

## KwaMthashana eBaQulusini 1902 *Ben Khumalo-Seegelken*

By April 1902 the war between the Boers and the British was about to be laid down. It had been waging since October 1899. Boer commandos, however, were still "moving around the countryside" and the British were "in full control" of the Boer towns such as Vryheid and Piet Retief. A historian recalls: The AmaZulu themselves were "little interested in the white men's quarrels. Only on the north-western frontier were they at all involved."

In April 1902 General Louis Botha issued orders that the Zulu homesteads between the Boer towns of Vryheid, Utrecht and Piet Retief be burnt down and that their livestock be confiscated. Field Cornet J. Potgieter ("Jan Mes"), who was stationed on the farm "Vrede" near the mountain of Hlobane, and a Kommando consisting of Boer landowners of that region carried out the order by burning down several homesteads of the local residents, abaQulusi, destroying their crops and driving their livestock along. The livestock was first held on the plains beneath the slopes of eMakhwabi, eNdomuka and kwaMthashana, on the Boer-farms "Gerust" and "Bedrog", before being moved towards the banks of Mbizankulu, onto the farms "Bloemendal" and "Holkrans".

In retaliation, on the 6th May 1902, the abaQulusi gathered secretly and proceeded under the command of uSikhobobo wakwaSibiya towards the slopes of kwaMthashana. They surrounded the laager, planning a surprise, but one of them is said to have prematurely fired a gun. The Boer Kommando jumped for their arms in the dark and opened fire.

The abaQulusi are said to have lost at least 200 of their men, but in the dark they crept in and practically wiped the commando out, killing 56 and taking 3 of them as prisoners, who they subsequently handed over to the (British) Magistrate at Vryheid, where the three were tried and taken into prison. The abaQulusi recovered almost all the about 4.000 head of cattle that had previously been taken away by military force.

(Sources: T.V. BULPIN: "NATAL and the ZULU COUNTRY", Cape Town, 1966;  
Ben KHUMALO-SEEGELKEN: "Umlando", Notes on Oral History, ongoing research)

29 September 2003