

The Archaeology of the Outposts of Steinaecker's Horse, a British Volunteer Unit during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902)

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Abstract

Steinaecker's Horse was a volunteer unit which fought on the side of the British during the Anglo-Boer War. The members of the unit consisted of local inhabitants of the Lowveld (now part of Mpumalanga) including Swazi, Pedi, and Shangane soldiers, but a few British soldiers joined their ranks. They operated in the Lowveld and Swaziland with the main aim of preventing the Boers from contacting supporters in Portuguese East Africa. The unit established a number of outposts for this purpose. The history of Steinaecker's Horse has been studied over the past few years. Historical sources on the unit are scarce and thus they were supplemented by archaeological excavations. The artefacts excavated provide information about the lifestyle and everyday circumstances of the soldiers, as well as their interaction with local people. It seems that outposts were placed close to existing communities, probably so that these people could be employed as scouts, servants, cooks, and hunters. Together with artefacts linked to British soldiers, such as ammunition and porcelain, objects linked to local people have been identified at all sites. These include ceramic pottery, glass beads and traditional weapons. Furthermore, the amount of faunal remains excavated at these outposts indicate that the inhabitants supplemented their diet by eating game. Since most of the occupations held by members of Steinaecker's Horse before the war are known, some of the excavated artefacts can be linked to such professions, which may have served the unit. This includes inter alia tailors, barbers, blacksmiths, cooks, and musicians.

Keywords: Steinaecker's Horse; Anglo-Boer War; Lowveld; Archaeology; Outposts; Daily activities; Lifestyle; Artefacts

Introduction

The Anglo-Boer War (also called the Boer War or the South African War)¹ has frequently been studied by historians. The war took place between 1899 and 1902 and was fought between the British Empire and the two Boer republics, Transvaal (Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek) and the Orange Free State.² The purpose of the article is not to discuss the war, but to focus on the volunteer unit, Steinaecker's Horse, specifically from an archaeological perspective. During the war, little time was actually spent on warlike activities such as fighting by Steinaecker's Horse. The question therefore is how the soldiers spent their time in between any military encounters in which they may have been engaged. The hypothesis of this study was thus to determine the lifestyle, daily activities, and everyday circumstances at the different outposts of the Steinaecker's Horse Unit. This can be

mostly determined from the cultural material excavated at these sites, although the limited historical sources available also provided information. The aim of the article is thus to provide a reconstruction of activities engaged in at the different outposts of Steinaecker's Horse, as can be established from archaeological material.

Background

A short background on the unit is necessary. After the British forces captured the capital of the Transvaal, Pretoria, on 5 June 1900, fortified posts were established at tactical points all over South Africa. The purpose thereof was to protect routes such as railway lines and roads and other tactical points.³ This included the area known as the Lowveld, of what was then called the Eastern Transvaal (now Mpumalanga). The main aim of fortifications here was to guard communication routes, especially the Eastern Railway Line between the Transvaal and the Portuguese territory.⁴ For this purpose, the British erected several blockhouses along the railway line.⁵

On 24 September 1900 General R Pole-Carew reached Komatipoort on the border with the Portuguese territory. This resulted in the evacuation of all Boer positions near the Portuguese frontier,⁶ with the British stationing a garrison at Komatipoort to patrol the eastern border. Here several forts were erected by the Steinaecker's Horse Unit,⁷ a volunteer military unit operating in the Lowveld and Swaziland.⁸ The fortifications consist of one fort, five blockhouses and at least four sangars.⁹ The unit was under the command of Francis Christian Ludwig von Steinaecker (Figure 1), a former Prussian-German soldier with vast military experience.¹⁰



