

A tale of two graves: A biography of Lance Corporal Wijnand “Victor” Hamman, 1893-1917¹

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Abstract

The biography of Lance-Corporal Wijnand “Vic” Hamman is quite unique in comparison to the stories of his peers who fought with him in the trenches during the First World War (1914-1918). This statement rests on the fact that he has two full-size graves but only rests in one of them. His remains were buried in the Browne Copse Commonwealth cemetery, outside Fampoux in France, but he has another grave in his hometown of Lichtenburg in the North-west Province, South Africa. This unique attribute inspired a research study to find out more about who he was and why he indeed has two graves after he fell in battle on the 12th of April 1917. His biography could however only be based on the limited amount of sources available about him and hence not every aspect about his life could be certified with a reliable source; resulting in several possibilities being considered to write his biography. Yet, enough was available to write the story of a young man from Lichtenburg who joined the 2nd South African Infantry Regiment to fight against the German Kaiser’s forces in France. His graves serve as reminders about the mysteries regarding his life, his family and why he was not commemorated by the community of his hometown.

Keywords: World War I; Lichtenburg; Wijnand Hamman; Western Front; Commemoration; Grave.

Introduction

The South African Parliament faced a difficult task when they had to decide if the country would support Great Britain in her latest conflict on the European continent. This time the enemy was the German Empire. General Louis Botha, the Prime Minister of South Africa, did not have any personal vendetta against Emperor Wilhelm II but had an agreement with Great Britain. This agreement to serve the British Empire during any time of war was cemented within the South African Act of 1909, which stipulated clearly that South Africa would come to Great Britain’s assistance whenever Westminster

¹ This article is dedicated to my colleague Prof Bernard Mbenga in gratitude for what he has taught me the past five years at NWU Mahikeng.

called upon Pretoria to do so. Great Britain's proclamation of support towards the Serbian Kingdom brought a new issue into the chambers of South Africa's parliament. Within the corridors of the Parliament building, speculation was rife, and the possibility of utilising the global crises for the betterment of their ideals of Republicanism was being considered by the former veterans of the South African War of 1899-1902.²

Speculation over South African participation in Great Britain's latest war was not confined to the parliament alone and soon spilled over into the public spaces of the Union of South Africa. In the small western Transvaal (modern-day North West Province) town of Lichtenburg, the local taverns and co-operative shops were focussed on the dilemma the country was facing. The town was the seat of the local Senator, General Jacobus Herculaas (Koos) De la Rey, a man who became famous for his military skills in guerrilla warfare during the South African War of 1899-1902. De la Rey was an icon of the Republican-minded Afrikaner and it is possible to believe that he would have supported a complete overhaul of the South African political system to include the lost Boer Republics, when the opportunity presented itself.³ It is still a mystery as to why precisely General De la Rey spoke with General Louis Botha during a recess after a heated debate in parliament on the 14th of September 1914 regarding South Africa's participation in the escalating global conflict centred in Europe. De la Rey did, however, leave Cape Town immediately after the discussion and travelled to Johannesburg by train. The next day he met the former Chief of Staff of the Union Defence Force, General Christiaan Beyers. Pretorius masterfully explains the last moments of De la Rey in Beyers' grey Daimler motorcar as the men were chauffeured through the streets of Johannesburg on the 15th of September 1914.⁴ Unknown to them, the Union Police were deployed to search for and capture the notorious criminal couple, William and Peggy Foster. The best possible tactic the Union Police could use, it seems, was to deploy platoons of policemen at road blocks along the main roads leading into Johannesburg. One of these roadblocks was situated in Langlaagte, with a certain Constable Charles Drury on duty. It was there where De la Rey was killed when Drury discharged his weapon. Pretorius argues that the constable lost his temper at the passing car, with Beyers and De la Rey as passengers, and the ricochet bullet hit the lower back of De la Rey. The general from Lichtenburg died in the arms of his former Boer comrade.⁵

2 B Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme: South Africa in the Great War 1914-1918* (Johannesburg, Penguin Books, 2007), pp. 12-13.

3 B Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme...*, pp. 69, 73.

4 F Pretorius, *De la Rey: Die leeu van die Wes-Transvaal* (Protea Bookhouse, 2007), p. 73.

5 F Pretorius, *De la Rey...*, p. 74.

The local folk in Lichtenburg would not have known the General's intentions but they arguably felt the sorrow of his passing more than any other community in South Africa. With the killing of their local icon and hero, scapegoats were sought, and conspiracy theories formulated on how the Botha government was indeed responsible for his "accidental" death.⁶ To make matters worse, the premonition about De la Rey's death from a respected soothsayer, Siener van Rensburg, was made known to the local communities.⁷ On the 22nd of September 1914, De la Rey's funeral was held in the Dutch Reform Church in Lichtenburg known as the "Ou Klipkerk".⁸ The arrival of hundreds of mourners into the town, including a great number of Bittereinders who wanted to pay homage to their former chief, forced the organisers to make use of the empty lots in front of the church and hold separate funeral services with the help of two additional Dutch Reform ministers.⁹ Among the mourners in the church were the next of kin and selected very important figures, including the Prime Minister and his deputy (General Jan Smuts).¹⁰ Outside, the emotions of the mourning populace were hard to control. Pretorius states that the crowds had to be calmed down by other high-ranking men, such as Generals Christiaan Beyers and Jan Kemp, to avoid anyone physically assaulting the Prime Minister and his deputy.¹¹ Most likely, among the mourners, who had moved onto the church square outside, was the Hamman family of Lichtenburg, which the paper now turns to.

Johannes Jacobus, the 13th child of Johannes Nicolaas Hamman (considered to be the founding father of the Hammans in South Africa), would have been with his second wife, Johanna Jacomina (née van Zyl).¹² It is possible that their youngest son, Wijnand, would have also been present. By that time the young Wijnand, a trained soldier of the South African army, would have been 21 years old, but after his discharge from the Transvaal Scottish Regiment, he began working for the South African Railways.¹³ Experiencing death would not have been new for the Hamman family. They had lived through the South African War of 1899-1902, with Johannes Jacobus undoubtedly serving

6 J de Beer, *Weerlig in die weste: 'n Geskiedenis van Lichtenburg* (Johannesburg, Perskor, 1973), pp. 17-18.

7 F Pretorius, *De la Rey...*

8 Translation: Old Stone Church.

9 The term *Bittereinder* refers to the Boer Guerrilla fighters who did not surrender or who were not caught during the South African War 1899-1902. General De la Rey was in command of a Bittereinder Commando during this war.

