenches full of British corpses caused an uproar. Queen Victoria, appalled, wrote to Lord Lansdowne, the Secretary of the State of War, „I am horrified at the terrible list of casualties, twenty-two officers killed and twenty-one wounded... Would it be possible to warn young officers not to expose themselves more than absolutely necessary?“ Queen Victoria didn't express any such concern for the common soldiers in her note.

Unfortunately, Redvers Buller wasn't the only one who would prove his command incompetence. Kitchener would rise to the incompetence fore with duplicity and alacrity.

In February 1900 the British General Kelly-Kenny had entrapped the Boer commander, Piet Cronje, and his commandos at the riverside of Paardeberg. One of the things the Boers had learned from fighting the numerically superior Zulus years before was to form a laager: to close ranks and form a defensive wall out of what ever was available. If bereft of wagons or other materials they would „form square“ or, having time, dig in and entrench themselves, thereby leaving no opening for attack. This defensive manoeuvre had previously proved highly effective against the British at Modder River, Magersfontein, Colenso, and Spion Kop. Kelly-Kenny, in command of the British 6th Division surveyed the field, taking note of the Boers' defensive position. He new the Boers weren't armed with spears and flintlocks: they carried Mauser magazine rifles. His plan was to distribute his infantry in a defensive position to block any escape routes and use the artillery to force Cronje and his men to surrender.

Unfortunately for the 6th Division, Kelly-Kenny was to be overruled by Roberts' Chief-of-Staff, Horatio Kitchener, who considered Kelly-Kenny's plan imbecilic.

Kitchener had been assigned to Kelly-Kenny, by Roberts; however, Roberts found Kelly-Kenny's methodical approach slow and tiresome—he wanted action. For the previous four days to bailing up the Boers, Kitchener had been badgering Kelly-Kenny, who finally lost his temper and asked Horatio who was in command. Kitchener replied, „You, Sir.“

Unbeknown to Kelly-Kenny, all the while Kitchener had been in correspondence with Roberts for on the morning of the battle a private message arrived from Roberts to Kelly-Kenny that he was to take anything Kitchener told him as an order. Kitchener had no qualms about deliberately undermining the authority of his battlefield superior, something he would never forgive anyone serving under him.

With Roberts wanting action Kitchener was going to give it to him. Horatio ordered aggressive frontal assaults to the Boer laager by infantry and cavalry—despite the fact that these tactics had previously proven themselves disastrous on numerous occasions. With the men sent off Kitchener looked at his staff officers and said, „It is now seven o'clock. We shall be in the laager by half past ten...“

Kitchener abhorred planning and writing anything down. His plan for battle was vague at best. Kelly-Kenny was later to write: „No written orders of any sort. Kitchener only sends verbal messages—takes my staff and troops on no order or system.“ Later, General Maurice, the official historian of the war, confirmed that comment more diplomatically, stating that to study the battle was: „...exceptionally valuable from the obvious results which followed from the very chaos.“ Kitchener’s approach to fighting a battle was a blue-print on how not to.

Early in the morning Kitchener sent a cable to Roberts, as he didn’t mind writing in his own praise: „We have stopped the enemy’s convoy on the river here. General Kelly-Kenny’s division is holding them to the south, enemy lining the bank of the Modder, convoy stationary in our immediate front... I think it must be a case of complete surrender.“ So confident was Kitchener he sent his men across an exposed plain. Piet Cronje, the Boer leader, couldn’t believe what he was seeing; neither could his men solidly entrenched with a clean lines of fire.

As the first two battalions marched in they were quickly pinned down on the plain and suffered heavy casualties. The next four battalions charged in; some came as close as 150 meters of the Boer lines but no further. Another battalion made it to the Modder River and captured some outlying trenches, then they received a message from Kelly-Kenny, trying to save his men’s lives, that on no account were they to cross the river. Meanwhile, Kitchner sends one of this staff officers to inform Major-General Smith-Dorrien, commanding the 19th Battalion, that he was to take his brigade and battery across the river and: „...establish yourself on the other side.“

Dorrien, naturally curious, asked where he was supposed to cross. He was told by the staff officer, „The river is in flood as far as I have heard. Paardeberg Drift, the only one available, is unfordable; but Lord Kitchener, knowing your resourcefulness, is sure you will get across somehow.“ This sort of repost was typical of Kitchener. Should the plan succeed he would bask in glory if it failed the subordinate could be blamed.

Smith-Dorrien did manage to, somehow, cross he flooded river and later wrote: „...(I was) in a complete fog, and knew nothing of the situation either of our own troops, or of the Boers, beyond what I could see, or infer, myself.“

General Colville, the 9th Division’s commander, ordered his men to attack the Boer’s flank but it was countermanded by Kitchener who, to Colville’s disbelief, sent the men into a frontal assault.

Colville was later to write: „One can hardly say the ground was worse for advancing under fire that that with the Guards had to deal with than the Modder River fight, for that would be impossible to find; but it was certainly as bad, and I never hope to see or read of anything grander than the advance of that thin line across the coverless plain, under a hail of lead from their invisible enemy in the river banks.“

By midday the attack had failed and the survivors were nailed down under deadly fire. At one o’clock Kitchener left his headquarters—that was well away from the fighting—to find Colville. He asked Colville for, „...a more determined assault.“ As far as Kitchener was concerned, the pawns on his battlefield chessboard weren’t moving and sacrificing themselves fast enough for his victory.

Colville tells Kitchener that the few reserves he has left haven't eaten all day and that they shouldn't fight on an empty stomach. Kitchener, begrudgingly, agrees; then he goes off to find Kenny-Kelly to tell him the 6th Division must renew the attack. If Kitchener couldn't sacrifice one lot of pawns he would do so with another. Kelly-Kenny later wrote in his diary: „I was terribly strained... the battle lasted all day. Kitchener kept pressing me to press flanks. I did so at great loss.“

While he sent his men to be slaughtered Horatio drafted a note to Colonel Hannay, ordering him to attack the Boer's right flank: „The time has come for a final effort. All troops have been warned that the laager must be rushed at all costs. Try and carry Stephenson's brigade on with you. But if they cannot go the mounted infantry should do it. Gallop in necessary and fire into the laager.“

Hannay couldn't believe the order—it was out of touch with the reality of the battle. To Hannay's credit he sent his staff and men away on various errands then asked for volunteers. „We're going to charge the laager,“ he told them.