Figure 1: Lieutenant-Colonel FCL von Steinaecker.¹¹

Before the war he resided in Port Shepstone (now in KwaZulu-Natal) and when the war broke out, he joined the Colonial Scouts.¹² Early in 1900 he persuaded General RH Buller to allow him and a number of men to blow up the Komatipoort railway bridge in order to restrict the movement of the Boers. Although they did not succeed, a culvert close to Malelane was demolished and the campaign was thus regarded as being a success. This impressed Buller, who allowed Von Steinaecker to raise a voluntary unit named Steinaecker's Horse. The main aim of the unit was to patrol the Portuguese border.¹³ Steinaecker's Horse was officially established on 7 November 1900.¹⁴

The unit eventually had a strength of 450 men mainly consisting of local people from the Lowveld. It included British subjects and Boer citizens, as well as people from countries like Germany, the USA and Australia, but a number of regular British soldiers also joined the unit.¹⁵ Von Steinaecker remained the commanding officer of Steinaecker's Horse for the duration of the war. The unit was only disbanded after the war, on 17 February 1903.¹⁶

Historical information on the role of Steinaecker's Horse during the War

It is necessary to discuss the operations of the unit during the war, as obtained from archival and other historical sources, as it provides insight into the nature of their activities and offers context to the life at such an outpost. As not much information could be obtained, a full account is provided.

Even before officially establishing the unit, Von Steinaecker and the few men he had with him raided stores and villages in the area. None of the sources indicate why this was done, but presumably it was to obtain goods or simply a result of petty crime. Looting was nevertheless frequently carried out by the British soldiers.¹⁷ Goods were for instance also taken by Von Steinaecker and his men from Ringler's store close to Komatipoort on 13 October 1900. It is said that Colonel Von Steinaecker told Ringler that he was neutral during the war as he was a German subject. This was a lie as he was a naturalised British citizen. They found weapons, ammunition and three horses, which Ringler admitted belonged to Boers, as well as two full Transvaal State Artillery uniforms. As Ringler was an outspoken pro-Boer he was captured and later deported.¹⁸

Early in 1901 the unit became known as Steinaecker's Horse.¹⁹ Von Steinaecker made his base at Nomahasha in Swaziland (now called Eswatini). In March of that year the unit raided Bremersdorp (now Manzini in Eswatini) and captured eight Boers, as well as some wagons and supplies.²⁰ A detachment of the corps stayed in the town until 24 July 1901 when the town was besieged by the Boer commando of General Tobias Smuts and Hans Grobler.²¹

Von Steinaecker, being warned of the coming attack, fled the town the previous night, leaving his men to defend the village as best they could. He however failed to nominate a detachment commander. Captain HO Webstock, who was in charge of the town detachment, claimed the honour, but was overruled by Captain AD Greenhill-Gardyne, who was detached to Steinaecker's Horse from the Gordon Highlanders and who was the only officer with regular military experience. Under conflicting instructions, Steinaecker's Horse retreated during the night of 22/23 July 1901, after which the Boers captured the

town. The Boers burned the small town and released a Swazi prince held by Steinaecker's Horse.²² During the attack four members of Steinaecker's Horse were killed, four wounded and seventeen taken prisoner. Captain Greenhill-Gardyne, second-in-command of the unit, managed to escape with the rest of the men.²³

It seems that Steinaecker's Horse was reputedly engaged in controversial activities, such as looting.²⁴ This was aimed at local inhabitants, including farmers and stores. A safe full of jewels was for instance looted from Bremersdorp.²⁵ Another incident was that of money taken from a store owner, Mr Gustav Schwab, who had stores in both Bremersdorp and Oshoek.²⁶ The unit also raided various settlements, including Hhohho and Oshoek. They burgled the store of George Hutchinson and in the process burned important historical documents regarding the history of Swaziland. The store of BB Stewart at the foot of the Ngwenya range was also raided by them and a large amount of money stolen from him.²⁷

The unit regularly confiscated livestock from local farmers, especially herds of cattle.²⁸ Sergeant Harry Wolhuter indicates how they took possession of a herd of cattle belonging to a prominent Boer leader, Abel Erasmus, and took it to one of their outposts, Sabi Bridge.²⁹ Once they even confiscated cattle on the Portuguese side of the border, which was a contravention of international treaties. The Portuguese Governor complained to the British, who then had to compensate the owners.³⁰

