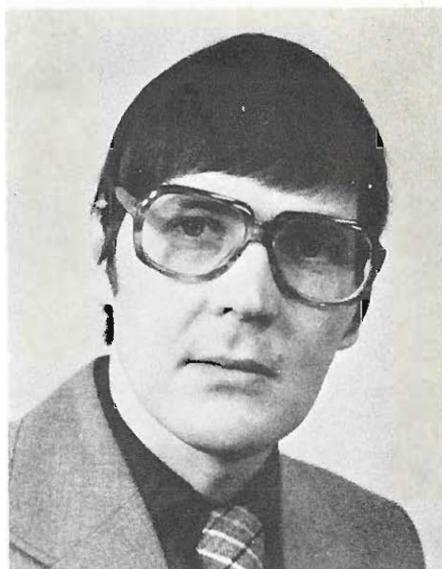


FL Mikko Uola:

Finnish warriors in the South African war



Of the Finnish human fates driven all around the world those countrymen who participated the Boer War over 76 years ago form their special totality about which it is not easy to get proper information but which, no doubt, includes many kinds of destinies. Excluding those few Finns on the British side there were in the Boer forces about twenty, thirty Finns. One part of them had immigrated South Africa for gold and diamond fields, another part were sailors and probably there were even adventurers who travelled from one continent to another.

The Scandinavians living in Johannesburg and Pretoria had in the middle of 1899 under unemployment and the risk of war founded for themselves an organization which was known as "Skandinaviska organisation". Its leader was a Swede, Christer Ugglä, who lived in Pretoria and worked for the Transvaal railway company. When the war was evident there were different opinions among the Scandinavians towards the two parts of the war. Some sympathized with the British while many others were on the Boer side. The first meeting in Johannesburg did not reach any unity about the organization's opinion to the war. Those who supported the Boers organized therefore another meeting in Pretoria about on the 12th October, 1899. In this meeting it was decided to form a Scandinavian volunteer force which would join fighting on the Boer side. This thought was rapidly accepted by the Transvaal officials. All the Scandinavian warriors received the full Burgher rights and it was promised a plot of land for everybody after a successful war but the soldiers did not get any salaries. The Government, however, gave some money to the corps for equipment and riding horses.

The sympathetic attitude of the majority of the Scandinavians towards the Boers had already the tradition some years old. In the beginning of the year 1896 when the English doctor L. S. Jameson made his unsuccessful raid against the Boers the Scandinavians living in Transvaal proclaimed their loyalty to the Boer Government.

Originally about 65 men joined the Scandinavian corps and they were from all the Nordic countries: Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland. Besides them there were some volunteers which represented some other nationalities in the corps. In the original Scandinavian corps there were probably 13 Finns. Most of them were from Pohjanmaa (Bothnia) and all of them had worked at Transvaal gold mines although they originally represented many occupations. Nearly all of the Scandinavian volunteers were miners but many of them were former sailors.

Like all the Boer corps the Scandinavians also elected their captain. The elected captain was a son to a Swedish missionary Carl Ludvig Flygare, Natal born Johannes Flygare. His greatest merit was the knowledge in the Boer language. In Finland it is often wrongly claimed that Flygare was a Finn.

Before their leave for the front between 14th and 17th October the Scandinavians made a parade before the residence of President Paul Kruger and the President made a stimulating speech to them.

When leaving for the front the Scandinavians' destination was Mafeking where the Boers had besieged the British forces commanded by Colonel Baden-Powell. On their way to Mafeking the Scandinavians escorted the famous Boer gun "Long Tom".

The Scandinavians participated small skirmishes in Mafeking but the Boer commander General Piet Cronje opposed any large scaled attack against the British occupied town because of vain losses. The Scandinavians protested strongly against Cronje's passive viewpoint because they wanted more active attacking. They complained of Cronje's passivity even to Pretoria. It is told that the Scandinavians were volunteers to everything which was amusing and dangerous. They distinguished themselves in trench digging, blowing up the British mine fields, stealing cattle etc.

The Scandinavians met their first loss in Mafeking because in an attack on the 25th October a Finn, Johan Johansson, was badly wounded. Johansson was taken into an ambulance organized by the Scandinavians. It was offered the possibility for Johansson to go to Pretoria to a hospital but the man preferred to stay among his corps.