Hannay and fifty of his men charged the laager attempting to carry out Kitchener's orders. They were all shot out of their saddles.

Still not satisfied with how the battle was going Kitchener came up with a new plan. Smith-Dorrien, from this vantage point across the river, watched as another frontal assault was tried: „We had a regular fusillade all day and were doing splendidly when Lord K. getting impatient ordered the 1/2 Cornwalls... over the river to charge with the Canadians. I was horrified when I saw them moving forward to charge about 3:30pm, as I could see they had not a ghost of a chance...“

The Cornwalls and Canadians were mowed down within 250 meters of the Boer trenches.

True to character Kitchener would give an order for action and expect it to be carried out irrespective of circumstances, situations, or anything else. If the desired result didn't eventuate the fault would be with the subordinate officer.

Not a single British soldier came within 200 meters of the laager. By nightfall Kitchener's „Butcher's Bill“ was 24 officers and 279 men killed with a further 59 officers and 847 men wounded; with 2 officers and 59 men missing. Single handedly, Kitchener had created what became known as „Bloody Sunday“, the worst British setback of the war.

However, the communique Kitchener sent to Roberts read: „We did not succeed in getting into the enemy's convoy, though we drove the Boers back a considerable distance along the river bed. The troops are maintaining their position and I hope tomorrow we shall be able to do something more definite...“

As hopeful and upbeat as Kitchener's note read Roberts couldn't deny the human cost of Horatio's grand adventure. Roberts decided to return to Kelly-Kenny's strategy and sent Kitchener to repair the railway in Orange Free State.

## **The Shape of Things To Come**

In June Kitchener was sent to Praetoria to deal with Christian De Wet and his Boer commando. For two months he pursued De Wet with little result. Despite Kitchener's failings by late September the war for the Boers was going badly. Under Lord Roberts' command the British were able to relieve Mafeking, Ladysmith; capture Bloemfontein, Johannesburg, and Praetoria. Roberts reported to the Secretary of War: „...with the occupation of Komati Poort, and dispersal of Commandant-General Louis Botha's army, the organised resistance of the two republics might be said to have ceased.“ Seeing his job done Roberts returned to England on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January 1901.

As the „organised resistance might be said to have ceased“ thousands of troops were sent home, local South African units were disbanded, and horses and mules that were bought to replace those lost so far were sent back to England.

Kitchener was made Commander-in-Chief on the 29<sup>th</sup> of November. The British public were thrilled. »Black and White«, the Victorian illustrated weekly, wrote: „Now that Lord Roberts has left, it is to be hoped that these people will be dealt with in the proper and only way. For months they have treated the British nation as a people of *Jugginses*. Now is the time to show them the mercy exhibited at Culloden.“ The editors wrote a prophetic editorial knowing Kitchener's history.

One of Kitchener's first acts was to send a letter to Queen Victoria informing her that the war would soon be over, as peace negotiations had begun in England. The British, needing to justify the most expensive war in pounds and lives, insisted on punitive terms. The „Butcher's Bill“ so far was 4,185 British officers and men killed in action or dying of wounds, 6,493 had died of disease; 34,499 had been invalided home. Even so a further 208 died, and 1,030 had to be discharged from further service.

The British and Kitchener arrogantly believed, as they had captured towns, bridges, and railways, was that the Boers were finished as a fighting force. The Boers didn't see it that way. Their home was the veld and their transport was the horse. With the British love of capturing bricks and mortar they'd overlooked that the Boers hadn't suffered any major defeats, nor had they surrendered en masse.

In London the Boers leaders disdained the peace terms offered so the war continued. The Boers had learned quickly from their previous encounters with the British and switched their tactics. They replaced the notion of fighting set piece battles, that they knew they would lose, with commando raids. These raids were made by as few as dozen and up to 1000 mounted men (and boys). To the British the commandos seemed to spring up out of nowhere, destroy their rail and communication lines, then disappear again. The Empire's army was caught flat footed with aggressive and effective Boer flying columns destroying their trains, supply, and communication lines.

Kitchener, initially, was at a loss of how to proceed with the war. An illustration of his incomprehension of his enemy and their tactics is illustrated in a letter he wrote to one of his friends' son: „The Boer are not like the Sudanese who stood up to a fair fight. They are always running away on their little ponies“. Horatio's idea of a fair fight was that of Omdurman, where masses of poorly armed and trained civilian soldiers charged to their death en masse into his cannon, rifle, and machine gun fire. Those damn Boers weren't playing the game as Horatio wanted them to.



Protecting the supply lines and railways became Kitchener's primary concern. His solution wasn't innovative but it was effective and, true to his nature, ruthless. In January 1901 Kitchener started building a series of fortified blockhouses and placing barbed wire along his supply lines and railroads; then he did the same along roads and rivers that crossed Boer settlements. He had over 20,000 troops under his command so manpower wasn't a problem.

As a good part of his army was cavalry and mounted infantry Kitchener used Brigade-size columns to drive the Boers towards the blockhouses where they could be appropriately dealt with. Again, the Boers refused to cooperate. They didn't want to be herded and killed.

The bags of Boer bodies that Horatio was expecting weren't eventuating, the cornered commandos were breaking out—and even outfighting the columns sent to catch them! In response Kitchener ordered the intervals between the blockhouses to be reduced. Initially, the distance was about 2100 meters, then it was reduced to 350 meters; in some more threatened areas this distance was further reduced to 150 meters. By the end of 1901 Horatio had built over 8000 blockhouses, manned by tens of thousands of troops.

Some of Kitchener's senior officers began to have doubts about their commander's ability and competence. They believed him to be part of the problem. Indicative of this feeling was acting Lieutenant Colonel Edmund Allenby, who became one of the most innovative British Generals of the First World War: „Lord K of K (Khartoum) tries to run the whole show from Praetoria—and fails. District commanders, with several columns under them, are the only people who bring the show to a speedy finish.“ Unfortunately for Allenby, Kitchener wasn't interested in devolving power—he interest was centralising it.

In February 1902 there was a great drive against the Boer stronghold of Elandskop. Kitchener expected to capture about 2000 prisoners. He had to settle for just 285 commandos killed or captured.

