

B&C CONSER

PROFILE: Major Frederick Russell Burnham D.S.O. (1861-1947)

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The lives of many early Boone and Crockett Club Members were fascinating and colorful. None, however, is likely to compare to the daring, courage, and self-confidence of Frederick Russell Burnham. He was a fighter and scout during America's Apache campaigns, and did the same in South Africa during the Matabele and Boer Wars.

Burnham was born May 11, 1861, on the southwestern Minnesota frontier. When the men were away during the Civil War, the local Sioux rose up. As Indians approached the Burnham cabin, his mother hid him in a corn shock, told him to remain quiet, and ran for help. When she returned the next morning, their cabin was burned, but the child was still silently hidden.



**PORTRAIT OF B&C MEMBER MAJOR
FREDERICK RUSSELL BURNHAM D.S.O.**

The West

When he was nine years old, the family moved to California, but two years later his father died. An excellent horseman, and small for his age, Burnham found work as a rider carrying messages for the Western Union telegraph company. When his

mother joined her family in Iowa, the 13-year-old boy stayed behind on his own.

Burnham often went into the Sierra Mountains for weeks at a time to hunt. He was soon hired as a market hunter to supply game to the mining camps. After a year, he rejoined his mother in Iowa and attended high school. Here, he met Buffalo Bill. A year later he left and worked his way west to the Arizona Territory.

He prospected with an old-timer who had scouted for Kit Carson and John C. Fremont, and who had lost his family in the Indian wars. The older man spent six months teaching his enthusiastic student the intricacies of scouting. Burnham learned how to find water in the desert, cover and backtrack a trail, and a myriad of other techniques that later served him well. He even taught himself to see well at night.

Burnham was a cowboy, prospector, and gunslinger. He joined the losing side in a range war, and until a truce was called, kept on the run and used aliases.

Burnham was small, very fast and strong, had great stamina, and could channel his intensity and energy despite going without food and sleep for several days.

He was hired as a messenger during the Apache wars, and once, surrounded by a war party, escaped by hiding in dense cactus until nightfall. He became a sheriff's deputy in Arizona and rode shotgun for Wells Fargo. He successfully trailed horse thieves for hundreds of miles, worked with famed Arizona sheriff Bucky O'Neal, scouted for the army against the Apaches, and prospected. On December 25, 1883, he and several partners struck pay dirt, which they aptly named the Christmas Gift Gold Mine.

With his new-found wealth, Burnham returned to Iowa, married his sweetheart, and purchased an estate in Pasadena, California. But life was too sedate and the Burnhams moved back to Arizona. Frederick sold some of his mining claims and invested heavily in the Mesa Irrigation Canal project.

Burnham prospected from the Canadian Rockies down to Mexico. He and some friends built a smelting mill, but when that burned down and the canal project faltered, Burnham lost most of his fortune.

The First Matabele War

Believing that Africa offered unlimited possibilities, the Burnhams with their young son left California and arrived in Durban in April 1893. South Africans used heavy wagons with up to 18 oxen for transportation. But oxen were in short supply, so Burnham found some old wagon gears, constructed a buckboard, purchased four mules, and headed north.

Burnham hoped to arrive at Fort Salisbury, a distance of 1,000 miles. However, the Matabele, an offshoot of the Zulus, were threatening war with the whites, and the family only reached Fort Victoria. The British parliament had given Cecil Rhodes a Royal Charter to form a colony. Rhodes purchased land between the Limpopo (Alligator) and Zambezi Rivers from Lobengula, the Matabele king, who thought he had only leased it, and the first Matabele war began.

Burnham joined the defense forces. Seven hundred armed settlers set out for Bulawayo, the capitol of Matabeleland, and on the way were successful in several major skirmishes. Burnham scouted ahead. At one point, he and another settler crept into a camp of 200 sleeping warriors and kidnapped one for interrogation.

When Lobengula fled north, Burnham was sent south to contact Rhodes' force. He found and exchanged messages with Frederick Courtney Selous, Rhodes' chief scout. Selous would later also join the Boone and Crockett Club.

