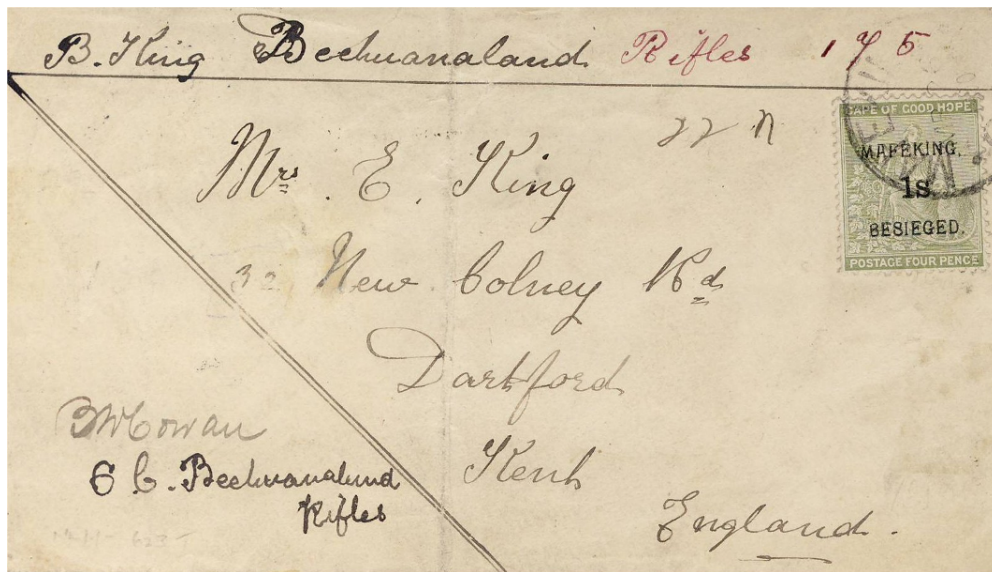


BECHUANALAND RIFLES IN MAFEKING: A SOLDIER'S LETTER

Philatelic Description of the item of Postal Stationery:

Philatelic Cover: a soldier's letter from B. King, Bechuanaland Rifles 175, in Mafeking to E. King at 32 New Colony Road, Dartford, Kent; with a franked 4d. Cape of Good Hope sage-green with 1/- surcharge [SG5], cds. of Mafeking dated 26.3.00, carried via Bulawayo and back stamped with cds. Bulawayo 4.4.00 and received at Dartford cds. 12.5.00.

Censorship certified by B W Cowan, C.O. Bechuanaland Rifles



BRUCE KING (-). The nominal roll of the Bechuanaland Rifles ¹ gives no indication of when King attested to the regiment. He was present throughout the Siege of Mafeking and was discharged on completion of service on 26 July 1901. He received the Queen's Medal with Defence of Mafeking & Transvaal clasps.

At much the same time as his leaving the Bechuanaland Rifles, a "King, Bruce Woodgate Tpr 112" attested to the Bushveldt Carbineers ² in Durban, the date recorded as 12 March 1901, later to leave the Pietersburg Light Horse on 10 April 1902 in Pietermaritzburg ³. Whether this is the self-same person I have not determined.

¹ WO 127/01 Bechuanaland Rifles

² WO 127/03 Bushveldt Carbineers: they were first called the Bushveldt Rifles, later the Bushveldt Carbineers and finally [1902] the Pietersburg Light Horse. They were raised February/March 1901 by Mr Levi a hotelier of Pienaar's River, Northern Transvaal.

³ WO 127/16 Pietersburg Light Horse (part of Bushveldt Carbineers)



BRYCE WALTER COWAN (1866-), Major (later Lieutenant Colonel), raised the Bechuanaland Rifles ⁴ on 1 January 1897 and commanded the group from 1896 onward; lived through the siege of Mafeking, and saw action elsewhere in the Cape Colony, Orange River Colony and Transvaal, where *inter alia* he commanded a special mobile column (September 1901-31 May 1902). He was mentioned in despatches four times ⁵; received the Queen's Medal with Defence of Mafeking, Orange Free State & Transvaal clasps, the King's Medal with two '01 & '02 clasps. Later, he was created a Companion of the Distinguished Service Order ⁶. In 1914 he participated in putting down the South African Miners' Rebellion; in 1915 he did service in German South-West Africa, and went on to command a battalion of the Royal Fusiliers (The City of London Regiment); and was awarded the Volunteer Officer's Decoration. He died post WWII

His sister, Ina Cowan, lived through the siege and, as a volunteer nurse, kept a diary being described as "epistolary in form, being addressed solely to her sister".

References:

1. www.britishmedals.us/files/127bechrifles.htm
2. http://www.angloboerwar.com/units/bech_rifle_vols.htm
3. <http://www.scouting.milestones.btinternet.co.uk/diaries.htm>
4. Cloete, P G. The Anglo-Boer War: A Chronology. Publ: J P van der Walt, Pretoria. 2000
5. Mitchell, F K. Defence of Mafeking Medal Roll. Publ: Chimperie. 1962
6. South African Archives Repository, Cape Town, Pietermaritzburg & Pretoria
7. Tylden, G, Major. The Armed Forces of South Africa 1659 – 1954. City of Johannesburg Africana Museum Frank Connock Publication No.2. Facsimile 1982.

⁴ Raised 1897; colours awarded 1904; disbanded 1913

⁵ London Gazette: 8 February 1901; 16 April, 1901; 3 December 1901 and 29 July 1902

⁶ London Gazette, 31 October 1902