The Boers were never an army in the traditional sense, they were farmers, land owners, and citizens who fought as needed, and expecting European aid that never eventuated. As such they certainly had guns but not uniforms. They fought in their civilian clothes that steadily wore down, so to replace their clothing they resorted to wearing parts of uniforms of captured, or dead, British troops. This was seen by British officers as an attempt to masquerade themselves as British soldiers to gain tactical advantages. Kitchener verbally ordered that Boers found wearing British uniforms were to be tried on the spot and death sentence to be confirmed by the commanding officer.

With these ad hoc court-martials, conducted in the field, most probably hastily, with officers not necessarily trained in military law, Horatio had an easy way out of responsibility for any excesses of following his orders: the local commanding officer would be held responsible.

The trials were, at times, perfunctory if non-existent. Colonel Douglas Haig, the newly appointed commanding officer of the 17th Lancers, who later became Field Marshall Haig, the commander of British forces on the Western Front during the First World War, interpreted Kitchener's order in his own way: all Boer prisoners caught wearing British uniforms were to be shot on the spot.

Kitchener's execution order was passed along by word of mouth. He denied ever issuing the order at the trial of three Australian colonial volunteers: Harry „Breaker“ Morant, Peter Handcock, and George Whitton.

Morant and Handcock were found guilty of executing Boer prisoners and for the murder of a German missionary believed to be a Boer sympathiser. Kitchener personally signed Morant's and Handcock's death warrants.

The main part of Kitchener's strategy to defeat the Boers was to deny them their supplies—just what they were trying to do to him. The majority of the commandos were farmers taking turns at military duties, then returning to their farms, as a Lieutenant Miller noted when writing to his mother: „The great mistake they are making here, as far as I can see, is that they leave all the farms and small tenures standing. The result is the Boers have always a means of getting fresh supplies. I would burn all the farms in the disaffected parts, also all the towns which we are not occupying, sending the women and children out to the nearest commando.“

If Kitchener and Miller ever met it would have been a meeting of like minds. Kitchener was just as frustrated with the Boers as Miller. Unlike Miller he could do something about it.

Initially, Roberts, Kitchener's predecessor, used his columns to burn and destroy farms in reprisal raids. With his series of blockhouses carving the veld into sections Kitchener could systemise the process. With blockhouses from Kapmurden to Komatiport acting as look-out posts to protect the railway they could also be vantage points from which to clear the land. Women and children were to be separated from their husbands and fathers, and put into internment camps; their farms were to be burned and livestock killed. Anything that could either assist or sustain a Boer guerrilla was to be destroyed. By Kitchener's own estimates over 30,000 homes were burned; 3,600,000 sheep were slaughtered, along with horses and cattle. The Boer women and children were taken away, at time in cattle trucks, and put into barbed wire compounds.

The idea of such camps weren't original. Sixty years previously, in 1838, the Americans rounded up the Cherokees and put them into 11 internment camps.

Just a few years prior to Kitchener's action, during the Cuban War of Independence in 1896, the Spanish General Valeriano Weyler y Nicolau, also known as »The Butcher«, implemented a system of „re-concentration“ camps. All the inhabitants (and any livestock they wanted to take with them) of an area were ordered to move in the camps within eight days. After that time anyone found in the designated area was considered an enemy combatant, irrespective of either age or gender, and could be shot on sight. Over 30% of the internees died from lack of proper food, sanitary conditions, and medicine. These camps gave rise to such severe resentment in the United States (who obligingly didn't draw any comparisons with their treatment of the Indians) that they helped pave the way to the Spanish American War of 1898.

During the American Spanish war the Americans ousted the Spanish from the Philippines to the joy of the Philippine nationalists. The nationalists thought they were free; however, the American's wanted to stay. To quell the resistance to the occupation of the Philippines the Americans set up internment/concentration camps for the families of the nationalists, obligingly forgetting what happened to Cherokee and Cuban camp internees.

It is naive to think that Kitchener, having worked in British Intelligence, the command of armies, and the Commander-in-Chief in South Africa wouldn't have been fully aware of the Spanish and American camps, and their consequences.

In South Africa, a British officer, wrote on February 18<sup>th</sup> 1901: „We move from valley to valley, lifting cattle and sheep, burning and looting, and turning women and children to weep in despair beside the ruin of the once beautiful homesteads.“

Another described his work: „Our course through the country is marked in prehistoric ages by pillars of smoke by day and fires by night... We usually burn from six to twelve farms a day.“

Private Bowers, tape recorded by Thomas Pakenham for his book, »The Boer War« said: „We sat down and had a nice song around the piano. The we just piled up the furniture and set fire to the farm. All columns were doing it... The idea was starve the Boojers out.“

Not all the soldiers were as cavalier as Bowers about their actions, as a young Lieutenant Phillips was to write: „The worst moment is when you came to a house. The people thought we had called for refreshments, and one of the women went to get milk. Then we had to tell them that we had to burn the place down. I simply didn't know which way to look...“ Later, Miller wrote to his mother: „The country is now almost entirely laid waste. You can go for miles and miles—in fact you might march for weeks and weeks and see no sign of a living thing or cultivated patch of land—nothing but burnt farms and desolation.“

Jan Smuts, when invading the Cape Colony wrote in his diary: „Dams everywhere filled with rotting animals. Water undrinkable. Veld covered with slaughtered herds of sheep and goats, cattle and horses. Hungry lambs bleating around.“

Horatio's plan was achieving results.

The women, children, and old folk that were rounded up became „internees“ that were put into a camp. In these camps they were deprived of cloths, bedding, and cooking utensils. The food supplied was less than that given to refugees (English speaking displaced people) which led to accusations that Kitchener was using food as a weapon and that he wanted to wipe out the Boers.

However, Horatio's war against the people of South Africa had become a political difficulty.

In early 1901 Emily Hobhouse brought the plight of the Boers to the attention of the British Parliament, resulting the appointment of the Fawcett Commission to investigate the conditions within the camps. When he heard about Miss Hobson and the Fawcett Commission Kitchener wrote: „I doubt there being much for them to do here as the camps are very well looked after.“ He also wrote to a lady friend: „The inmates are far better looked after in every way than they are in their homes, or than the British refugees are, for whom no one now seems to care. The doctors' reports of the dirt and filth in which the Boer ladies from the wilds revel are very unpleasant reading.“

In October 1900 Emily Hobhouse formed the Relief Fund for South African Women and Children in Britain. This organisation was set up to „Feed, clothe, harbour and save women and children—Boer, English, Other—who were left destitute and ragged as a result of the destruction of property, eviction of families

and other incidents resulting in military operations.“ Except for members of the Society of Friends (Quakers) very few people contributed.