Burnham joined Major Wilson's patrol that tried to find Lobengula and urge his surrender. On one rainy night, Burnham was on hands and knees feeling for horse prints to determine the king's direction. Wilson rode into an armed camp of 2,000 warriors, could not find the king, and became surrounded. Burnham was sent out that night to guide in the expected reinforcements, and by using his enormous skills, managed to get through the lines. But the relief column was also in a battle. Surrounded, Wilson's 30-man patrol fought to the last man and became British heroes.

Burnham guided the relief column back to Bulawayo. One night it executed a miraculous escape by dismantling the guns, selecting only the healthiest horses, and creeping over nearly impenetrable hills

NATIONISTS

*To my friendly enemy
the greatest scout in the world
whose eyes were the vision of an
empire. I closed the honour
of killing him, but feeling
that I extend my heartest
admiration.*

*Major Frederick Russell Burnham
from*

Fritz Joubert Duquesne

1933

The warrior to another.



**ABOVE: LETTER FROM
FRITZ DUQUESNE TO
BURNHAM FROM 1933.**

**INSET: BLANCHE BLICK
BURNHAM SHORTLY AFTER
THE SIEGE OF BULAWAYO.**

**ABOVE RIGHT: THIS
GATLING GUN WAS USED
DURING THE CIVIL WAR IN
THE U.S.; IN DEFENSE OF
FORT VICTORIA, AFRICA,
IN 1893, UNDER SUPERVISION OF
BLANCHE BURNHAM; IN DEFENSE OF
BULAWAYO, DURING THE SECOND
MATABELE UPRISING IN 1896.**

while leaving the camp in a feigned occupied status. A force in the south, with Selous as guide, defeated the Matabele, and when Lobengula died in January 1894 of natural causes, the uprising ended.

Burnham was rewarded with 6,000 acres of land and 20 acres of mineral rights, and moved his family to Bulawayo, which was transformed, from gold and diamond mining, into a boomtown. By trading in mine and farm interests and stocks, and by prospecting, Burnham again became wealthy.

Second Matabele War

Burnham and his wife toured Europe, but their trip was cut short when the Matabele again rebelled. Bulawayo was under siege. His two-year old daughter died there because of the poor health conditions, and her death played heavily on Burnham's mind.

Burnham scouted enemy positions for three or four days at a time. He made several forays with Major Robert Baden-Powell and the two began a lifelong friendship. Baden-Powell acknowledged that the urban-reared British soldiers would benefit from an outdoors experience as youths.

A high priest among the natives, following the M'Limo religion, placed a spell on his warriors so that the white man's bullets couldn't penetrate. Burnham and a British officer found out the location of the priest's hillside cave. They avoided thousands of warriors in the vicinity and, to disprove the spell, assassinated the priest. After setting fire to the native huts, they escaped on horseback. Several British historians, while admitting that this information rallied the troops and ended the uprising, claim that the story was a hoax and that Burnham killed a lower priest who did not take part in the rebellion.

Yukon

In 1897, gold was discovered in the Yukon, and Burnham, with several relatives, traveled over the White Pass and eventually took out 100 pounds of gold. Burnham went to London to obtain financing for a hy-

draulic dredging system, but was unsuccessful. He returned to Alaska and built a home in Skagway.

The Boer War

The British and the Boers were now at war in Africa, and Field Marshall Frederick Lord Roberts, the British commander, recruited Burnham to be his Chief of Scouts. When Burnham arrived in South Africa in February of 1900, forces under Baden-Powell were surviving a siege in Kimberly. When the siege was finally broken, Baden-Powell became a British hero and was promoted to general.

Again, Burnham's task was to get behind enemy lines, travel and scout at night, and hide during the day. At one point, the Boers were camped along a river and would fire at the British from behind the high banks. Burnham went upstream, hid in a box frame wrapped in cowhide and, disguised as a floating carcass, drifted through the Boer camp.

By this time, the American cowboy scout, as the Boers knew him, was a marked man. One day he shot a Boer scout's horse at long distance in order to escape.

Another night, he stole into a Boer camp, cut the reins holding 18 oxen to a wagon, drove them through the Boer pickets, picked up two milk cows along the way, and supplied the British with food. Roberts chastised Burnham for taking chances.