10 J de Beer, *Weerlig in die weste...*, pp. 9-18.

11 F Pretorius, *De la Rey...*

12 M Smith (Personal Collection), Hamman Family Genealogy list, 2014.

13 Department of Defence Documentation Centre (DOD Archives), Personal Files, World War 1 Service, File: 5989 Vic Hamman Attestation Form, 16 September 1915.

under General De la Rey and Field Cornet JH Hamman in the Lichtenburg Commando.¹⁴ The Hamman family were not spared the brunt of the war, considering the loss of kin during combat – specifically a cousin of Wijnand Hamman, at the Battle of the Modder River (28th of November 1899).¹⁵ At the outbreak of the war in 1899, Wijnand was only six years old. Born in the former South African Republic (ZAR) in 1893, Wijnand was the last of thirteen children fathered by Johannes Jacobus Hamman, and the sixth from his second marriage to Johanna Jacomina Hamman. Growing up in a house with twelve siblings, with an age difference of 26 years between him and his oldest half-brother (Johannes Nicolaas Hamman Jr.), certainly meant that Wijnand had several influences from different authority figures during his formative years. In addition, he would have often interacted with his uncle, Eduard Christiaan Hamman, a member of President Paul Kruger's third Volksraad.¹⁶ The pressure to achieve must have been a reality for the young Wijnand, not only to showcase his masculinity with eight older brothers but also to prove that he was indeed of the same stock as his better-known uncle.

The outbreak of the First World War (1914-1918) was the pretext for Wijnand Hamman's descent to obscurity. With his story largely unknown even today, the mystery surrounding him is the vehicle to his remembrance. This mystery is connected to the oddity of Wijnand Hamman's two full-length graves – one in the Browne Copse Commonwealth Cemetery outside the town of Fampoux in France and another in his home town of Lichtenburg.¹⁷ Usually, First World War fallen soldiers have a grave near, or on, the battlefield on which they were killed, with their names upon another additional monument or plaque commemorating their death in their home town or regimental headquarters. If there was no body of a missing Triple Entente soldier found, their name would be added to Commonwealth monuments such as the Menin Gate in Ypres, Belgium.¹⁸ However, none of the foregoing is true about Wijnand Hamman.

Names of fallen South African soldiers would usually appear somewhere in South Africa, for example, on plaques at their respective regimental headquarters, at Memorable Order of Tin Hats (MOTH) shell holes or on

14 AD Bosman, *Lichtenburg 1865-1985* (Lichtenburg, Lichtenburg Drukkery, 1986), p. 194.

15 M Smith (Personal Collection), Hamman Family Genealogy list, 2014.

16 AD Bosman, *Lichtenburg 1865-1985*, p. 51.

17 Commonwealth Graves Commission, "Find-War-Dead: V Hamman 5989" (available at <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/567744/HAMMAN,%20V>, as accessed on 31 May 2017).

18 "Menin Gate" (available at [http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/91800/YPRES%20\(MENIN%20GATE\)%20MEMORIAL](http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/91800/YPRES%20(MENIN%20GATE)%20MEMORIAL), as accessed on 31 May 2017).

monuments in their home towns. The possibility of having another empty grave would have been considered ludicrous. The British Commonwealth Graves Commission was more than willing to send to the fallen soldier's family a copy of the register of the specific cemetery in which he was buried; however, the erection of a headstone, or the purchase of another full-length grave in the soldier's hometown without any remains to bury in it, was not warranted.¹⁹ Yet, that is exactly the case with Wijnand Hamman.

The major objective of this article is to give a narrative about the life and death of Wijnand Hamman. Wijnand was an enigma. He abruptly created a new identity for himself within the trenches at the Western Front and, therefore, he would be remembered differently, under two different names in two different places, France and in Lichtenburg. Due to his decision to change his first name to Victor, shortened to Vic for his friends, a biographical study of Hamman should follow the name used during the different periods of his life. In other words, because there are two different graves for Hamman, there are two different sides to him; there is Wijnand, known as Ms Hamman's youngest son, and then there is Vic Hamman, the South African soldier in the Western Front trenches who would be slain by German firepower.

It is easy to imagine that the death of this single fallen soldier from Lichtenburg could have been readily and regularly commemorated in his hometown, and become part of the general history of Lichtenburg. This is, however, not the case. Before the start of this research study, the name Wijnand 'Vic' Hamman was unknown to the community of Lichtenburg, unlike that of another soldier from Lichtenburg being, General Koos De la Rey.²⁰ Whereas British cities and towns have many fallen soldiers to commemorate, and did so during the past centenary of the First World War, Lichtenburg had only five First World War veterans to add to the total tally of volunteering soldiers.²¹ Only one of them was an Afrikaner, Wijnand Hamman, and the only one who did not survive the war. Yet, Wijnand Hamman sacrificed a great deal to sign up for service at the Western Front, considering the political tensions within his hometown. The second objective of this paper is to indicate the limited amount of

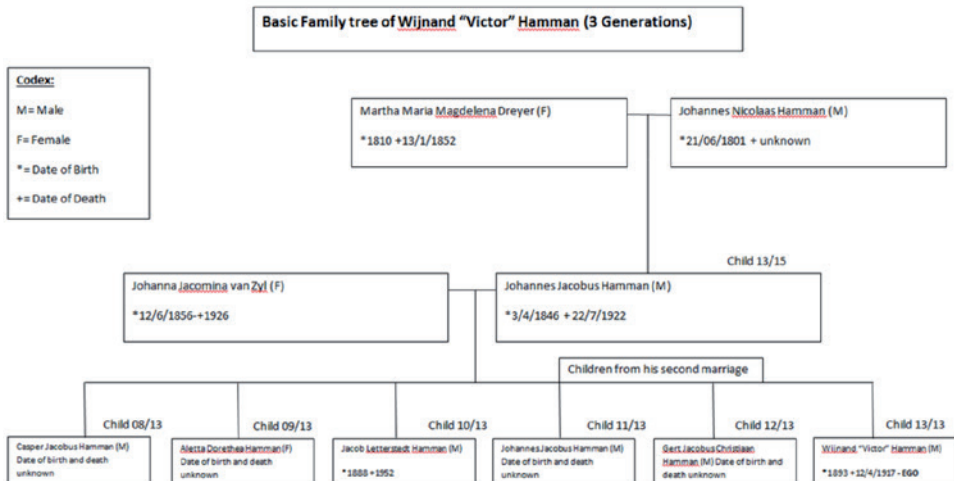
19 Department of Defence Documentation Centre (DOD Archives), Personal Files, World War 1 Service, File: 5989 Vic Hamman Attestation Form, 16 September 1915; Imperial War Graves: The War Graves of the British Empire Cemetery Registers.