By November 1901 over 117,000 people were herded into the camps. Supplying them with clean drinking water was problematic, as was supplying medicines to deal with the illnesses such as dysentery, typhoid, and measles that kept breaking out. Kitchener, at best, was indifferent to the suffering. The majority of inmates were women and children as over 25,000 male internees had been shipped overseas. The Secretary of the State of War, William St John Fremantle Brodrick, argued in Parliament that the interned Boers were: „...contented and comfortable,“ and that everything was being done to ensure satisfactory conditions in the camps.

Hobhouse arrived in South Africa on the 27<sup>th</sup> of December 1901. She gained permission to visit the camps that met with immediate objection by Kitchener. A compromise was met—she could visit the Blomfontein camp where between 5,000 to 7,000 people were incarcerated, and it was only one of about 50 camps. At Blomfontein Emily wrote: „The atmosphere was indescribable. The ration... did not come up to scale, it became a starvation rate.“ When she complained about the lack of soap she was informed it was a luxury. She persisted and soap was moved from luxury to necessity, together with straw and kettles for boiling water to drink.

Over the next month she was able to visit other camps; each time bringing to the authorities notice the inadequate sanitary conditions and rations.

Emily also saw Boer women and children in cattle trucks on a railway siding during one of Kitchener’s drives. She wrote what she saw: „...war in all its destructiveness, cruelty, stupidity, and nakedness... I began to compare a parish I had known at home of 2,000 people where a funeral was an event—and usually of an old person. Here some twenty to twenty-five were carried away daily... the full realisation of the position dawned on me—it was a death rate such as had never been known except in the times of the Great Plagues... the whole talk was of death... who died yesterday, who lay dying today, who would be dead tomorrow.“

The New York Times with perhaps a backward glance to the Philippines and the camps its own government had set up wrote: „The War Office has issued a four-hundred page Blue Book of the official reports from medical officers on the conditions in the concentration camps in South Africa. The general drift of the report attributes the high mortality in the camps do the dirty habits of the Boers, their ignorance and prejudices, their recourse to quackery, and their suspicious avoidance of British hospital doctors“. Hardly a more thorough blame the victim piece has been written since.

With Emily Hobhouse stirring up trouble at home and international newspapers writing articles people were asking questions. The Secretary of the State of War wrote to Kitchener saying: „I think I will have a hot time of it... tell me all that you will to help the defence.“ Kitchener replied that he couldn’t see what all the fuss was about.

During her first visit to South Africa Emily Hobson wasn’t allowed to visit the black African internment camps. Over 30,000 black Africans were interned and Kitchener used them as labourers building their own, as well as the Boers’, camps. The Boers highly resented the black Africans as they saw them as primitive

menials who added to their oppression. Kitchener's similar attitude towards the black African labourers is summed up in his words, „Let the kaffirs do the rest.“

The conditions in the black Africans' camps were supposedly worse than those within the whites'. Hobhouse arrived a second time in Table Bay, October 19<sup>th</sup>—she was denied further access to the camps and deported under martial law.

The Fawcett Commission confirmed almost everything that Emily Hobhouse reported. In Parliament, the future Prime Minister Lloyd George denounced what was happening in South Africa: „It is not a war against men, but against women and children.“ In June, another future Prime Minister, Henry Campbell-Bannerman declared: „When is a war not a war? When it is waged in South Africa by methods of barbarism.“

In January 1902 the Boer General, J.C. Smuts, who later became Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa, summarised in a report: „Lord Kitchener has begun to carry out a policy in both (Boer) republics of unbelievable barbarism and gruesomeness which violates the most elementary principles of the international rules of war. Almost all farmsteads and villages in both republics have been burned down and destroyed. All crops have been destroyed. All livestock which has fallen into the hands of the enemy has been killed or slaughtered. The basic principle behind Lord Kitchener's tactics has been to win, not so much through direct operations against fighting commandos, but rather indirectly by bringing the pressure of war against defenceless women and children... this violation of every international law is really characteristic of the nation that plays the role of chosen judge over the customs and behaviour of all nations.“

The Boers had no way to combat what was happening to their families and farms. They surrendered and peace was signed on the 25<sup>th</sup> of May 1902. Six days later Kitchener was awarded 50,000 pounds for his successful conclusion of Britain's costliest war to date. He was also elevated to a Viscount by Queen Victoria, and given an Order of Merit. The empire rewarded those who served it well.

A report after the war concluded that 27,972 Boers, of whom over 22,000 were children under the age of sixteen, and 14,154 black South Africans died of starvation, disease and exposure in the concentration camps.

Outside of the largest towns hardly a building was left intact, with perhaps only one tenth of prewar livestock remaining. No crops had been planted for two years.

Added to the honours so far bestowed upon him, Kitchener was then appointed Commander-in-Chief of India in 1902, then to Field Marshall in 1909.

The British public idolised Kitchener—he was their warrior. His shortcomings were kept quiet as further honours were bestowed: Vice Consul to Egypt in 1911 and then he was made an Earl in 1914.

Illustration:

Join your Country's Army!

## **The War to End All Wars**

On July 28<sup>th</sup> 1914 the war to end all wars began. All the combatting nations thought it would be over by Christmas, and that they would be victorious. With such a short war envisaged and so much glory to be gained millions of men throughout continental Europe's and Britain's empires rushed to the nearest recruiting station hoping to see some action before it was all over. The grand adventure, as many thought it, lasted past Christmas and most of those patriotic hearts that so eagerly enlisted now lay buried in the battlefields of France and Belgium. The senior British officers such as General Haig, who served under Kitchener in South Africa, were still of the mindset that pluck and courage, marching abreast into machine gun fire, along with a good cavalry charge, would quickly decide matters. It did, but not as they expected.

To ensure victory, Lord Kitchener, the Consul General to Egypt, was recalled and appointed Secretary of the State of War, by Prime Minister Herbert Asquith. The British public felt Horatio was eminently qualified since he was able to win the Boer War, which Lord Roberts didn't do. They hoped he would, no doubt, repeat his success. There were those in Whitehall that didn't want him to be appointed as Secretary of the State of War but they were overruled and Kitchener became the first military man to hold the position.