Officially both the Boers and the British agreed not to involve local Black people in the war.³¹ Despite this, Steinaecker's Horse armed these people which sometimes had tragic outcomes.³² This was indeed the case at the Battle of Fort Mpisane, perhaps the most important of Steinaecker's Horse's military encounters with the enemy. Fort Mpisane was one of the various forts that Von Steinaecker had erected in the Lowveld,³³ and together with Steinaecker's Horse some pro-British local people manned the fort. The battle occurred on 7 August 1901 when Boer forces from the Lydenburg Commando under Commandant Piet Moll attacked the fort.³⁴

The British eventually surrendered to the Boers, and although the battle had little effect on the outcome of the war, it did seriously damage the operations of Steinaecker's Horse in the region.³⁵ During this confrontation the officer in charge of the fort, Captain HF Francis, and many of the Shangané³⁶ troops, were killed.³⁷ In fact, many of these Shangané troops captured were executed by the Boers, as their participation in the war was in contravention of the agreement between the Boers and the British that no Black people would be allowed to partake in the War.³⁸

Apart from making use of local people as troops, in general the unit did not have good relationships with the local non-fighting people. Although they were sometimes assisted by the Swazi, some Swazi people were opposed to Steinaecker's Horse because they captured Prince Mancibane, as they suspected him of pro-Boer sympathies.³⁹ In another incident Lieutenant E Holgate had a Swazi executed for allegedly spying.⁴⁰

At least once members of Steinaecker's Horse captured foreigners under suspicious circumstances which led to an investigation by the British military. From archival documents it is clear that the foreigners were not armed, but that they did not stop when

asked to do so. After their capture letters were also written by their consuls to the British, as they had apparently received their clearance from the Boers and were all on their way home to their respective countries of origin.⁴¹ In another incident, a British subject, Bill Sanderson, was captured by members of Steinaecker's Horse and accused of working with the Boers. His livestock were seized, and although he proved to be innocent, he was never compensated.⁴²

There are however also positive accounts of the operations of Steinaecker's Horse. Lord Roberts even made mention of one of the successes of the unit after they captured 16 Boers trying to smuggle ammunition into Swaziland from the Portuguese territory on 8 November 1900. This was the day after the unit was officially established and presumably refers to a success by Von Steinaecker and the few men that he had under his command at the time. In addition, at the end of August 1901, a small party of Steinaecker's Horse, under the command of Captain Greenhill-Gardyne, captured 11 Boers with wagons loaded with equipment and in February 1902, Captain JB Holgate and 16 men captured 18 Boers on the Swaziland border.⁴³ Towards the end of the war, members of Steinaecker's Horse under the command of Captain D Forbes of the Lebombo Intelligence Scouts, also attacked a commando of Boers in Swaziland. The Boer commander, Commandant NJM Vermaak, was killed and the women and children that had accompanied him were captured.⁴⁴

Such incidents led to Steinaecker's Horse having a reputable standing with the British military authority. In fact, when another unit was raised for service in the Pietersburg Lowveld, they were named the Steinaecker's Horse Special Squadron. However, apart from the name, this unit, under the command of Colonel JW Colenbrander,⁴⁵ had no connection to Steinaecker's Horse.

During the war 39 members of Steinaecker's Horse died, of which only 11 died during skirmishes with the enemy. Other causes of death included malaria, being caught by lions and crocodiles, suicide and falling off a horse.⁴⁶ A number of the 337 members of the unit received special mention after the war, and 327 of them qualified for the King's South African medal.⁴⁷ Since this medal was never issued without the Queen's South African medal,⁴⁸ one can assume that these members had also received the latter. Eight members of the unit were mentioned in the despatches of Lord H Kitchener.⁴⁹ Von Steinaecker himself received mention in the London Gazette of 17 June 1902.⁵⁰ Apart from Von Steinaecker, Lieutenant JA Bailie was the only other member of Steinaecker's Horse who received the Distinguished Service Order, on 8 August 1901. On the same date, Sergeant WS Haines received the Distinguished Conduct Medal.⁵¹

