

*impi yakwa Mthashana* ("Holkrans")  
During the "Anglo-Boer" War  
100 years ago

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 Zulus 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 Vryheid, Utrecht and Piet Retief be burnt down and that livestock be confiscated. Field Cornet J. Potgieter ("Jan Mes"), who was stationed at the farm "Vrede" near Hlobane, carried out the order by burning down several homesteads of the **abaQulusi**, destroying their crops and driving their cattle away. The cattle were first held on the plains beneath the slopes of eMakhwabi, eNdomuka and kwaMthashana, on the farms "Gerust" and "Bedrog", before being moved towards the banks of Mbizankulu, on the farms "Bloemendal" and "Holkrans".

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

The **abaQulusi** lost about 200 of their men, but in the dark they crept in and practically wiped the commando out, killing 56 Boers and taking 3 prisoners, who were handed over to the Magistrate at Vryheid, where they were **imprisoned**. 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;  
"Battlefields Route", a tourist guide, undated;  
Ben KHUMALO: "Umlando", Notes on Oral History, ongoing research)

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