When appointed Kitchener was 64 years old and he held the army's bureaucracy in contempt, publicly announcing it as inefficient. This wasn't surprising considering having to wade through paperwork and work through proper channels wasn't his style. Kitchener liked to act quickly, and on impulse, and expected others to do so. He curtly told Asquith he would only take the job for the duration of the war and couldn't be expected to act as a politician, nor to publicly defend the government. He had previously remarked to a friend, „May God preserve me from the politicians.“ This comment probably hadn't been relayed to Asquith, or if it had he chose to ignore it.

Despite Asquith knowing the appointment was a risk it was politically sound since the public loved Kitchener. His image was reworked to show the mechanical efficiency and toughness he displayed in South Africa that would now beat the dastardly Hun in Europe. Keith Nelson, a Kitchener biographer wrote: „Kitchener brought to his new office both strengths and weaknesses. He had waged two wars in which he had dealt with all aspects of warfare, including command and logistics. He was used to being in charge of large enterprises, he was not afraid to take responsibility and make decisions, and he enjoyed public confidence. However, he had no experience of modern European war, almost no knowledge of the British army at home, and a limited understanding of the war office. Perhaps, most importantly, he had no experience of working in a cabinet. Nevertheless in the opening stage of the war he, Asquith, and Churchill formed a dominant triumvirate in the cabinet.“

Arthur Conan Doyle was more succinct: „Kitchener grew very arrogant. He had flashes of genius but was usually stupid. He could not see any use in Munitions. He was against tanks. He was against Irish and Welsh divisions. But he was a great force in recruiting.“

On August 5<sup>th</sup> 1914 Britain's deadline for Germany to withdraw troops from Belgium was reached, and consequently a state of war existed between the two

empires. The following day Kitchener called for a meeting with all the senior officials of the war office. One of those present used to be a subaltern, who fought at Omdurman, and later became First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill.

This was still the time when most thought the war was going to be over by Christmas. Kitchener astounded them by flatly stating, „There is no army“. Churchill later reported: „Lord Kitchener now came forward to the Cabinet, on almost the first occasion after he joined us, and in soldierly sentences proclaimed a series of inspiring and prophetic truths.

„Everyone expected the war to be short; but wars took unexpected courses and we must now prepare for a long struggle. Such a conflict could not be ended on the sea or by sea power alone. It could be ended only by great battles on the Continent. We must prepare to put armies of millions in the field and maintain them for several years.“

Kitchener didn't respect the Territorial Army and proposed raising a New Army of seventy divisions. Asquith and Parliament ruled out conscription as then politically impossible so Kitchener agreed to voluntary recruitment. The poster of Horatio pointing to the reader commanding: „Join Your Country's Army“, is probably history's greatest recruitment image. The official poster carried a warning that conscription would become necessary if volunteer numbers weren't met. Eventually they weren't and conscription came into force. However, that was in the future. By the first week of September 175,000 men volunteered and by the end of the month 750,000 had follow suit. The average figure for volunteers up until June 1915 was 125,000 per month.

Many of Kitchener's New Army recruits needed to wear their civilian clothes and train with broomsticks for weeks, as supply couldn't match demand. The existing, experienced, army training staff were overwhelmed and couldn't handle the volume of new recruits so Horatio needed to hold back professional Non Commissioned Officers and Officers desperately needed by their Generals at the front. This dichotomy of demands increased the antagonism between Kitchener and those under him. To compensate for the professional soldiers he needed to train recruits Horatio called up retired officers, some of them in their sixties and seventies, who had no concept of the requirements of modern warfare on a European battlefield. Kitchener obviously didn't see this as a problem as he had never fought a European war either.

The regular soldiers, to whom these retirees were posted to command, called them „Dugouts“. A twenty-seven year old captain, Bernard Montgomery, who later became a General and beat Rommel and his Afrika Corps in World War II, made the following comment about his commanding officer: „...quite useless... I really ran the brigade and they all knew it.“

By 1915 Kitchener had become irritable and aloof, insecure within himself and around other people. He had done extremely well in the Sudan and Egypt but those battles hadn't prepared him for total war in Europe. As the war bogged down to one of stalemate and attrition Kitchener said, „...I don't know what is to be done—this isn't war.“

Unfortunately the men at the front had to bear the consequences of Kitchener's self doubt, and those like him, who gloried in their past but were incapable of adapting to the modern and real world. Kitchener continued his style of command

with his inability to delegate, his withholding and refusal to share vital information with his subordinates and Cabinet, his need to centralise decision making and then attempting to micromanage, eventuated in shortages, hold-ups, and confusion.

Cabinet quickly realised his failings and tried to find ways to sack him; however, the British public thought otherwise: they considered him a military genius and their saviour.

For Kitchener, and his ilk, the First World War was something they were also mentally unprepared for. In the good old days they fought against hordes of natives that seemed happy to charge against cannon and bullets, armed only with spears, or antiquated flintlocks if they were lucky. These commanders now faced a modern army over a 600 kilometre front who didn't blindly run to their deaths. They now faced high explosive shells fired over 30 kilometres away, blew people into pieces no larger than postage stamps; millions of civilians were being made into refugees struggling along roadsides, and an equal number of soldiers needed supplies. All of this was coupled with ever increasing difficulties in communication, administration, and supply. The war in Europe brought to the fore all the incompetencies of the commanders fighting it.

Those same commanders were the product of the best English boarding school tradition, where character and will power, as well as family connections, carried the day. In 1910, Sir Ian Hamilton, who commanded at Gallipoli wrote: „War is essentially the triumph, of the chassepot over a needle gun, not of a line of men entrenched behind barbed wire entanglements and swept zones over men exposing themselves in the open, but of one will over another weaker will.“

Men like Hamilton now faced machine-guns, high explosive shells, barbed wire; aircraft overhead that dropped bombs and strafed the ground, and everything else that human ingenuity could think of that would cause death and misery. They were at a loss as to what to do since „will“ wasn't doing it for them.