He once swam a crocodile infested pool both ways in order to scout a Boer

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IN 1900, RETURNING FROM THE BOER WAR ON THE SHIP, THE HMS DUNOTTER CASTLE. BURNHAM IS PICTURED THIRD FROM THE LEFT IN THE BACK ROW. ALSO PICTURED HERE IS A YOUNG WINSTON CHURCHILL, SECOND ROW, SECOND FROM THE RIGHT. BOTH MEN MIRACULOUSLY ESCAPED THE BOER WAR WITH THEIR LIVES AND TRAVELED BACK TO ENGLAND TOGETHER.



camp. Another time, he was resting during the day in an unoccupied native hut when several Boer leaders entered to get out of the sun. Burnham stayed hidden under blankets in a corner until they left a half-hour later.

Uncovering a Boer ambush, Burnham waved a white banner unsuccessfully to warn the advancing British. Along with many British, he was captured, but faked both his identity by using a British accent and a leg injury by limping with a bloody bandage. Several nights later, he escaped by falling off a wagon and rolling to the roadside. Making his way back to friendly lines, with Boers in sight, he lay all day without moving in a four-inch deep field furrow. The next day, a Boer bird hunter captured him and was transporting him in a cart when Burnham reached down, grabbed the man's leg, and flipped him backwards out of the cart. Three days later, he reached Lord Roberts.

Burnham led 50 cavalymen through enemy patrols to blow up railroads. When the Boers abandoned Johannesburg, Burnham and one native blew up a railroad bridge north of the city two nights in succession. They survived for 12 days on 5 days of rations.

Another time, Burnham set out alone, but came across a Boer commando party. A long shot killed his horse and the fall knocked him unconscious. He awoke in great abdominal pain and was vomiting blood. Nevertheless, he walked through a waist-high swamp to blow up a railroad bridge, and then hid in a grassy field while the Boers searched within feet of him. Despite his injuries, he returned to the British lines.

Burnham had surgery and was removed from active duty and returned to

England. On the boat was his friend Winston Churchill, who himself had escaped from a Boer prison.

The Burnhams were feted by British society. They were overnight guests of Queen Victoria shortly before her death. Her successor, King Edward VII, awarded Burnham a Member of the Distinguished Order (D.S.O.) and allowed him to retain his brevet rank of Major without renouncing his United States citizenship.

In 1901, Burnham led an unsuccessful prospecting expedition to Africa's gold coast. The following year, he headed a two-year multi-pronged exploration team to British East Africa to search for minerals and perform agricultural experiments, and where he extensively hunted Africa's big game.

The family moved to London, but his youngest son drowned in the Thames while fishing. Devastated, the Burnhams returned to Pasadena. Baden-Powell by this time had published Scouting for Boys and started a youth training program, soon to be known as the Boy Scouts.

United States and Mexico

Burnham was invited by President Theodore Roosevelt for several informational meetings, and even suggested that African game be stocked in the newly formed National Parks and Forest Reserves. Fortunately, that idea went nowhere. Burnham recommended that Selous lead Roosevelt's 1909 African Safari.

Burnham's later years were still adventuresome if less risky. He prospected

in Mexico and Guatemala and became heavily invested in Mexico's Yaqui River dam and irrigation projects. But Indian uprisings and the Mexican revolutionary wars forced the Americans out. Burnham purchased a 5,000-acre ranch south of California's Sequoia Park, and leased 20,000 more acres.

Burnham lost financially both on the Yaqui irrigation project and on Mexican oil leases. However, he became permanently wealthy when oil was discovered under his land near Los Angeles.

He was appointed a member of the California State Parks Commission, which worked with the Save the Redwoods League, a project initiated by the Boone and Crockett Club. He was also involved in the early days of preserving the few remaining Arizona desert sheep. Burnham was appointed in 1938 as a trustee of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian in Los Angeles, and was president from 1939 to 1940.

On Memorial Day, 1931, the Boy Scouts of America dedicated a 9,399-foot peak north of Pasadena as Mount Baden Powell. Frederick Burnham was the principal speaker. Twenty-one years later, an 8,997-foot adjacent peak was named Mount Burnham.

Frederick Burnham became a member of the Boone and Crockett Club sometime between 1925 and 1933. He died on September 1, 1947. His obituaries commented that it did not seem possible that this lovable and gentle man could have been such a fearless and brave warrior. ■