The Archaeological Research

During the research on Steinaecker's Horse, a number of outposts were identified. These are mostly located in the Kruger National Park and include Bremersdorp, Nomahasha, Signal Hill on the Kalishan Mountain, Komatipoort headquarters, Fort Mpisane, Kilo 104, Muntshe, Crocodile Bridge, Outspan, Nwanedzi, Mbiyamithi Spruit, Salitje, Bottelkop, Northernmost Outpost, Sabi Bridge (Skukuza), Ngotso Mouth, Gaza Gray Outpost, Sabi Poort, Gomondwane and N'wamuriwa. Seven of these were excavated and three more documented between 1998 and 2020.

The excavation of the sites and the documentation of features, structures and artefacts thereon gives an insight into aspects such as the people present at these outposts, contact with local communities, and social differentiation. Furthermore, it assists in obtaining an idea of the lifestyle, daily activities, and everyday circumstances at the Steinaecker's Horse outposts. This relates to both intangible as well as material culture.⁵²

Intangible culture

Intangible culture includes aspects such as faith, communication, the arts, recreation, and inter-cultural influence. These issues can only be indirectly deduced from certain artefacts. Thus, the intangible is to be deduced from the tangible objects. One aspect relates to finding cultural objects associated with the White soldiers of Steinaecker's Horse and the Black soldiers and local inhabitants present on the sites respectively. Historical sources also corroborate the presence of different groups on the sites.⁵³ Artefacts normally associated with one group (e.g., indigenous pottery) at an area associated with another group, indicate mutual influence.

Glass beads (Figure 2) and pendants show another intangible dimension. Apart from being used for personal adornment, they may have also served the purpose of being a lucky charm. A good example here is the fake lion dew claws found at the Makhadzi site (Figure 3) with holes indicating their being worn as pendants.



Figure 2: Glass beads from the Gaza Gray Outpost.⁵⁴



Figure 3: Three fake lion dew claws together with eggshell and faunal material from the Northernmost Outpost of Steinaecker's Horse.⁵⁵

Remains of musical instruments is another example (Figure 4). Music is frequently used in social activities, or by an individual, sitting around a campfire and playing an instrument,⁵⁶ likely while longing for something else. Remains of Jew's harps and mouth organs were for instance identified.⁵⁷ One of the members of the unit, Trooper BT Train, indicated his occupation as musician.⁵⁸



Figure 4: Remains from food tins, an oil lamp, musical instruments, and a buckle excavated at the Ngotso Mouth site.⁵⁹

Social and everyday activities are also examples of the intangible. A number of champagne bottles with heads clearly cut off were found at Sabi Bridge. The ritual of cutting the head off a champagne bottle with a sword is unique to the cavalry, and since Steinaecker's Horse was a mounted infantry unit, this makes sense. It can also be linked to camaraderie which runs much further than a single military unit, since cavalry units from different armies also practised this ritual.

Material culture

Of course, the tangible is much more obvious from archaeological artefacts, as will be indicated below.

Food and drink

On most of the sites a large number of the remains of food tins (bully beef, fish, and ham) were identified (Figure 4). This indicates that that Steinaecker's Horse was well provisioned with military rations. Other artefacts found show that food distributed to them included Bovril, sweet oil, baking powder and a variety of sauces, e.g., Worcestershire sauce. Rations were provided frequently from military stores and included pickles, whisky and other groceries.⁶⁰ For instance, this included various tinned meat, biscuits, jam and fishpaste.⁶¹ Wolhuter indicates that Steinaecker's Horse was also provided with tinned vegetables and fruit.⁶² Baking powder tins suggest that they baked on site, and since a number of members of the unit indicated their trade as being bakers, this is no surprise. This includes Troupers CM Hay, E Morgan, and WH Williams.⁶³

The soldiers of Steinaecker's Horse did supplement their diet with fresh meat and eggs (Figure 3). Faunal remains from steenbok, zebra, blue wildebeest, and impala were excavated. It is known that members of the unit hunted and that this was the only source of meat at certain outposts.⁶⁴ A few members of the unit indicated their trade as being butchers, for instance Troopers FA Carrington and A Tempest.⁶⁵ Ammunition excavated that was not of military origin includes cartridges from shot guns, but military weapons may also have been used for hunting.