20 This is based on the researcher's attempts to obtain information from the local community about Wijnand 'Vic' Hamman through the local newspaper, *Die Noord-Wester* and the local radio station, Lichvaal Stereo 92.6FM. None of the articles published with the former or the programs broadcast on the latter delivered any information about any family that still remembered Wijnand Hamman.

21 AD Bosman, *Lichtenburg 1865- 1985...*, pp. 60- 61.

documentation and public memorials available for the reconstruction of Wijnand "Vic" Hamman's biography. The lack of primary sources was not the only obstacle that had to be overcome in the pursuit of unlocking the riddles of his life. Yet, the researcher had the good fortune of tracing the closest living relative of Wijnand Hamman. Information from her personal collection was extremely helpful in creating the basic family tree of Wijnand Hamman (see Image 1). Only then did it become clear that Wijnand's kin includes three well-known South Africans who have made great strides in South Africa's film and music industries, and in academia. Wijnand Hamman's life is equally as interesting as theirs and, with him being a mutual relative; they are all indirectly connected to the First World War through his service and death.

Image 1: Basic family tree of Wijnand 'Vic' Hamman



Source: M Smith (Personal Collection), Hamman Family Genealogy list (2014).

Early life and signing up for war

The precise day of Wijnand Hamman's birth is not known. It stands unrecorded on either of his two gravestones and it was not found within his official personnel file located in the South African National Defence Force's Documentation Centre in Pretoria. According to the genealogical record of the Hamman family, Wijnand was born in 1893. The place of his birth is not known but it was either in Lichtenburg or in the neighbouring town of Zeerust.

This assumption is based on the fact that Wijnand's father, Johannes Jacobus (known as Jan) Hamman, married his second wife Johanna Jacomina van Zyl (henceforth Johanna) in Zeerust sometime after 1880.²² Jan Hamman's first wife, Magdalena Catharina Kepler Muntingh, died on the 15th of October 1880 at the age of 35. By then they had seven children together. Wijnand's closest elder brothers were Gert Jacobus Christiaan and Johannes Jacobus Jr. Another brother was the second-youngest son from Jan and Johanna Hamman's marriage, Jacob Letterstedt, who was born in Lichtenburg on the 2nd of August 1888. Jacob Letterstedt was thus five years older than Wijnand and therefore both Gert Jacobus Christiaan and Johannes Jacobus Jr had to have been born within those five years. Jan and Johanna Hamman's house was therefore filled with children during the early 1890s. It is, however, not clear what the relationship was like between Johanna's children and the seven children that were fathered by Jan Hamman during his first marriage. The reality of being the youngest child receiving instructions and advice from several masculine influences must have made Wijnand a true Benjamin-like figure in his house and this reality continuously reminded everyone who knew the Hamman family of his status as the youngest Hamman lad. It is, however, clear that Wijnand meant something special to Johanna Hamman. This inference is based on the fact that she was fully responsible for the erection of his headstone in the Lichtenburg cemetery and for acquiring a full-length grave in his honour after he fell in battle. She made it known to all and sundry that she was responsible for this posthumous loving act of commemorating and honouring of her youngest son, by her decision to add her name to the headstone as well (see Images 2 and 3):

Image 2: Johanna and Wijnand Hamman's graves. Johanna's gravestone is the large black slab erected next to the smaller duo-rectangular gravestone of Wijnand's empty grave



Source: In the old Lichtenburg cemetery (Author's Personal Collection), 31 May 2016.

²² M Smith (Personal Collection), Hamman Family Genealogy list, 2014.

Johanna and Wijnand probably went through devastating periods together, which further strengthened their bond as mother and son. With the outbreak of the South African War of 1899-1902, the ZAR had to battle an invading British Imperial force considered the strongest military power on the globe.²³ The ZAR was not given the same accolade; nonetheless, 55 000-60 000 able fighting men from every town had to saddle up and prepare for war.²⁴ As stated above, Jan Hamman undoubtedly had to serve in the Lichtenburg Commando and was, therefore, under the command of General Koos De la Rey. De la Rey's commando was ordered to begin the war by derailing a military train at Kraaipan (pan of crows) in the northern Cape Colony (today part of the North West Province), about 73 kilometres southwest of Mafikeng. Jan Hamman was probably present at the attack on Kraaipan and would have heard the first shot fired by Johannes Coetzee.²⁵ Jan Hamman was fortunate enough to survive the war.

Johanna Hamman and her children were most probably transported to the Mafeking concentration camp; if so, they were fortunate to have survived that ordeal.²⁶ This war undoubtedly made an imprint on the mind of young Wijnand. The brunt of the war would create in the young Wijnand not only an awareness of a military ethos, but also the different military cultures emanating from the different Commandos and British regiments. At the end of the war on the 31st of May 1902, young Wijnand was nine years old. The level of his education is not known, but it is possible that he received some schooling (from his mother, the local religious minister or even at a concentration camp school). Whether he continued with his schooling after the war is left to the imagination, but it is certain that he started his military training as soon as the opportunity came along. Wijnand was probably among the 11 250 lads that received cadet training by 1908.²⁷ His opportunity to start a career in the military only became possible in 1912. By then Wijnand was

23 ZAR is the abbreviation for the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (also known as the Transvaal) that existed officially from 1852-1900 (except for the period 1877-1881 during the annexation period under the British Empire).

24 TJ Stapleton, *A military history of South Africa*..., p. 89.

25 F Pretorius, *De la Rey*..., p. 18.

26 AD Bosman, *Lichtenburg 1865- 1985*, p. 44. No information on Johanna Hamman and her children's removal to the nearest concentration camps, which would have been at Mafeking (Mahikeng). If she was not removed, then she would have been witness to the fearful nights of supposed raids from the local black communities, the Battle of Lichtenburg in March of 1901 and, obviously, the entire period of British occupation of the town. Without the necessary evidence, it is hard to undoubtedly state where she and Wijnand were. For more information on the conditions in the Mafeking Concentration Camps please see: SY van der Walt, *Stress and disease in Mafeking during the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902): An analysis of skeletal remains* (MSc, University of Pretoria, 2013), pp. 3-5.