Kitchener also came to the conclusion that „will“ wasn't enough so he invited the head of America's Bethlehem Steel Corporation to London and ordered 1,000,000 shells, adding that Britain needed stock to last at least five years. What he didn't tell the head of Bethlehem Steel was the he, and the War Office, seriously underestimated the amount of shells needed at the outset of the war. To be fair, this was also true of nearly every other nation. So Kitchener corrected this mistake by ordering a massive quantity of shells; where he erred, again, was ordering the wrong sort.

Horatio's ordinance error didn't go unnoticed. Lord Northcliffe wrote scathingly in the Daily Mail: „Lord Kitchener has starved the army in France of high explosive shells. The admitted fact is that Lord Kitchener ordered the wrong kind of shell—the same kind of shell which he used largely against the Boers in 1900. He persisted in sending shrapnel—a useless weapon in trench warfare. He was warned repeatedly that the kind of shell required was a violently explosive bomb which would dynamite its way through the German trenches and entanglements and enable our brave men to advance in safety. This kind of shell our poor soldiers have had has caused the death of thousands of them.“

The wrong type of shells weren't the War Office's only concern. Equipment for the army was also an issue. In May 1915 it ordered 27,000 machine-guns; then



told the Vickers Company it would buy every gun it could make. This order was placed despite the Commander of the Western Front, and Kitchener's friend, Field Marshal Douglas Haig, emphatically stating in the same year, „The machine-gun is a much over rated weapon.“ Even Kitchener who had used German made Mauser machine-guns, for their accuracy and reliability, with great effect in the Sudan, laid down that four machine-guns were all that was necessary for a battalion.

Lloyd George, the Minister for Munitions, ignored Horatio's recommendation and raised the limit to sixteen. Lloyd George didn't bother discussing his decision with the army chiefs; furthermore, Kitchener was relieved of his authority to order munitions, no doubt to the relief of many.

On December 19<sup>th</sup> 1915 Prime Minister Asquith dismissed Sir John French as Supreme Commander on the Western Front. His replacement was Sir Douglas Haig. With the war in stalemate the Prime Minister needed to do something and Haig was one of the few acceptable names for the position. Asquith then turned his attention to Kitchener. He couldn't dismiss the Secretary of the State of War at such a time without losing public confidence so he appointed William Robertson as Chief of the Imperial Staff with so much power that he no longer was subordinate to Kitchener. Much to his annoyance Horatio had been militarily sidelined despite the public's continued adulation.

Illustration:

A Fresh Appeal by Lord Kitchener

Illustration:

Kitchener Says

## **Gallipoli**

The First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, in 1911 wrote: „It should be remembered that is no longer possible to force the Dardenelles, and nobody would expose a modern fleet to such perils.“

By 1915 the war in Western Europe was, effectively, a stalemate. Barbed wire and trenches stretched from Switzerland to the North Sea. The Russian armies were doing poorly on the Eastern Front and Tsar Nicholas had asked Britain for a diversionary tactic in the Bosphorus to redirect German divisions there so his could be given some respite.

Historically, the Russians had long sought a passage through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, as this would give them access to all sea ports. Sixty odd years previously the Russians tried to take them forcefully from the Ottoman Empire. This action alarmed Britain, as a Russian presence posed a threat to her sea lanes, who came to the Ottoman's aid and the Crimean War began.

Now the Ottomans were the enemy and Russia an ally. With the Western Front bogged down it was an opportune time to acquire the passageway for Britain while stretching German resources. The grand plan was for Britain to take the

Dardanelles and attack Constantinople via sea while the Russians swept down from the north and attacked by land.

The Ottoman Empire was considered the sick man of Europe and none of the allies expected the Turks to put up much of a fight. In fact, on November 3<sup>rd</sup> 1914, before a formal declaration of war had been made to the Ottoman Empire, Churchill sent two battlecruisers and two French battleships to shell the fortifications on either side of the Gallipoli Peninsula. Not only did Churchill ignore his own writings of 1911 but he also gave the Ottomans an early warning of British intentions.

One lucky shell from Churchill's strike force struck the magazine of the fort Sedd el Bahr, displacing ten guns and killing eighty-six Turkish soldiers, wounding another thirty, as well as forty Germans. Unable to force their way through, as predicted and ignored by Churchill, the battle fleet withdrew while the Turks and Germans immediately reinforced their defences.

In Churchill's mind the quickest way to break the Western Front deadlock was through the, supposedly, soft underbelly of the Ottoman Empire. He was fixated with the idea of capturing Constantinople. Tsar Nicholas' request in 1915 coincided with Churchill's view of sending a fleet up the Bosphorus and blasting the city in submission while the Russians streamed troops down from the north. In Churchill's mind the Ottomans would prefer to surrender the city to the civilised British than the barbaric Russians.

Sending ships up the Bosphorus wasn't the first time that Churchill conveniently forgot what he put down with pen to paper. During the Boer war, as correspondent for the Morning Post he famously wrote to General Evelyn Wood: „I think we ought to punish people who surrender troops under command—and let us say at once—No exchange of prisoners.“ Two weeks later he was a prisoner in Praetoria and pressed his captors for permission to send home a press release urging prisoner exchange! In the end he didn't have to be as he used an escape plan devised by another prisoner, Aylmer Haldane. Churchill fled leaving Haldane behind.

As to the Dardanelles, Kitchener was initially opposed to Churchill's plan of opening another front there but due to the European situation he was open to suggestion. Naturally, Churchill was happy to press his case; however, there wasn't any love loss between these two supposedly master strategists. Churchill, while a correspondent in Egypt and the Sudan, wrote to his mother that he thought Kitchener was „common“; while Kitchener tried repeatedly to keep Churchill out of the Omdurman campaign and the Boer War, which he knew Churchill desired to further his political career. Now the escaped prisoner and Secretary of the State of War were uneasy bedfellows.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of January 1915 the War Office agreed to Churchill's plan about the Dardanelles and the British forces in Egypt were put on alert. With the most important decision so far in the war under his responsibility Kitchener called in General Ian Hamilton, the man who served under him during the Boer and believed superior „will“ would win battles. Sitting behind his desk and gazing at the standing Hamilton Kitchener informs him, „We are sending a military force to support the fleet now at the Dardanelles, and you are to have command.“

Hamilton wasn't completely surprised about the opening of a second front as he knew Churchill was lobbying to have him appointed as its commander. What he never expected was that it would be for the Dardanelles.