Faunal material from domesticated species were also excavated and include sheep, cattle, and goat. These animals were obtained from the local people, but were also confiscated from farmers.⁶⁶ Fish bones were identified, as well as those from birds like guineafowl and pheasant. Shells from tortoises, land snails and eggs indicate that these were also consumed.

Some of the ceramic and glass objects found had a household function. They include dinner plates, cups, saucers, cooking pots, egg cups and wine glasses. Metal objects associated with food include parts of pots, knives, forks, spoons (Figure 5), coffee pots, a grid and enamel plates. Food was likely prepared on open fires. At the Northern Outpost, a cooking shelter was excavated, and at Komatipoort remains of a primus stove was found. Water provision was very important, both for cooking and hygienic purposes. At Komatipoort two large water tanks were identified. Handles of buckets were also unearthed at some of the other sites.



Figure 5: Remains of spoons excavated at Ngotso Mouth.⁶⁷

Ceramic and glass shards excavated give information on the liquid refreshments available to the soldiers. Alcoholic beverages (Figure 6) include gin, rum, whisky, brandy, schnapps, wine, champagne, and beer, while non-alcoholic drinks are represented by soda and mineral water, ginger beer and Rose's lime cordial. The large number of objects in this category is an indication that drinking was a popular activity on site. Rum was in fact part of the daily rations given to the British troops.⁶⁸ Gin was also believed to be a counter to malaria. A section of a cork, the lead seals of liquor bottles (Figure 7) and wire from champagne bottles were also found. Soda water was produced on site. At the Northern Outpost small CO₂ cylinders were excavated (Figure 7). One of the members of the unit, Trooper HW Warcup, indicated his trade as being a producer of mineral water.⁶⁹



Figure 6: Bottles from alcoholic beverages found at the Sabi Bridge Outpost. Note the wire around the head of the champagne bottle fragment.⁷⁰



Figure 7: CO2 cannisters, a toothpaste tube, a section of a syringe and lead seals excavated at the Northernmost Outpost.⁷¹

Transport

At the Northern Outpost and at Sabi Bridge, parts of the undercarriage of small carts were found. This was probably used to transport ammunition or other supplies. Faunal material from donkeys indicate that these animals were present on site and that they were probably used as draught animals. It is known that ox wagons were used to carry supplies between the different outposts.⁷²

Since Steinaecker's Horse was a cavalry unit, they would have used horses. A historical photograph shows some of the officers of Steinaecker's Horse on horseback, while artefacts associated with horses were identified at Sabi Bridge. These include horseshoe nails, metal rings, buckles from bridles and pliers used for removing nails from horseshoes. The unit did have veterinarians, for instance Lieutenants JW Edward and EC McCrystal.⁷³

Many objects associated with the railway were found at Sabi Bridge. It is known that the members of the unit used the railway to transport provisions between this site and Komatipoort.⁷⁴ A coco pan which may also have been used to transport provisions, was found at Komatipoort.