27 TJ Stapleton, *A military history of South Africa*..., p. 114.

19 years old and the new Union Defence Act of 1912 clearly stated that young men of Wijnand's age had to serve in the Union Defence Force (UDF) for a specific amount of time before they went on to other ventures. This same act stated that young white men could fulfil this obligation by enlisting into the local Commando or Rifle Association.²⁸ Wijnand Hamman had the option of joining the local Lichtenburg Commando or the local Rifle Association. He joined neither. Instead, he joined the Transvaal Scottish Regiment (TS) situated in Johannesburg.

Image 3: Wijnand (spelled as Wynand) Hamman's gravestone at his Lichtenburg grave



Source: Author's personal collection, 31 May 2016.

The Transvaal Scottish Regiment, known simply as the Jocks, was, and still is today, an infantry unit. It started, like several other Rand-based volunteer units, after the South African War for the benefit of former enlisted men to continue to serve British defence requirements.²⁹ Through the influence of the different Caledonian societies and especially the Marquis of Tullarbadine, the heir apparent to the Dukedom of Atholl, the Transvaal Scottish Volunteer Regiment was established through Government Notice No. 688 of 1902. This

²⁸ TJ Stapleton, *A military history of South Africa...*, p. 115.

²⁹ The Transvaal Scottish Regiment was first known as the Transvaal Scottish Volunteer Regiment. However, for the sake of connecting Hamman's story with the present-day infantry regiment the present name is used in this article.

notice was proclaimed only after both Lord Milner and General Kitchener agreed to the prospect of volunteer units.³⁰

The Marquis was not to be the Commanding Officer, due to his short stay in Johannesburg, but his tartan was chosen to be the official dress of the TS.³¹ The main job of this newly constituted regiment was to keep the peace in Johannesburg and continue to be of service to the Transvaal Colonial government, for the protection of British interests in their newly acquired colony. Even when the Transvaal received responsible self-government status, the Transvaal Scottish Regiment would be at the disposal of the Transvaal Prime Minister, General Louis Botha, who would agree to deploy the Transvaal Scottish Regiment to the Natal Colony to defeat the Zondi chief, Bambatha, during his rebellion in 1906.³² With the unification of South Africa in 1910 and the formation of the Union Defence Force in 1912, the Transvaal Scottish Volunteer Regiment would change slightly, with the altering of its name and the marshalling of new divisions within the Union Defence Force (starting from 1 July 1913) as the 8th Infantry (Transvaal Scottish). Wijnand Hamman would have experienced these changes in this infantry regiment during his enlistment. He enlisted while the Transvaal Scottish Regiment had its third Officer Commanding, Lieutenant Colonel J Dawson Squibb. Dawson Squibb was considered, based on the work by TS regimental historian, HC Juta, a respected officer who could respond rapidly to any issues related to the equipment his men had to use in battle.³³

By 1912, Hamman must have been able to speak English fluently to survive the training and everyday toil of the Transvaal Scottish. Wijnand was undoubtedly instructed in the Caledonian military ethos, which was mixed with a South African military cultural influence; as Nasson states: "Combat culture was a strikingly idiosyncratic mix of burly physicality and underlying values ... a contagious kind of diaspora "Scottishness" bound together Brigade Springboks".³⁴ Wijnand would soon become bound to the Transvaal Scottish Regiment and be among the first Afrikaners to wear the Murray of Atholl tartan under his tunic. According to HC Juta, during the years 1912-1914 when Wijnand completed his military training there were no major conflict situations in which he had to serve. However, the most notable event seems

30 HC Juta, *The history of the Transvaal Scottish* (Johannesburg, Hortors Limited, 1933), pp. 3-6.

31 HC Juta, *The history of the Transvaal Scottish...*, p. 6.

32 HC Juta, *The history of the Transvaal Scottish...*, pp. 67-74.

33 HC Juta, *The history of the Transvaal Scottish...*, p. 11.

34 B Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme. South Africa in the Great War 1914-1918...*, p. 127.

to have been the 5th of October 1912 guard of honour for the Minister of Defence, General Jan Smuts.³⁵ According to Juta, young men like Wijnand had to do at least four years of military training, starting from their 17th year of age. The training had to be completed by their 25th year. Wijnand seems to have been discharged at the age of 21, it is possible that he had indeed start his military training before the Union Defence Act of 1912 was accepted. He left the Transvaal Scottish Regiment with skills in musketry and military drill, and a new perspective of the British and their military ethos.

With the death of De la Rey, the Afrikaner rebellion broke out. Wijnand undoubtedly stood at a crossroads in his life. Given that he was trained in the art of war, even though he never saw a single day of combat action, he would have been eligible to serve in any Boer Commando during the Afrikaner Rebellion of 1914. It is difficult to determine to which political group (Boer Republicans or British Imperialist) Wijnand was loyal to after De la Rey's funeral. As part of the TS he was exposed to different influences in comparison to his contemporaries who were merely the products of the insular developments in the Lichtenburg district. Surely, Wijnand would have harboured different if not conflicting opinions about service in the First World War in comparison to his fellow Lichtenburg citizens.

What is known is that after his time in the TS, Wijnand went to work as a ticket examiner for the South African Railways. This meant that he had to travel daily aboard a train and check that every passenger had purchased a ticket to a specific station. Sadly, it is unclear which trains he worked on or which routes he travelled. However, this job ensured that Wijnand could escape the daily confines of Lichtenburg and be part of a larger world. In a time without radio, television or printed press in Lichtenburg, Wijnand would have been able to hear and read more about the events of the world and, naturally, the country, than the majority of his peers. From an intellectual and educative perspective, this made Wijnand different and could have ultimately persuaded him to enlist for service at the Western Front.

35 HC Juta, *The history of the Transvaal Scottish...*, p. 18.

Image 4: The only known photo of Wijnand 'Vic' Hamman (probably taken before his enlistment in the 2SAI)



Source: J de Beer, *Weerlig in die weste: 'n Geskiedenis van Lichtenburg* (Johannesburg, Perskor, 1973).