That Hamilton was appointed spoke volumes for the ineptitude of Churchill, Kitchener, and anybody else involved. As Hamilton was to confess in his book, »Gallipoli Diary«: „But my knowledge of the Dardanelles was nil; of the strength of our own forces next to nil. Although I met K almost every day during the past six months, and although he has twice hinted that I might be at Salonika, never once, to the best of my recollection had he mentioned the word Dardanelles“.

Kitchener and Hamilton knew that the Greeks had earlier proposed an action in the Dardanelles and they estimated they would need 150,000 troops. The Greeks knew the terrain and their enemy well so they'd given sound advice as to what would be required; however, Kitchener then tells Hamilton, „...but half that number of men will do you handsomely. The Turks are busy elsewhere. I hope you will not have to land at all. If you do land, why then the powerful fleet at your back will be the prime factor in your choice of time and place.“

If Horatio ever read Churchill's note of 1911 about it being impossible to force the Dardanelles through seapower he chose to forget it, or not inform the action's new commander. Kitchener then went to Hamilton with his summation of the Turkish fighting spirit, „Supposing, one submarine pops up opposite the town of Gallipoli and waves a Union Jack three times—the whole Turkish garrison on the peninsula will take to their heels and make a beeline for Bulair.“

After that little morale building talk Kitchener tells Hamilton his Chief of Staff for the expedition is Major-General Walter Braithwaite, who, though congenial wasn't, and proved to be, not the most able man. What Kitchener was doing, to the detriment of the campaign and those who would be facing Turkish bullets, was feathering his nest with men who owed promotion beyond their abilities to him.

To his credit, Hamilton was aware of the huge task ahead of him and of his extremely limited knowledge of where he was being sent, including his enemy and its deployment. He had the audacity to ask about aircraft for spotting—a vital requirement for reconnaissance in an unknown area. Kitchener turned him down immediately with, „Not one!“ That was the last time Hamilton spoke during the meeting.

Churchill, the smell of victory filling his nostrils and accolades of his genius already in his ears, was keen to get the action happening as soon as possible so ordered a special train for Hamilton. To Churchill's annoyance Kitchener tells Hamilton to wait a day as he has orders to issue. In the game of one upmanship Kitchener was determined not to let Churchill win a round.

The following day Hamilton receives orders, in various draft stages, from Kitchener. Hamilton reads them and finds them vague. He asks Kitchener for information about the Turks' strength.

Kitchener responds, „About 40,000“.

Hamilton then enquires about the Turkish heavy guns only to be told that no-one really knows how many there are. When he asks who is commanding the Turks he's told by Kitchener, „It's supposedly Jevad Pasha, but nobody is sure.“

Kitchener's instructions to Hamilton now reside in the Imperial War Museum. The document is titled »Mediterranean Expeditionary Force«. Originally it was

titled »Constantinople Expeditionary Force« but Hamilton brought it to Kitchener's attention that such a title didn't do much for secrecy, to which Kitchener had to begrudgingly agree and change the title. The document handed to Hamilton, for the opening of a second front and the taking the Dardanelles is less than 1000 words. In it Hamilton is told that landings are to be made after: „...every effort has been exhausted.“ Further plans on defeating the Turkish army, according to Kitchener, were to be made after the Russians attacked Constantinople from the other side.

To summarise Kitchener's planning of the Gallipoli campaign: it was devised without any military or naval intelligence of the peninsula, with less than a third of the number of troops recommended by an ally, while ignoring notes about the impossibility of taking the peninsula by sea. To compound things even further it was to be commanded by a man who knew, by his own admission, „nil“ and „next to nil“ about where he was going and who he was facing.

To alleviate Hamilton's lack of knowledge about the Dardanelles and its surrounds he was given two tourist guidebooks on Western Turkey and an out of date map that was never intended for military use. To ensure his understanding who he and his men were going to face he was given a 1905 textbook on the Turkish army.

With such incompetent planning and wishful thinking at the highest levels the debacle that occurred at Gallipoli shouldn't have come as a surprise. Furthermore, Hamilton and his staff, along with the majority of the commanding officers were to prove themselves equally as inept as those at the upper echelons. Sadly, they caused the death of thousands of men who volunteered to do their duty for King, country, and the empire.

Despite Kitchener's prediction that all that was needed were some Union Jacks fluttering in the breeze for the Turks to surrender they fought tenaciously, courageously, and effectively.

As the situation in Gallipoli deteriorated the empire's troops on the Western Front became bogged down in a quagmire of mud and blood. With his inadequacies being felt the conduct of the war was removed from Kitchener as Secretary of the State of War and placed in the hands of a War Committee. This committee was made up of three to five Cabinet members—with the exclusion of Winston Churchill.

The War Committee decided that the Gallipoli campaign needed a reassessment, and possible evacuation. With Churchill now sidelined Prime Minister Asquith also wanted Kitchener out of London. The War Committee sent Horatio to the Dardanelles on November 3<sup>rd</sup> 1915 to assess and make recommendations for an evacuation.

Oblivious to the political machinations around him, and perturbed that the campaign hadn't gone the way he envisaged it should, Kitchener came up with a new campaign plan en route! He sent a cable to General Birdwood, one of the few capable senior officers in the field: „Most secret. Decipher yourself, tell no one...“ Birdwood must have been incredulous upon receiving it as such a communication should have been sent to his Commander-in-Chief. By inference it seemed Kitchener was playing his commanders off against each other.

The cable from Kitchener went on to say that the Admiralty would probably agree to help another attempt to force the straits and that Birdwood was to explore a possible landing site at Bulair. Just as he had done to Hamilton he was doing to Birdwood—telling him to work things out as he went along.

Birdwood; however, wasn't Hamilton, and he wasn't a fool. He informed Kitchener that a landing at Bulair would be disastrous. Kitchener then sent Birdwood a new cable: „I fear the navy may not play up. The more I look at the problem the less I see my way through, so you had better very quietly and very secretly work out a scheme for getting troops off.“

In the space of one day Kitchener had told Birdwood that the navy would assist and he was to attack Bulair, then that the navy wouldn't assist and he would need to work out an evacuation plan. While lesser mortals might have found this peculiar it was just another day's planning for Horatio. What Birdwood must have thought can only be guessed at.