Technology

Most of the artefacts excavated can be linked to technology and are discussed under other sections. Remaining aspects include the provision of light. The handle and cover of a paraffin can and lamp were found at the Northern Outpost, and the remains of an oil lamp at Sabi Bridge (Figure 4). Many pieces of wire which could have had a variety of functions, were excavated. A section of copper wire found at Sabi Bridge may have been used in a mechanism to blow up the blacksmith workshop, as it is similar to explosive devices of the time (apparently the workshop was blown up after the war).⁷⁵

Axe heads (Figure 8) excavated at the Northern Outpost, were used to chop wood for the purpose of obtaining firewood, building material or repairing equipment, and to build a branch-fence around camp. A number of hoe blades were found, and were probably linked to agricultural activities, but it is unlikely that the soldiers would have planted crops. It was thus probably used by local people who were employed as servants at the outposts.



Figure 8: Axe heads, files and tailor's scissors found at the Northernmost Outpost.⁷⁶

Personal care

Some of the excavated artefacts can be linked to the personal hygiene of soldiers. Two examples are fragments of Odol mouth wash containers and toothpaste tubes (Figure 7). The cover of a shoe polish tin was found, something that definitely can be expected in a military context.

Remains of medicine bottles and ointment containers were identified. Some of the illnesses that the soldiers had to cope with were malaria and black water fever,⁷⁷ but based on the large quantities of liquor bottles on the sites, it seems that they rather believed in the medicinal power of gin to ward off fever. Remains of syringes (Figure 7) were also found, and it is known that the unit had a number of surgeons, including Captain AJ Campbell and Lieutenant AN Grieve.⁷⁸ They also had pharmacists, namely Corporals W Jasper and WJ Wright,⁷⁹ as well as a dentist, Corporal A Baagoe.⁸⁰ The only kind of medicine that could specifically be identified from bottle fragments is Eno's fruit salt, indicating that stomach problems were one of the ailments with which the soldiers had to cope. Refuse middens at the outposts, as well as a specific storage area for empty bottles at Sabi Bridge, are an indication of containing refuse, which may have assisted in controlling illness. However, at Steinaecker's Horse, this was not the case, and hygiene may have been a problem. In fact, it is known that sanitary conditions were not always maintained at British camps.⁸¹

Clothing and paraphernalia

A large variety of objects related to clothing were found. These include cufflinks, as well as many different buttons, some with a definite military origin. Buttons made from wood or bone were probably manufactured on site. Beads, bangles, earrings, parts of pocket watches and finger rings are examples of paraphernalia. Remains of shoes were also

identified, including the heel irons from military boots. Buckles (Figure 4) from belts and braces, made from copper, bronze and iron, were also excavated.

Two tailors' scissors (Figure 8) found at the Northern Outpost suggest that clothes were mended. Other objects in this regard included pins, needles made from bone, and an awl. The unit had tailors as members, for instance Troopers CJ Gooden and AW Sinclair.⁸²

Handwork

Mending clothes is of course a form of handwork. Making buttons and needles etc. are also handwork activities in which the members of Steinaecker's Horse were engaged. Three fake lion dew claws made from bone, and a coin with holes to carry it around the neck are also examples. Rings and bangles also may have been produced on site.

Ceramic pottery found may have been manufactured on site, but again would likely have been associated with local inhabitants. A hand-made arrowhead which was identified at the Northern Outpost is also probably a locally produced artefact.

Some of the nails excavated were hand-made, whilst others were bent to serve as hooks (e.g. for hanging clothing). Others were bent to form fishhooks, as fishhooks bent from wire were also found (Figure 9). These were likely done by the soldiers in order to fish. Two files (Figure 8) excavated at the Northern Outpost, were probably used to make other objects, while pocketknives could also have been used for this purpose (Figure 10). Wire with sharpened points is not only a product of handwork, but may also have been used as a tool in making other objects.



Figure 9: Fishhooks and nails from the Northernmost Outpost⁸³



Figure 10: A pocketknife excavated at Sabi Bridge⁸⁴

Architecture

The architecture of Steinaecker's Horse is probably not unique, as it would be similar to typical military buildings of the time. These were mainly prefabricated buildings made from corrugated iron.⁸⁵ Examples are the blockhouse at Sabi Bridge and buildings at Komatipoort.⁸⁶ These buildings nevertheless had stone, brick, and concrete foundations which the soldiers had to build themselves. A number of builders were members of the unit, including Troopers W Cartwright, TH Moore, and G Povall.⁸⁷ Since most of the buildings identified were at least partially formally built, it can be assumed that these soldiers were responsible for the erection thereof.

