

Boer War records show 86 were struck by lightning

Getting struck by lightning was a real hazard for British soldiers in the Second Boer War, according to military records put online for the first time.

By Stephen Adams

Published: 12:01AM BST 24 Jun 2010

On one occasion two soldiers were killed within moments of each other, when lightning struck their base in the appropriately-named Stormberg in an area known as the Cape Midlands. Photo: AP

During the late Victorian conflict 86 men were killed or injured by lightning while serving in southern Africa, the records published online today by genealogy website Ancestry.co.uk show.

On one occasion two soldiers were killed within moments of each other, when lightning struck their base in the appropriately-named Stormberg in an area known as the Cape Midlands.

They are included in a collection detailing 55,000 British and colonial soldiers who were killed, wounded, captured or died of disease during the conflict, which lasted from 1899 to 1902.

Of those, more than 22,000 died. Despite the risk posed by the Boer troops in the battle for land and gold in the disputed colonies, the most common cause of death was disease, with dysentery, typhoid fever and intestinal infections accounting for some 12,000 deaths.

One unlucky soldier met a more savage end: he was eaten by a crocodile in the Usutu River in what is now Swaziland.

Dan Jones comments: "These records are a stark reminder of the atrocities of a conflict that is often eclipsed by wars that took place closer to home. They detail a dark and regrettable period of history, but one that should never be forgotten.

Dan Jones, from Ancestry.co.uk, said: "These records will be of great significance to anyone trying to find out more about an ancestor or soldier who fought in the Second Boer War, particularly as British soldiers who fought in the conflict won't appear in the 1901 England and Wales Census because they were fighting in South Africa."