When the strong British army led by Lord Methuen advanced from the south towards another besieged town Kimberley the main forces of General Cronje, among them the Scandinavians, received on the 20th November the order to go towards Kimberley. On their way the Scandinavians got the supplement of 15 men but after two were wounded and some moved to other corps the amount of the soldiers did not rise much over 70 men.

The Scandinavian corps arrived at Magersfontein, to the south of Kimberley, on the 28th November. The slower ambulance unit reached the place not early than on the 10th December.

To the end of November the British army of 15 000 men led by Lord Methuen had advanced to Modder River, about 10 kilometres south from Magersfontein. The British stayed there for two weeks after severe clashes with the Boers.

The Boer forces of about 8500 men led by Cronje prepared on their side to avert the probable British attack by digging trenches to the foreground of the Magersfontein hills. Especially the Finns in the Scandinavian corps proved to be the best experts with explosives and they distinguished themselves as railway mining on the British rear.

In the evening on the 10th December after a severe British artillery concentration 52 men of the Scandinavian corps (according to other sources 49 men) were sent to an outpost about 1,5 kilometres before the defenses and circa 10 men stayed with horses. Other Scandinavians were around the whole encampment in different tasks.

The night was rainy and chilly. About at four a'clock in the morning the British were seen advancing towards the Boer positions. The Scandinavians had got orders to retreat to the main force but despite of that captain Flygare decided to let his men fight in the outpost. The British soon blockaded the Scandinavians and cut their way of retreat. The corps, however, fought persistently. It followed that 20 Scandinavians were killed, among them captain Flygare, 21 were taken prisoners by the British, the greatest deal of them badly wounded. Three of the prisoners died within the following days from their wounds. Only four men of the Scandinavians in the outpost got out of the outpost safely to their own side, five came off lightly wounded and two badly wounded were removed from the battlefield to the Boer side. The Finnish losses were one killed on the battlefield and one died in captivity after two days from his wounds, two badly wounded and one captured.

The British suffered a bloody defeat at Magersfontein but the Boer losses, except the Scandinavians, were slight. Cronje's troops stayed at Magersfontein still for two months until the British succeeded by passing the Boers to raise the siege of Kimberley in February, 1900. By that time the position of the

Boer forces became intolerable at Magersfontein and they began their retreat towards Bloemfontein. After reaching a place called Paardeberg they were, however, besieged by the British.

The Scandinavians had received the supplement of twenty men, four or five of them Finns, at Magersfontein in January. The Scandinavians formed still their own unit which participated the battle of Paardeberg on the 18th – 27th February. In this battle only two Scandinavians were killed. Among wounded there were three or four Finns. The whole Boer force had to surrender to the British on the 27th February. The war prisoners were sent to Cape Town and from there the biggest part was sent to St. Helena where they were released after the war in 1902.

It is written several books and innumerable articles about the Scandinavians in the Boer War. It is characteristic for them the great contradiction in many affairs.

The contradictory and the inconstancy of the name spelling have been the main difficulties in collection of the biographical notes of the Finns in the Boer War. In many cases it is used the surnames (or the names of the house or farm) in the Finnish sources but abroad those persons have often been satisfied with their patronymics. When the foreign sources make known the domicile it has not been possible to rely on it because the name of the locality is nearly always written wrongly or the domicile is announced completely incorrectly (compare: Warsaw – must be Oravais or Oravainen, Evozov – must be Vörå or Vöyri).

It is worth a mention that in the Scandinavian memorial erected at Magersfontein in 1908 it is cut among the Finnish killed a name J. Jakobsson although any person called Jakobsson were not among the Scandinavians as far as it is known, at least not in the lists of the fallen. In the memorial there is not on the other hand the name of Johan Jakob Johansson who died in captivity on St. Helena probably from his wounds.

There were Scandinavians in the Boer War on the Boer side also as members of some Boer commandos. There are not, however, many facts available for example about the Finns in the Boer commandos. Presumably the names of only few of them are known. It is the same thing for the Finns on the British side.