Wijnand likely saw the beginning of the Afrikaner Rebellion. Lichtenburg was one of the epicentres of the rebellion which ended in December 1914.³⁶ He did not take part in ending the rebellion and he also missed South Africa's victorious campaign in German South West Africa (present-day Namibia), where his fellow Transvaal Scottish Regiment comrades were deployed after his discharge.³⁷ Maybe he did not care to miss the mosquito-plagued swamps and outstretched landscapes of Tanganyika (present-day Tanzania), with the inability of General Smuts and General van Deventer to capture the German "pimpernel", General Paul Emil von Lettow-Vorbeck. What he did not miss was to serve at the very heart of the European conflict. When the opportunity arose, in July 1915, for South Africans to sign up for service at the Western Front in France, Wijnand Hamman would be among them.³⁸

³⁶ AD Bosman, *Lichtenburg 1865-1985...*, pp. 58-60.

³⁷ D Lange, *Urgent Imperial Service. South African forces in German South West Africa 1914-1915* (Rivonia, Ashanti, 1991), p. 13.

³⁸ B Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme...*, p. 123.

Promised the same pay rate as British soldiers, South Africans were called to serve in any of the planned South African infantry regiments.³⁹ Wijnand signed up in the Natal town of Bergville at the foothills of the majestic Drakensberg Mountains.⁴⁰ Why there? It could have been one of the towns on the route he frequented as part of his duties on board the South African Railway passenger trains. Maybe De Beer is correct when he alleges that Wijnand Hamman ran away from his parents' home in Lichtenburg, who probably did not agree with his idea of volunteering for military service.⁴¹ Yet by then Wijnand was legally deemed an adult and could have decided to enlist without parental consent. The possibility that he "ran away" is therefore not a plausible argument. On his Provisional Enrolment Form, Wijnand gives his address as "S.A.R. Winterton".⁴² He was therefore working temporarily in Natal by the time of his enlistment and was close to Bergville, where he could indicate his willingness to serve. Still, the question of why he would enlist remains unanswered. Was it the prospective larger salary for volunteers to the Western Front? If so, did it surpass his earnings at the railways? Was it a sense of duty from an undefined source of patriotism to Botha's ideal of a South Africa united between Afrikaners and English- South Africans? Was it frustration at missing the two African campaigns in which he could have taken part? Was it a sense of adventure, hatred against the German Empire or the conviction that combat experience could help him achieve greater things in later life if he was fortunate enough to survive the war?

It is easy to understand that there may have been recruitment drives within large State companies such as the South African Railways, but surely it is also feasible to argue that Wijnand wanted to volunteer and had an unquenchable desire to serve as a soldier. Working for the Railways may have been too monotonous for a youth that craved something more adventurous than checking train tickets. With the added advantage of an increase in his monthly wages, Wijnand Hamman would wear a military uniform again.

To enlist in Natal would have been more advantageous to him than returning to the Transvaal to do so. As a Natal recruit it would have been close to impossible for any fellow Lichtenburg citizen, or even his parents,

39 B Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme...*, pp. 123-125.

40 Department of Defence Documentation Centre (DOD Archives), Personal Files, World War 1 Service, File: 5989 Vic Hamman Attestation Form, 16 September 1915.

41 J de Beer, *Weerlig in die weste...*, pp. 184-185.

42 Department of Defence Documentation Centre (DOD Archives), Personal Files, World War 1 Service, File: 5989 Vic Hamman Attestation Form, 16 September 1915.

to recognise him or stop him if they wished to. The town of Bergville was perfect for that end. So the die was cast for Wijnand and he enlisted on the 1st of May 1915, with a certain GW Walker Wilson responsible for informing the South African Railways that their employee, Wijnand Hamman, was now an enlisted man. He had about three months to sort out his personal affairs before he had to be in Potchefstroom on the 15th of September 1915.⁴³

In Bergville, Wijnand Hamman transformed into Victor Hamman. Victor Hamman became recruit number 5989 in the 2nd South African Infantry Regiment.⁴⁴ Due to his choice to sign up in Bergville, Victor Hamman would *de facto* join the 2nd South African Infantry Regiment in which all Natal and Orange Free State enlisted soldiers were placed in. Given his TS background it is interesting to note that he did not join the 4th South African Infantry Regiment (South African Scottish) and once again wear the Murray of Atholl tartan.⁴⁵

The scene that played out on the day of his enlistment should be viewed as dramatic and life changing, even though it was probably as dull and ordinary as it was for any spectator of a recruitment line. A 22-year-old man from Lichtenburg in the Transvaal province gave his name as Victor Hamman. On his official enlistment form, there is not a single reference to his name Wijnand.⁴⁶ This sudden change in his name can support the theory that his enlistment was never approved by his parents. If they were planning to trace him after his disappearance, any records of a Wijnand Hamman would not exist. Wijnand identified himself as Victor but he still wrote his parent's address in Lichtenburg as the residence and place of contact of his next of kin. In such an event, Johanna Hamman and her husband would therefore receive correspondence for "Victor Hamman" rather than their son Wijnand Hamman. It is curious to imagine their reaction when they were addressed as the parents of one Victor Hamman.

Why "Victor"? Could this have been a nickname he obtained during his time in the Transvaal Scottish Regiment? It is understandable that the correct pronunciation of Wijnand could be quite challenging for English speakers, and

43 Department of Defence Documentation Centre (DOD Archives), Personal Files, World War 1 Service, File: 5989 Vic Hamman Attestation Form, 16 September 1915.

44 Department of Defence Documentation Centre (DOD Archives), Personal Files, World War 1 Service, File: 5989 Vic Hamman Attestation Form, 16 September 1915; Department of Defence Documentation Centre (DOD Archives), Personal Files, World War 1 Service, File: 5989 Vic Hamman Preliminary Enrolment form.

45 The Murray of Athol tartan was the adopted tartan of the 4th South African Infantry Battalion's as opposed to those of the Cape Town Highlanders, First City Regiment and the Pretoria Highlanders.

46 Department of Defence Documentation Centre (DOD Archives), Personal Files, World War 1 Service, File: 5989 Vic Hamman Attestation Form, 16 September 1915.

Victor was the closest name linked to his Afrikaans Christian name. Did Wijnand know that Victor came from the Latin word for victory the "glorious" status yearned for by every soldier? Maybe he chose his name from the Vickers machine gun that was in use during the First World War. Or was it simply a name Wijnand liked and took as a nickname at first, later becoming his new name?