For the previous six months Kitchener had been rattling off a series of orders about what to do and how to do it at Gallipoli from London. When he arrived there, at North Shore, he set up his headquarters aboard the battleship, LORD NELSON, then went ashore. Charles Bean, the official Australian war historian wrote in his diary: „The tall red cap (Kitchener) was rapidly closed in among them—but they kept a path and as the red cheeks turned and spoke to one man or another, they cheered him—they, the soldiers—no officer leading off or anything of the sort. It was purely a soldier's welcome.“

Perhaps in a rare moment, realising the hopeless situation he'd place these men in, he said to them, „The King has asked me to tell you how splendidly he thinks you have done—you have done splendidly, better even, than I thought you would.“ Just how well they should have done he never bothered to clarify.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of November 1915 Kitchener sent a cable to Prime Minister Asquith: „The country is much more difficult than I imagined, and the Turkish positions could be held against very serious attack by larger forces than have been engaged.“

What Asquith must have thought about the difference between Kitchener's imagination and the reality with its subsequent cost in lives, misery, resources and time can only be imagined. That he should have received such a communique from the man ultimately responsible for the planning and implementation of the campaign must have had him wondering if he was dealing with the Mad Hatter from „Alice in Wonderland“.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November Kitchener recommended the evacuation of Anzac and Suvla Bay but the retention of Helles: „...at all events for the present.“

The War Committee thought otherwise, and confirmed by Cabinet, wanted a complete evacuation. Kitchener must have, by now, realised that only a short while ago it was he who was telling Cabinet what to do.

Illustration:

Earl Kitchener in Regalia

## Back Home

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 1916 Kitchener was forced to answer questions about the horrific loss of life and number of casualties on the Western Front, and the progress of the war, to Cabinet. This was only the fourth time he did so in 22 months. Horatio didn't consider himself one to answer questions, his role was to command and order. His political masters thought otherwise.

The members of Parliament had previously requested him to present at an open session of Westminster which he'd refused. Now his choice was removed. He began: „I feel sure the Members realise that my previous work in life has been naturally not of a kind to make me a ready debater, nor to prepare me for the twists and turns of argument...“ Unused to having to justify himself Kitchener was paving the way for deflecting any questions that required him to explain his actions.

Kitchener told Cabinet how the war was a gigantic experiment and: „I was convinced that... we had to produce a new army sufficiently large to count in a European war... I had a rough hewn, in my mind, idea of creating such a force as would enable us to continuously reinforce our troops in the field with fresh divisions, and thus assist our allies at the time when they were beginning to feel the strain of war with its attendant casualties.“

If it wasn't clear to Cabinet with whom they were dealing it was now. Kitchener's „rough hewn idea“ was to keep sending fresh troops to become „attendant casualties“ and hopefully there would be enough of them standing at the end of it all for Britain to be in a bargaining position. The United Kingdom and its dominions, according to Kitchener's logic, were an endless supply of young men to be sent to the front. The ministers who had lost sons in the trenches must have seethed.

The problem for Cabinet was the public still adored Kitchener, as they were little informed, if at all, of his failings. Unfortunately, for the War Office and Cabinet, if nothing else he was a point to which the public could rally. What were they to do with an incompetent commander that the public adored?

An opportunity to remove him from further meddling arose when the Tsar of Russia, Nicholas II, asked the War Office if he could meet Kitchener. The Russians had suffered severe military setbacks and Tsar Nicholas wanted a few things: improve liaison between allies and alleviate the munitions shortages, and to use Kitchener as a figurehead for Russian recruitment as his „fame“ was international.

Horatio was always ready to ingratiate himself to those he thought could help him. Perhaps, finally realising his star was waning at home he considered there were fresh opportunities abroad, in Russia, where his aura remained untarnished. An additional benefit was that Russia wasn't a democracy and he wouldn't have to justify himself to loathsome politicians.

The Tsar, a hopeless Commander-in-Chief, believed the Kitchener mystique, and Horatio was ever ready to play the role people expected from him. He did, obligingly, want to see what was causing the Russian shortages in munitions and how communications could be improved. That he had responsibilities for

munitions stripped from him wasn't issue for either him or the Tsar. He would prove in Russia what he couldn't prove at home. The War Office, no doubt, was delighted to send him abroad for as long as he wished to stay.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of June, three days after his grilling by Cabinet, Lord Kitchener, Secretary of the State of War, was aboard the cruiser, HAMPSHIRE, steaming away, in a force 8 gale, from the West Orkneys coast towards the port of Archangel, in Russia. The Hampshire had two escort ships, the UNITY and VICTOR. The gale increased to force 9; then the Admiralty recalled the escort ships.

Unknown to the HAMPSHIRE's captain the German submarine U-75 laid mines in the area on the 28th of May, to block the Scapa Flow exits before the battle of Jutland. It is interesting to note that the Admiralty was aware of this through intercepted radio signals, and that the ship LAUREL CROWN was sunk there due to mines the previous day.

Why the HAMPSHIRE was ordered to take this route and its captain not informed of the LAUREL CROWN's sinking by the Admiralty remains a mystery, as does the recalling of the two escort ship just prior to the HAMPSHIRE's entry into the mined waters.

The HAMPSHIRE struck one of those mines; it blew a gaping hole between the cruiser's bow and bridge. With the ocean rushing in lifeboats were lowered but the rough seas smashed them against the side of the ship. In approximately fifteen minutes the HAMPSHIRE went down, taking Horatio Kitchener, his staff, along with 643 ratings and officers to their deaths. Only twelve of the crew survived.

The British War Cabinet was looking for ways to get removing Kitchener and sending him to Russia was one way of getting him out of their hair; they just weren't expecting this trip would be his last.

It is of little doubt that his demise off the Orkneys brought comfort to some of them. As John Keegan and Andrew Wheatcroft wrote in »Who's Who in Military History«: „His loss, popularly regarded as a national tragedy, was not much regretted in government and by no friends, for he never had any.“

For the British public Kitchener's death was viewed as a national tragedy; the face of the war, of the indomitable British spirit; the man who knew all there was to know about war, was gone. In the public's eye he was a martyr; another victim of the beastly Hun. His Cabinet colleagues knew otherwise but kept quiet—better to let the people believe what they wanted to believe rather than confront them with the truth.

Illustration:

Are You One of Kitchener's Own?