According to the newspaper comments there were about 50–60 Finns in Johannesburg when the war broke out. 20 men of them joined the Scandinavian corps while the others either left for Finland or stayed in Johannesburg. The Finns who served in other Boer units lived probably in Transvaal or Orange but presumably not in Johannesburg or Pretoria.

The birth year of 16 Finnish Boer War participant is known. The youngest of these was 22 years old and the oldest 46 years old. The mean age was nearly 28 years. The known home localities by provinces are distributed as follows:

- Vaasa province 19
- Uusimaa province 2
- Åland province 1
- Kuopio province 1
- Oulu province 1

The main sources for the following biographical notes have been:

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- Uusia hauskvoja kertomuksia Boerisodasta. *Amerikan Sanomat*, Ashtabula Ohio. (without the year of printing).
- Articles in various newspapers, for example *Hufvudstadsbladet* 25.1.1903, 11.12.1924, *Wasabladet* 16.6.1896, 23.3.1901, *The Standard and Digger's News* 20.12.1899.
- Government Archives, Pretoria: The Red Cross Registers, British Intelligence Department (Finns who have taken full Burgher Rights under the Transvaal Government since the commencement of War).
- National Archives of Finland: The sources for the Finnish migration statistics, 1889–1899.
- The records at various Finnish parishes.

Karl Fredrik Åberg sailor

Karl Åberg was from Helsinki. It is known that he was a sailor and got the passport for foreign countries 5.6.1891. He has probably been a member in some Boer commando but has been taken war prisoner by the British and sent to St. Helena. After releasing in 1902 Åberg travelled to the United States. There are no more facts about him.

K.W. Alfston

The name is got from British sources and so it can be wrongly spelled. Perhaps it should be Alfström. It is not known any more about him but he has received the full Burgher rights 30.1. 1900 so that he has probably at that time joined some Boer commando. Before the war he had lived four years in Transvaal.

Zachris Michelsson Änst

Änst was from Närpiö and he is mentioned as a Finnish participant in the Boer War. After the war Änst lived in the United States. There are no more facts about him.

Otto Wilhelm Backman

Born 6.4.1876 at Kirkonkylä, Uusikaarlepyy

Parents: Jakob Johansson Backman and Anna Sofia Gustafsdotter.

Married 18.8.1895 with Wilhelmina Jakobsdotter Sund, born 1874, died 1905.

Child Otto Jakob Reinhold, born 17.1.1896.

Otto Backman got the emigration certificate for Africa 9.9.1895 (three weeks after his weddings) and immigrated Transvaal in the same year. He worked as a miner and joined the Scandinavian volunteer corps in 1899, participated the siege of Mafeking and was badly wounded in the battle of Magersfontein 11.12.1899. Backman was taken war prisoner by the British together with the ambulance 18.2.1900. Because badly wounded he was not sent to any prisoner camp but was allowed to stay in Cape Town as a war prisoner.

Otto Backman died of tuberculosis in South Africa 14.2.1907.

Simon Mattsson Backman carpenter

Born 20.3.1853 at Tuckur, Vöyri

Parents: Matts Simonsson Jåfs and Greta Lovisa Johansdotter Häggblom.

Married with Anna Michelsdotter Finne, born 1855, died 1925.

Children: Michel, born 25.8.1881, died 22.9.1917, Edla Maria, born 10.4.1885, died 24.6.1921, Anna Lovisa, born 23.3.1888.

Simon Backman immigrated Transvaal in 1895 and worked at Transvaal gold mines. He joined the Scandinavian volunteer corps 9.1.1900 and was probably wounded in the battle of Paardeberg in February. Backman was taken war prisoner by the British at Paardeberg 27.2.1900 and was sent to St. Helena. After releasing in 1902 Backman stayed on St. Helena as a carpenter according to his contract with Eastern Telegraph Company. He returned Finland in 1903 and lived at Kovjoki village in Vöyri. Backman was probably the oldest member in the Scandinavian corps.

Simon Backman died at Munsala 9.4.1928.

There is an article about Backman published in "Svenska Skyddskåristen" 10.1.1925.

Isak Vilhelm Eriksson England carpenter

Born 5.11.1872 at Oravainen

Parents: farmer Erik Eriksson England and Maja Carlsdotter Bergman.