Victor Hamman was, however, officially "born" in Bergville and pushed Wijnand Hamman aside. It is quite striking that the Union Defence Force, which handled the recruitment of South African soldiers into the Oversea Expeditionary Force, did not launch an investigation into Wijnand's new identity by checking any records associated with him and his time in the Transvaal Scottish Regiment. One can argue that the time it would have taken and the use of manpower such an investigation would require meant that an identity investigation was not a priority for the UDF. In any case, why would it matter? They had a new recruit to help with the war against the German Empire. Surely Wijnand was not the only South African soldier who gave a new alias for service overseas.

The rest of the information he gave was likely correct. On the 16th of September 1915, just over a year after the death of General De la Rey, Victor was in Potchefstroom giving a second attestation for the South African Oversea Expeditionary Force.⁴⁷ TA Brook acted as the witness for Victor's attestation, making it official for Victor to once again serve in uniform and be on his way to be "baptised" in combat. In addition, Victor wrote "Yes" when he was asked if he understood thoroughly the "nature and terms of this engagement" and he replied similarly with every question that formed part of the Attestation process. He, however, most likely only had a limited understanding of what to expect while serving in the muddy and bloody trenches of the Western Front. It is important to remember that he was a volunteer but after he took the Oath of Attestation Victor Hamman became part of the First World War.

He was found medically fit to serve in the 2nd South African Infantry Regiment (2SAI). He indicated that he was a member of the Dutch Reform church, undoubtedly from the congregation in Lichtenburg that held their services in the old Stone Church, the same church in which De la Rey's funeral was held. Victor stated that he was single and that both his parents were particularly dependent on him for income. Could a higher income so as to assist his parents

⁴⁷ Department of Defence Documentation Centre (DOD Archives), Personal Files, World War 1 Service, File: 5989 Vic Hamman Attestation Form, 16 September 1915.

have been a motivation for enlisting? If he died in combat, his parents would receive the life insurance pay-out that came with his service. After the medical officer, a certain PJ Monaghan, deemed him fit enough, the hazel-eyed Victor Hamman would be transported to Cape Town. From there he would be shipped to England before stepping onto the wet soil of northern France.⁴⁸

Fighting at the Western Front

No documentation exists regarding Victor from the time of his attestation to his arrival in Cape Town. He could have received additional training as he had some time to practise his musketry skills while waiting to be deployed from Cape Town. Surely he had to take part in the daily drills held on deck while he travelled to England. Right there he would have met his fellow soldiers and became part of the social strata of the 2nd South African Infantry Regiment.⁴⁹ He had become "Victor" or "Vic" Hamman and it is hard to believe that anyone knew that his real name was Wijnand. Vic was part of South Africa's forces for the full duration of the war and for six months after the hostilities ended. With hindsight, it is easy to state that he would have served until May of 1919, four years after he signed up, but obviously he had no inkling of how long he would serve. He would, however, have been among the men he would die with as he waved goodbye to South Africa. As the silhouette of Table Mountain vanished from the horizon, Vic Hamman was on a journey to his own demise, never to return to his country of birth and to leave behind a mystery that would poke the imagination of future scholars.

Details of the voyage that took Hamman and his soldier comrades to England are unclear. However, the record on Victor Hamman's Casualty Form, known as Army Form B. 103, shows that he was in England by the 26th of July 1916. Vic Hamman therefore missed the devastating battle at Delville Wood but would obviously have been informed about what other South African soldiers had to go through in that one square mile of forest outside the town of Longueval, Picardy. His time to sharpen his bayonet for battle came with him disembarking at Rouen, France, on the 27th of July 1916, after crossing the English Channel from Southampton the previous day. Vic had some time to become accustomed to his new environment and he only joined up with his unit on the 3rd of August 1916. As part of a brigade consisting of Orange

48 Department of Defence Documentation Centre (DOD Archives), Personal Files, World War 1 Service, File: 5989 Vic Hamman Attestation Form, 16 September 1915; Preliminary Medical Examination form and; Casualty Form - Active Service.

49 B Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme...*, p. 125.

Free State and Natal volunteers, Vic Hamman would have been able to make friends with any of the Afrikaans and English-speaking soldiers. He was made a Lance Corporal on the 27th of October 1916, given the responsibility to call the riflemen into formation according to the commands received from their sergeant.⁵⁰ Serving with Vic in 2SAI was a certain Sergeant Philip Stephan O' Donaghue, a 37-year-old Irish man who travelled to South Africa when he served for two years in the British South African Police, the private police force of Cecil John Rhodes' British South Africa Company. O' Donaghue was a married South African Railway "checker" from Berea, Durban, and he continued to serve in the Durban Light Infantry for nine years before he volunteered for service in France.⁵¹ O' Donaghue was truly part of the "old breed" of Anglo-Irish pro-imperial servicemen not satisfied with the totality of their actions during the first years of the First World War. O' Donaghue would volunteer for service at the Western Front after he returned from the German South West African campaign. Unlike Vic Hamman, O' Donaghue would travel to France a week before his men would arrive, for obvious logistical reasons. However, this extra week in France did not save Sergeant O' Donaghue from his shared fate with Lance Corporal Hamman.⁵²

No proof exists indicating that Vic Hamman was a replacement soldier at Delville Wood before and by September 1916, after his countrymen were slaughtered there in July 1916. Nasson states that 2900 troops were deployed as replacements for the fallen men at Longueval in the immediate post-Delville Wood period. These 2900 soldiers met up with the survivors of Delville Wood who were resting in the corn fields outside the French town of Arras, Picardy.⁵³ Vic Hamman would have been part of the 2900 replacements and was therefore part of a military force consisting of, as Nasson states, "a seam of decorated Delville Wood veterans" who had to keep their soldiers in line under the deathly memory of the Delville Wood legacy.⁵⁴ It is recorded in the 2SAI official field diary that Vic Hamman would start his service at the Somme River from October 1916.⁵⁵ Little is known of his war experiences

50 Department of Defence Documentation Centre (DOD Archives), Personal Files, World War 1 Service, File: 5989 Vic Hamman Casualty Form - Active Service.

51 Department of Defence Documentation Centre (DOD Archives), Personal Files, World War 1 Service, File: 4459 PS O' Donaghue Attestation Form.