The blacksmith workshop at Sabi Bridge was partially made from bricks and also had wooden beams. It likely also had a corrugated iron roof. Another building at this site had walls made from corrugated iron, wooden posts, and clay. Metal sleepers from the railway were also utilised. These are unique features as an adaptation to their circumstances. The building may have been used as offices, garrison's quarters, or a mess hall. Structures without formal floors were also excavated here. They include three storage areas with walls made from wooden poles and clay.

A hut and cooking shelters at the Northern Outpost were also made from clay and wooden posts. This hut and a large building excavated at Sabi Bridge had earth floors, an indication of adaption to local building styles. Further indications of architecture include window glass, a window latch and the remains of a wooden door, sections of locks, hut clay, nails, screws, and washers.

At Komatipoort various examples of architecture were identified. These include blockhouses, a fort, steps, footpaths, water furrows, storage rooms, and a stable etc. Stone was mainly used in construction. Artefacts indicating the use of tents consist of the eyes from sails and tent pegs. It is known that tents were issued to British soldiers.⁸⁸

Trades and occupations

Different trades and occupations have been mentioned above. The most important tasks of the members of Steinaecker's Horse were of course to be soldiers. Military activities would have included doing patrols, target practice, standing guard and being involved in skirmishes. Most of the ammunition excavated are from military rifles (Lee Metford, Lee Enfield, Maxim, and Martini Henry) and confirm these activities. Having firearms probably meant that a gunsmith was needed. Trooper JM Mills was indeed one.⁸⁹

There are many associated activities needed to keep a military unit going. One of the excavations at Sabi Bridge seems to have unearthed a quarter-master's store, suggesting that such a person with personnel must have been present. Woolmore indicates that Lieutenant JW Dallamore was the quartermaster of Steinaecker's Horse.⁹⁰ Control over equipment and the handling thereof, as well as dispatching provisions to the different outposts would have been part of their duties. A small weight excavated may be linked to these activities. One of the duties of Sergeant Harry Wolhuter was to transport provisions and equipment between the different outposts.⁹¹

Although Woolmore lists the trades of each member of the unit, it does not mean that they were necessarily utilised in the same capacity. He mentions for instance the following occupations: builders, blacksmiths, barmen, auditors, fire-fighters, engineers, policemen, wagonmakers, electricians, glass cutters, miners, cooks, musicians, and barbers.⁹² Since Steinaecker's Horse was a mounted infantry unit one can expect trades linked to horses. Trooper JA Barnes was a blacksmith, Troopers S Cooper and RC Edlin horse breakers, Trooper J Cox a horse trainer, Troopers G Dillman and JH Healy saddle makers and Trooper FJ Lambe a saddle and bridle maker.⁹³

A large number of soldiers had construction trades, and one can assume that they assisted in building activities. Wolhuter, who was a farmer and hunter before the war, nevertheless indicated that he assisted in the building of the blockhouse at Sabi Bridge.⁹⁴ Tom Boyd and Clinkers Willis were the train drivers between Sabi Bridge and Komatipoort.⁹⁵ Blacksmith activities were also practised here and can be seen in hammer and anvil stones on site.

There must have been cooks to prepare food for the unit. One of these was Trooper CO White.⁹⁶ An associated activity to food preparation is the sourcing of food, and fishing and hunting served this purpose. These food sources had to be slaughtered, and it is known that there were a number of butchers in the unit, for instance Trooper A Tempest.⁹⁷ Pocketknives may have been used for this purpose. Fauna material from small animals such as frogs indicate that these had to be captured. They were probably used as bait when fishing.