Isak Eriksson had served six month's military service in Finland. He got the passport for Africa 28.11.1895 and immigrated Transvaal in the same year. He worked as a miner and joined the Scandinavian volunteer corps 9.1.1900. He was taken war prisoner by the British at Paardeberg 27.2.1900 and was sent to St. Helena. After releasing in 1902 Eriksson stayed on St. Helena as a carpenter according to his contract with Eastern Telegraph Company. Isak Eriksson died on St. Helena 5.5.1903.

Erik A. Eskilsson

Erik Eskilsson has participated the Boer War as a Finn and there are no more facts about him

Matts Henrik Simonsson Hägglöf

Born 5.2.1874 at Oravainen

Parents: Simon Simonsson Kyhr (later Hägglöf) and Lisa Greta Johansdotter Knuters.

Married 1.4.1894 with Maria Lovisa Nilsdotter, born 1870.

Child Henrik Arvid, born 20.4.1895.

Henrik Hägglöf moved in 1895 from Oravainen to his wife's locality Munsala. In the same year he got the passport for America and travelled either via America or directly to Africa and worked as a miner in Transvaal. Hägglöf joined the Scandinavian volunteer corps in 1899 and participated the siege of Mafeking. He acted as an explosives expert among others at Modder River when the railway line was mined. Hägglöf was badly wounded in the battle of Magersfontein 11.12.1899 and was taken war prisoner by the British.

Henrik Hägglöf died from his wounds in the British military hospital at Orange River 13.12.1899.

Erik Johansson

There is in various sources the mention that Erik Johansson was from Kristiinankaupunki but he is not, however, found in the parish's books. It is possible that he came from some neighbour locality.

Johansson worked at Transvaal gold mines and joined the Scandinavian volunteer corps in 1899. He participated the siege of Mafeking and the battle of Magersfontein 11.12.1899. He was taken war prisoner by the British at Paardeberg 27.2.1900 and was sent to St. Helena. After releasing in 1902 Johansson travelled to the United States. His later years are unknown.

Herman Johansson sailor

Born 20.12.1869 at Pännäinen, Pietarsaaren mlk.

Parents: farmer Johan Johansson and his wife Maja Greta.

Herman Johansson had gone to sea in 1883 after which there are no sign about him in the records of his parish. He has landed in South Africa and worked at Transvaal gold mines. Johansson joined the Scandinavian volunteer corps in 1899, participated the siege of Mafeking and the battle of Magersfontein 11.12.1899. He was taken war prisoner by the British at Paardeberg 27.2.1900 and was sent to St. Helena. After releasing Johansson travelled to the United States in 1902.

His later years are unknown.

Johan Jakob Johansson Gästgivars or Spåra

Born 23.8.1875 at Monå, Munsala

Parents: Johan Johansson and Lovisa Jakobsdotter.

Johan Johansson immigrated Africa propably in the middle of the 1890's. He worked at Transvaal gold mines and joined the Scandinavian volunteer corps in 1899. He participated the siege of Mafeking and was wounded there in an attack 25.10.1899. Despite of his bad wounds Johansson followed the Scandinavians but hardly participated fighting. He was taken war prisoner by the British at Paardeberg 27.2.1900 and was sent to St. Helena. Johansson died on St. Helena 11.9.1900 officially of a tumour in his neck but it is also claimed that he died from the wounds from Mafeking.

Matts Anders Gustav Knuts or Matts Gustavsson

Born 1.9.1877 at Jepua

Parents: farmer Gustav Gustavsson Knuts and Sanna Lisa Mattsdotter.

Married 18.4.1896 with Alina Isaksdotter Björkman, born 1875.

Children: Signe Elisabet, born 2.11.1896, died 7.10.1902, Karl Åke Rolf, born 14.10.1904. Matts Gustavsson got the passport for Africa 17.8.1896 and immigrated Transvaal in the same year. He worked as a miner and joined the Scandinavian volunteer corps in 1899, participated the siege of Mafeking and the battle of Magersfontein 11.12.1899. He was taken war prisoner by the British at Paardeberg 27.2.1900 and was sent to St.Helena. After releasing in 1902 he returned Finland in April 1903.