52 It is possible that O'Donaghue and Hamman also knew each other while working for the South African Railways in Natal.

53 B Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme...*, p. 138.

54 B Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme...*, p. 140.

55 Department of Defence Documentation Centre (DOD Archives), World War I collection, 2nd South African Infantry Battalion field diary.

at the Somme River but surely it is plausible to believe that Vic Hamman had to accommodate the influence of Delville Wood veterans regarding the basic necessities for survival at the Western Front. On the one hand, he had to become accustomed again to a "superior" masculine influence that showed him that he was among the "younglings" at the Western Front. On the other hand, Vic Hamman must have also shown his "superior" experience as a soldier, compared with the lack of skills of several of his fellow non-commissioned soldiers who had not served in the UDF before the outbreak of the First World War. This supports his superiors' decision to promote him to the rank of Lance Corporal before the end of 1916.⁵⁶ From October 1916 until his death on the 12th of April 1917, little is known of Vic's battle experiences. It is not known if he kept a diary of his experiences. If he had, it was most probably lost on the day he died.

As the South Africans marched from the Somme to the most northern point of France to meet the Germans in Belgium, due to General Haig's plan of ultimate victory at Ypres, Hamman and O'Donaghue would see action at the town of Fampoux.⁵⁷ Lance corporals, like sergeants, are the mortar that keeps the regiment structure well-connected and intact and hence Hamman and O'Donaghue had to lead men into battle while keeping the morale up as much as possible.

The charge at Fampoux does not carry the same weight as the battle of Delville Wood. This does not mean that the carnage seen by the survivors at Fampoux or the lives lost at that tiny spot on the map of the Western Front were in any way less important than Delville Wood. However, the casualties at Fampoux have not received the same attention as those South Africans who were killed or mangled at Delville Wood. This contributes to the obscurity of Vic Hamman's story.

The charge at Fampoux on the 12th of April 1917 seems to be a mere anti-climax, occurring between the two above-mentioned major battles. How did Vic Hamman experience the charge at Fampoux? The following paragraph by Juta can help with creating an idea about the experience that Hamman had on this fateful day.⁵⁸

On April 12th, the 9th Division were again in the attack, and assaulted the Chemical Works and the Station of Rouex over ground unknown, and with an inadequate barrage. The South African Scottish started in support of the 1st and 2nd regiments, but before failure was admitted, had lost 6 officers,

56 Department of Defence Documentation Centre (DOD Archives), Personal Files, World War 1 Service, File: 5989 Vic Hamman Casualty Form – Active Service.

57 B Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme. South Africa in the Great War 1914-1918...*, pp. 139-142.

58 HC Juta, *The history of the Transvaal Scottish...*, p. 128.

including Captain Grady and 200 men. This was the action in and to the east of the village of Fampoux, one of the shortest and most intense of the fights ever waged by the Battalion, the heavy shellfire and consistent machine gun fire making further advance impossible.

Image 5: Lance Corporal Vic Hamman’s grave in the Browne Copse Commonwealth Grave’s cemetery, Fampoux, France



Source: Commonwealth Graves Commission, “Find-War-Dead: V Hamman 5989” (available at <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/567744/HAMMAN,%20V>, as accessed on 31 May 2017).

The last two sentences of the above quote prove that the charge was not an anti-climax to those involved and therefore should not be for the community

of Lichtenburg. On the 12th of April 1917, C-Company, 2nd SAI Brigade, was part of the above-mentioned charge to oust the German soldiers from their trenches. Lance Corporal Vic Hamman followed his orders, being slightly behind Sergeant O' Donaghue as the two men scaled the trench wall. It is the opinion of the author that bursts from German machineguns shot both men down. They were among the fallen that received the abbreviation KIA (Killed in Action) next to their names on the official 2nd SAI Casualty list.⁵⁹ Their names printed in blue on thin sheets of paper prove that their remains could still be identified even with their burial taking place about a month after the charge at Fampoux. Both Hamman and O'Donaghue were laid to rest by the 51st Highland Brigade, who collected all of the corpses and buried them in what is today known as the Browne Copse Commonwealth Cemetery.⁶⁰

Image 6: Medals of the 2017 Springbok Vasbyt Marathon with Vic Hamman's picture in the right-hand corner and a brief description at the bottom



Source: Author's personal collection, 17 July 2017.

59 Department of Defence Documentation Centre (DOD Archives), World War I collection, 2nd South African Infantry Battalion field diary and 12 April 1917 Casualty list.

60 Department of Defence Documentation Centre (DOD Archives), World War I collection, 2nd South African, 12 April 1917 Casualty list; See The end of the battle at Fampoux, B Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme. South Africa in the Great War 1914-1918...*, p. 141.

Soon after his death, notice was sent to his parents that their youngest son had died. Naturally, it would have been written with the utmost of sympathy and that the British king and country were as equally grateful for Vic Hamman's sacrifices as the South African government. Correspondence from the Imperial Graves Commission to the Hammans in Lichtenburg continued long after Vic Hamman's death. Until 1926, correspondence was received from the Imperial Grave's Commission requesting Hamman's parents to inform them if they, as his next of kin, wanted a special message inscribed on his tombstone. Nothing was added by his parents. Perhaps they could not afford to make a special engraving. But it is not prudent to jump to that conclusion. When Vic Hamman was killed at Fampoux, his parents received £73.4.0 as part of his service package, which was most probably his life insurance. The amount that the Imperial War Graves requested for basic inscription was merely 3.5 pennies per letter. If the Hammans wanted something engraved on Vic's gravestone they could afford it.⁶¹ Having to pay for these personal words of endearment might have been interpreted by them as an impersonal endeavour by the Imperial Graves Commission.

Soon afterwards, his mother would erect her own gravestone for her fallen son (probably from the money received after his death). In the historical cemetery of Lichtenburg, a full-size grave with a gravestone at the head end indicates the sorrow and mourning of a mother, whose own grave is right next to her fallen son's, reunited in death after having been separated in life. Possibly due to financial obstacles, his parents were never able to visit his final resting place at Fampoux, and with his story fading from public memory with every passing year, no one from his hometown has created an opportunity to show the town's remembrance for his death.

Ironically, Hamman would not even be remembered by the local MOTH shell hole in Lichtenburg.⁶² No other commemoration of his life can be found in Lichtenburg; not a single photo, commemorative plaque or a monument was to be displayed for Lichtenburg's only fallen World War I soldier. The MOTH shell hole was rather named after General Koos De la Rey, which was fitting if one considers the General's death to be the first real casualty of the First World War for Lichtenburg. Except for a short paragraph on the last

61 Department of Defence Documentation Centre (DOD Archives), Personal Files, World War 1 Service, File: 5989 Vic Hamman Casualty allocated funds form and Imperial War Graves Correspondence, 10 April 1926.