Another task was carrying water to site, seen from handles from buckets that were excavated. Tailors' scissors indicate the mending of clothes, which was likely done by

members of the unit who served as tailors. Artefacts associated with writing were also found. These include fragments from ink containers, a paper clip and the point of a flood pen. These could have been personal items, but may also have been used for official correspondence of the unit.

Other objects found indicating trades were shovels, picks, chisels, and a crowbar. The remains of purses found at Sabi Bridge were likely used to pay wages. There would, therefore, have been a paymaster and Woolmore indeed indicates that the unit had several paymasters like Lieutenant A Gray.⁹⁸

Protection and defence

Since Steinaecker's Horse was a military unit, activities of a military nature would have been the order of the day. Target practice, patrols, sentry duty and skirmishes were already mentioned. The ammunition found, many which were of military calibre, is an indication of these activities (Figure 11). Standing guard of course had more than a military function, as they had to guard against wild animals as well. On a number of occasions lions attacked both men and horses.



Figure 11: Ammunition excavated at Sabi Bridge.⁹⁹ From left to right and top to bottom - Martini-Henry, Lee Metford/Enfield, 12 bore shotgun, Lee-Metford/Enfield, Maxim, Maxim, Lee Metford/Enfield.

Some of the buildings at Komatipoort had a distinctive offensive or defensive function. These include blockhouses, canon positions, a fort and trenches. A few military structures were however identified at the other outposts. A photograph of Sabi Bridge indicates that there was a blockhouse.¹⁰⁰ The main function of the blockhouse would have been to

protect the bridge over the river. Together with a camp on both sides of the river it would have been difficult to attack. At N'wamuriwa military trenches were discovered. Other artefacts of military origin include uniform buttons, heel irons from boots and hinges from ammunition cases.

Other

Metal hoops from wooden barrels and crates were found at various sites. Barrels had many functions, but were nothing more than storage containers, as were wooden crates. At Sabi Bridge a hoop was found at the blacksmith workshop, indicating that a barrel filled with water was located here to cool warm iron.

Small bronze crosses found here were probably decorative elements on purses used for payment of wages. Two coins (Figure 12) excavated also indicate the presence of money on site, which may have been used to purchase personal items.



Figure 12: Two sixpence coins from the Sabi Bridge site. Note the holes in the first one, likely made to be able to wear it as a pendant.¹⁰¹

Some of the soldiers smoked. The remains of kaolin pipes and the brass lids of such pipes were identified. The tail of an ornamental animal, made from bronze, was also found. It was probably used by someone who wanted to decorate his living quarters.

Conclusion

Steinaecker's Horse played an important role in the Lowveld during the Anglo-Boer War. It is interesting to note that their outposts were mostly located close to existing communities, and that the placement thereof was perhaps to a lesser extent influenced by military-tactical reasons. On the other hand, the communities lived close to known routes and thus the camps were strategically placed on possible routes that the Boers could have utilised.

By analysing and interpreting the different cultural objects excavated on the sites, an explanation of life at such a military outpost can be given. At many of the sites, the artefacts reflect social and racial differentiation. This refers to the types of artefacts identified, as well as to different locations within one site. Thus, it seems that the officers were separated from the men. Also, the White soldiers of Steinaecker's Horse stayed separate from the local inhabitants and Black soldiers at these sites. This can be seen from artefacts such as indigenous pottery, glass beads and even traditional weapons at certain sections of the sites, as opposed to other sections where European type ceramics (porcelain and stone ware) were found, together with the remains of glass bottles, military buttons, and ammunition from the time.

Military artefacts excavated are proof of these sites being linked to the Anglo-Boer War. Apart from these military artefacts, the archaeological material assists in forming an idea of the daily life at these sites. It can be used to make assumptions about the activities which the soldiers and other people on site were engaged in, and provides insight into the daily activities at such an outpost. Archaeological research thus brings insights and new perspectives into Steinaecker's Horse. As such it is an example which can be utilised in other research projects and sites associated with the Anglo-Boer War.

Endnotes

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