Matts Gustavsson died of tuberculosis at Jepua 4.11.1907. Matts Gustavsson's notes are used in the book "Boerer och engelsmän" in 1910.

Kustaa Korhonen

It is told that Korhonen was from the county of Savo but some sources claim that his home locality was Helsinki.

Korhonen worked at Transvaal gold mines, joined the Scandinavian volunteer corps in 1899, participated the siege of Mafeking and the battle of Magersfontein 11.12.1899. He was taken war prisoner by the British at Paardeberg 27.2.1900 and was sent to St. Helena. After releasing in 1902 Korhonen travelled to the United States. His later years are unknown.

Ernst Evert Lindberg decorator

Born 3.1.1864 in Helsinki

Parents: engine driver Anders Vilhelm Lindberg and Maria Sofia Lindfors.

Lindberg had wife and at least one daughter but the names are unknown.

Ernst Lindberg moved with the family to Viipuri in 1875 and worked in Viipuri and Helsinki as a decorator, mechanic and book-binder. He immigrated New York, the United States in 1892 and worked there still as a decorator. After some years he travelled with his family to South Africa. He lived in Johannesburg as a decorator, later as a miner. Lindberg joined the Scandinavian volunteer corps in 1899 and belonged to the Scandinavian ambulance unit with which he participated the siege of Mafeking and the battle of Magersfontein 11.12.1899. He was lightly wounded in the battle of Paardeberg and was taken war prisoner by the British at Paardeberg 27.2.1900 and sent to St. Helena. After releasing in 1902 Lindberg travelled to Finland where wrote the book "Suomalaisen seikkailuja buurisodassa ja muistoja vankeudesta St. Helenan saarella". Lindberg returned to South Africa to his family in 1903 and went to work to gold mines again.

There are no facts about Lindberg's later years.

Arthur Lindqvist

Lindqvist has participated the Boer War as a Finn and there are no more facts about him.

Matts Emil Mattsson

Born 9.5.1875 at Forsby Bro, Uusikaarlepyy

Parents: farmer Matts Mattsson and Anna Maja Jakobsdotter.

About Emil Mattsson it is known only that he immigrated South Africa in the 1890's and worked as a miner in Transvaal where joined the Scandinavian volunteer corps in 1899. He participated the siege of Mafeking.

Emil Mattsson was killed in the battle of Magersfontein 11.12.1899 and his body was badly mutilated.

Matti Mattsson farmer

Matti Mattsson was born at Kalajoki but the date of birth, parents and family are unknown. Mattsson immigrated the United States with his family to the end of the 1880's or in the beginning of the 1890's. He bought a farm but before long he handed his farm over to his family and travelled to Africa. He worked as a miner in Johannesburg. Matti Mattsson joined the Scandinavian volunteer corps in 1899 and served as a cook. He participated the siege of Mafeking and the battle of Magersfontein 11.12.1899. He was taken war prisoner by the British at Paardeberg 27.2.1900 and was sent to St. Helena. After releasing in 1902 he returned to the United States where probably lived the rest of his life. The death date is unknown.

Matti Mattsson was known among the Scandinavians as a peculiar personality who could use both ladle and rifle very well.

Johan Mickelsson

Born 1865 at Bertby, Vöyri

Johan Mickelsson immigrated Transvaal already at the age about 15 in the beginning of the 1880's. Before the war he worked at Transvaal gold mines. He joined the Scandinavian volunteer corps in 1899, participated the siege of Mafeking and the battle of Magersfontein 11.12.1899 when he was taken war prisoner by the British and was sent to St. Helena. After releasing in 1902 Mickelsson travelled to the United States. His later years are unknown.

Matts Nelson

Matts Nelson was from Munsala but the name is very common so that the person has not been able to identify.

Nelson is mentioned as a member in the Scandinavian volunteer corps already in 1899 but there are no facts about his participation in the battles. Probably he has been in Mafeking, Magersfontein and Paardeberg. Nelson was not, however, as a war prisoner on St. Helena.

Johan Jakobsson Nyman

Born 28.4.1877 at Vöyri.

Parents: innkeeper Jakob Johansson Träsk and Anna Lisa Johansdotter.

Married 20.2.1904 with Aina Maria Johansson.