62 This is ironic given the fact that the MOTH was established after the First World War to support returning veterans and to remember their fellow soldiers who fell in battle. Hence, the other four Lichtenburg soldiers had enough reason to remember the fallen Vic Hamman.

pages of De Beer's collection of anecdotes and basic histories of Lichtenburg, Hamman can be considered to have been a *persona non grata*.⁶³ There is no reason that this situation has had to persist for an entire century after Vic Hamman's death. Wijnand "Vic" Hamman was no criminal, but merely a fallen, and now forgotten, soldier from a town considered to be a bastion of anti-British and pro-Republican conviction. He was one of five white Lichtenburgers who had volunteered and the only one who did not return; as the only Afrikaner volunteer, one wonders if the town of Lichtenburg was guilty of purposefully ignoring the story of Wijnand "Vic" Hamman immediately after his death. With the creation of his Lichtenburg grave, Johanna Hamman obviously wanted to make a statement that she was indeed mourning over Vic's death and wanted to do so as publicly as possible. She made sure that the words "Here lies" or "Here rests" were not engraved on the headstone because it would have been false to say so. She merely had the name of her son (Wijnand) engraved, and when and where he died, stating that she was responsible for the erection of the gravestone of an empty grave (see Image 3). This was done without the help of the Imperial Graves Commission and was surely based on the same principle that Sir Percy Fitzpatrick harboured when he became an arduous role-player in the erection of a massive commemorative monument at Delville Wood.⁶⁴

Historical amnesia and the first remembrance of Vic Hamman

The town of Lichtenburg cannot be considered one of pacifist ideals. The town takes pride in its association with the fallen General De la Rey and has commemorated his life in several ways; for example, a large equestrian statue of him sits on a square named in his honour. However, as described above, by 2017 nothing had ever been done by the town of Lichtenburg to commemorate the life of Wijnand "Vic" Hamman. Following the example of Prof Brian M Du Toit who researched the descendants of Boer families in the American south-west and northern Mexico, several articles were published from 2012-2014 in local Lichtenburg newspapers and interviews held at the local radio station to try and find the nearest living next of kin of Vic Hamman.⁶⁵ Not a single reply was received from the Afrikaner population of Lichtenburg. The local town historian simply said that he knew of Hamman

63 J de Beer, *Weerlig in die weste: 'n Geskiedenis van Lichtenburg...*, pp. 184-185.

64 B Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme. South Africa in the Great War 1914-1918...*, pp. 222-223.

65 BM du Toit, *Boer settlers in the Southwest* (El Paso, Texas Western Press, 1995), pp. 30-31.

but knew nothing about him.⁶⁶ By a stroke of luck, the researcher tracked down one of Hamman's living relatives residing in Potchefstroom. Based on a genealogical register in her possession, Hamman was her great-uncle, and his picture was displayed in one of the homes of her childhood. When asked who the gentleman in the photo was (See image 4), she identified him as Wijnand and that he died in France.⁶⁷ She only knew the basic details of his life but at least she remembered him.

That is precisely what the town of Lichtenburg did not do. In their defence, the Lichtenburg Afrikaner community had no means to remember the life of their only fallen World War I soldier because no commemorative resource was ever erected for him in a public place. Naturally, the politics of the post-World War I era can explain why a Lichtenburg soldier who fought at the Western Front would not be considered a viable commemorative commodity for nationalists.⁶⁸ If the aforementioned succeeds in explaining the situation, it does however, not exonerate the community. To remember a single fallen soldier is not a heavy burden and, after studying the histories of Lichtenburg and its monuments, it seems that their sons who died in the Second World War (1939-1945) and the Angolan Bush War (1966-1989) were also not commemorated publicly. However, the local MOTH De la Rey shell hole did not make the same mistake with these soldiers from later wars as they did with Vic Hamman. Commemorative plaques in honour of Lichtenburg's fallen WWII and Angolan Bush War soldiers were displayed in the MOTH De la Rey shell hole. Dozens of studies have focussed on the concept of gradual historical amnesia, which comes into effect as soon as stories of the past are not transported from one generation to the next.⁶⁹ This article's goal is not to challenge the theories associated with historical amnesia, but rather to illustrate that Vic Hamman's story and his ordeal at the Western Front fell into the abyss of obscurity, due to the neglect of transference of Vic Hamman's story from one generation to the next via the use of public commemorative monuments or events. Obscurity is erased as soon as a story is progressively spread.

66 Telephone call: E Coetzee (researcher)/Mr D Retief, September 2012.

67 EC Coetzee (Personal Collection), interview, M Smith (Potchefstroom)/EC Coetzee (Researcher, NWU, School of Human Sciences), September 2014; As agreed, the identity of Hamman's oldest living relative will remain anonymous in this article.

68 In 1924 the National Party under General JBM Hertzog won the election and started with their Afrikaner-Nationalist agenda. Service in the First World War was considered to have been pro-British and hence it would have made Vic Hamman an unpopular figure to commemorate in a town known for its pro-Nationalist sympathies.

69 S Nelson, "Historical amnesia and its consequences: The need to build histories of practice", *Texto contexto - enferm* [online], 2009, 18(4), pp. 781-787.

That is exactly what happened on the 15th of July 2017. In the centenary year of Vic Hamman's death, he was commemorated for the first time at a public event, the annual Springbok Vasbyt Marathon at the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria, when it was decided to dedicate the marathon's commemoration medal to him (See image 6). It was a fitting location, as the only public monument that refers to Vic Hamman is in Pretoria. In front of the Pretoria Train Station is the war memorial for South African Railway workers who fell in the First World War. Sadly, the memorial is locked behind iron gates but a visitor can peep through the openings of the iron gates to read the names on the memorial's wall. Vic's name is clearly marked, even though his surname is misspelled as "Hammon".

Vic Hamman's story is unique within the annals of the First World War. The uniqueness does not derive, however, from his actions alone. As the only Afrikaner volunteer from Lichtenburg who served at the Western Front, ignoring the possible criticisms and verbal onslaughts of his fellow Lichtenburg townsfolk with their Republican sentiments, he is unique by default. If it was not for the same tenacity and inner strength of his mother, driven to find a way to express her grief, he would have never been the "occupier" of two graves located thousands of kilometres from each other. Vic Hamman's life is truly a tale of two graves.