Johan Nyman moved in 1883 with his parents to Oravainen (Kullas gästgifveri). He left for Africa (perhaps via America) in 1896 and worked at Transvaal gold mines. Nyman joined the Scandinavian volunteer corps 9.1.1900. He was taken war prisoner by the British at Paardeberg 27.2.1900 and was sent to St. Helena. Nyman probably lightly wounded in the battle of Paardeberg. After releasing in 1902 he travelled to the United States where married with Aina Johansson from Munsala, Finland. The last fact about Nyman in his parish's records is that he lived in America in 1913.

Peter Peterson (also Petersen)

Peter Peterson is mentioned as a Finnish member in Boer commandos. He has been taken war prisoner by the British in 1900 and he has probably sent to Ceylon. There are no other facts about him.

Johannes Rank

Born 11.4.1875 at Munsala

Parents: Johan Andersson Rank and Anna Sanna Andersdotter.

Johannes Rank got the passport for America 2.9.1893. He probably travelled from America

to Africa in the middle of the 1890's and worked at Transvaal gold mines. Rank joined the Scandinavian volunteer corps in 1899 and participated the siege of Mafeking. He took part also the battle of Magersfontein 11.12.1899 and was one of those few who escaped the outpost nearly unwounded. Johannes Rank was elected a sergeant of the Scandinavian corps after Johan Viklund had resigned the post. Rank was taken war prisoner by the British at Paardeberg 27.2.1900 and was sent to St. Helena. After releasing in 1902 Rank travelled to the United States.

Johannes Rank died in the United States 19.6.1917.

Johan Anders Karlsson Schultz

Born 7.3.1870 at Rimal by, Sulva

Parents: farmer Karl Anders Larsson Schultz and Maja Beata Johansdotter.

Married 26.11.1893 with Maria Sofia Eriksdotter Smeds, born 1873 at Sulva, proclaimed dead 1.11.1975.

Children: Irene Emilia, born 1894, died 1895, John Einar, born 1896, died 1897, Jenny Maria, born 1897.

Johan Schultz immigrated the United States in the beginning of the 1890's and he married in America. He lived in New York and Green Point. The family returned Finland in 1897 and Johan Schultz travelled to Africa in 1898. He worked at Transvaal gold mines and joined the Scandinavian volunteer corps 9.1.1900. He was taken war prisoner by the British at Paardeberg 27.2.1900 and was sent to St. Helena. After releasing in 1902 Schultz travelled to the United States where also his family lived again.

Johan Schultz died in the United States 26.12.1906.

Johan Simons

Johan Simons was from Oravainen and he is mentioned as a Finnish participant in the Boer War. After the war Simons lived in the United States. There are no more facts about him.

A.W. Stenberg

Stenberg is mentioned as a Finnish member of some Boer commando. He was taken war prisoner by the British in 1900 and propably sent to Ceylon. There are no more facts about him.

Karl Anders Stenroos sailor

Born 5.8.1871 at Klemetsby, Lumparland

Parents: farmer Matts Stenroos and Maja Lisa Michelsdotter.

Karl Stenroos immigrated Transvaal in 1891 and worked at gold mines. He joined the Scandinavian volunteer corps in January 1900. He was taken war prisoner by the British at Paardeberg 27.2.1900 and was sent to St. Helena. After releasing in 1902 he travelled to the United States. His later years are unknown.

Karl Stenroos was proclaimed dead by the court of Åland 27.4.1971.

G. Sundblom

Sundblom has got the full Burgher rights 24.10.1899. He has propably been a member of some Boer commando since that date. It is said that his home locality was Oulu but there are no mention about him in the parish's books and there are no more facts about him elsewhere.

Frans Werner Widbom sailor

Born 18.1.1869 at Kristiinankaupunki

Parents: mother sailor's widow Sofia Karolina Widbom, father unknown.

Werner Widbom sailed several years in merchant ships until he landed in South Africa to the end of the 1890's. He joined some Boer commando during the South African War and participated battles in various places. Widbom was taken war prisoner by the British in 1900 and was probably sent to Ceylon. After releasing he went again to seas.

Werner Widbom died in Vancouver 7.11.1920.

Anders Nils Viklund

Anders Viklund was from Munsala and he is mentioned as a Finnish participant in the Boer War. There are no more facts about him.

Johan Nils (Niklas) Viklund blacksmith

Born 13.11.1867 at Vexala, Munsala

Parents: Nils Nilsson Viklund and Anna Jakobsdotter Storsvart.

Johan Viklund immigrated Transvaal in 1894. He worked five years at Transvaal gold mines as a miner. Viklund joined the Scandinavian volunteer corps in 1899 and was elected the sergeant for the Finns but resigned the post after some weeks. He participated the siege of Mafeking and acted as an explosives expert among others at Modder River when the railway line was mined. Viklund was badly wounded in the battle of Magersfontein 11.12.1899 and was taken war prisoner by the British together with the ambulance 18.2.1900 and was sent to St. Helena. After releasing Viklund returned Finland in December 1902. He lived near Uusikaarlepyy until 1910 when he moved to Kokkola where he worked as a blacksmith. He moved again to Africa some years later and he became a miner.

Johan Viklund died of tuberculosis in South Africa 28.7.1917.

Johan Viklund's stories are used in the book "Boerer och engelsmän" in 1910.

SUOMALAISSOTURIT BUURISODASSA

Etelä-Afrikassa työskennelleet skandinaavit perustivat työttömyyden ja sodanuhan varjostamissa oloissa vuonna 1899 itselleen järjestön "Skandinaviska organisation" johtajanaan ruotsalainen Christer Ugglä. Sodan sytyttyä 11.10.1899 päättivät buureille myönteelliset yhdistyksen jäsenet muodostaa buurien puolella taistelevan skandinaavisen vapaaehtoisosaston.

Vapaaehtoisosastoon liittyi aluksi noin 65 miestä eri pohjoismaista. Suomalaisia lienee ollut alunperin 13, jotka lähes kaikki olivat kotoisin Pohjanmaalta. Kapteenikseen skandinaavit valitsivat Natalissa syntyneen ruotsalaisen Johannes Flygaren.

Skandinaavit lähtivät rintamalle lokakuun puolivälissä määränpäänsä Mafeking, jossa buurit piirittivät brittiläistä varuskuntaa. Mafekingissa pohjoismaalaiset kohtasivat myös ensimmäisen tappionsa suomalaisen Johan Jakob Johansonin haavoituttua 25.10. Hänet otettiin hoidettavaksi skandinaavien organisoimaan ambulanssiin.

Marraskuun 20. päivänä skandinaavit saivat määräyksen lähteä kohti Kimberleyn kaupunkia, sillä lordi Methuenin johtama brittiarmeija oli etelästä lähestymässä kaupunkia. Taistelu brittien ja buurien välillä käytiin 11.12.1899 Magersfonteinissa, Kimberleystä etelään. Skandinaavien 52-miehinen etuvario taisteli siellä erityisen urhoollisesti menettäen kaatuneina, haavoittuneina ja vankeina yhteensä 48 miestä. Suomalaisia kaatui kaksi (Henrik Hägglöf ja Emil Mattsson), haavoittui kaksi (Otto Backman ja Johan Viklund) ja jäi vangiksi yksi (Johan Mickelsson).

Vaikka buurit voittivat Magersfonteinin taistelun, oli heidän helmikuussa 1900 peräännyttävä Magersfonteinista. He joutuivat uuteen taisteluun brittien kanssa Paardebergissa, jossa koko buuriarmeijan, mukana skandinaavit, oli antauduttava 27.2.1900. Lähes kaikki suomalaiset sotavangit kuljetettiin St. Helenalle, josta heidät vapautettiin sodan päätyttyä 1902.

Johannesburgissa oli buurisodan syttyessä ollut 50–60 suomalaista. Näistä liittyi vapaaehtoisjoukkoon sen eri vaiheissa 20 miestä. Etelä-Afrikan muilla paikkakunnilla asuneet harvalukuiset suomalaiset liittyivät buurijoukko-osastoihin, ja muutamia taisteli myös brittien puolella.

The Scandinavian corps in Pretoria before leaving for the front in October, 1899.

Scandinaaveja matkalla rintamalle Lokakuussa 1899 Pretoriassa.

