

ROBERT BADEN-POWELL  
GILWELL

**THE  
MATABELE  
CAMPAIGN**

Robert Baden-Powell of Gilwell

**The Matabele Campaign**

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# Содержание

CHAPTER I	7
CHAPTER II	13
CHAPTER III	18
CHAPTER IV	30
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	37

# **R. S. S. Baden-Powell**

## **The Matabele Campaign / Being a Narrative of the Campaign in Suppressing the Native / Rising in Matabeleland and Mashonaland 1896**

### **PREFACE**

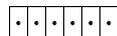
*Umtali, Mashonaland,  
12th December 1896.*

My dear Mother, – It has always been an understood thing between us, that when I went on any trip abroad, I kept an illustrated diary for your particular diversion. So I have kept one again this time, though I can't say that I'm very proud of the result. It is a bit sketchy and incomplete, when you come to look at it. But the keeping of it has had its good uses for me.

Firstly, because the pleasures of new impressions are doubled if they are shared with some appreciative friend (and you are always more than appreciative).

Secondly, because it has served as a kind of short talk with you every day.

Thirdly, because it has filled up idle moments in which goodness knows what amount of mischief Satan might not have been finding for mine idle hands to do!



*R. S. S. B.–P.*

### **TO THE READER**

The following pages contain sketches of two kinds, namely, sketches written and sketches drawn. They were taken on the spot during the recent campaign in Matabeleland and Mashonaland, and give a representation of such part of the operations as I myself saw.

They were jotted down but roughly, at odd hours, often when one was more fit for sleeping than for writing, or in places where proper drawing materials were not available – I would ask you, therefore, to look leniently upon their many faults.

The notes, being chiefly extracts from my diary and from letters written home, naturally teem with the pronoun, “I,” which I trust you will pardon, but it is a fault difficult to avoid under the circumstances. They deal with a campaign remarkable for the enormous extent of country over which it was spread, for the varied components and inadequate numbers of its white forces, and especially for the difficulties of supply and transport under which it was carried out – points which, I think, were scarcely fully realised at home. The operations were full of incident and interest, and of lessons to those who care to learn. Personally, I was particularly lucky in seeing a good deal of Matabeleland, and something of Mashonaland, as well as in having a share in the work of organisation in the office, and in afterwards testing its results in the field. Incidentally I came in for a good taste of the best of all arts, sciences, or sports – “scouting.” For these reasons I have been led to offer these notes to the public, in case there might be aught of interest in them.

The “thumbnail” sketches claim the one merit of having been done on the spot, some of them under fire. Most of the photographs were taken with a “Bulldog” camera (Eastman, 115 Oxford Street), and enlarged. A few were kindly given by Captain the Hon. J. Beresford, 7th Hussars.

Several of the illustrations have also appeared in the *Graphic* and *Daily Graphic*, and are here reproduced through the courtesy of the proprietors of those journals.

*R. S. S. B.—P.*

Marlborough Barracks, Dublin,  
*19th March 1897.*

## CHAPTER I

### Outward Bound

2nd May to 2nd June

An Attractive Invitation accepted – Voyage to the Cape on the R.M.S. *Tantallon Castle* – The Mounted Infantry – Cape Town – Mafeking – Coach Journey through Bechuanaland Protectorate – Rinderpest rampant – Captain Lugard *en route* to new Fields of Exploration – Khama and his Capital – Coaching compared to Yachting – Tati–Mangwe Pass – The Theatre of War.

“War Office, S. W.,  
28th April 1896.

“Sir, – Passage to Cape Town having been provided for you in the s.s. *Tantallon Castle*, I am directed to request that you will proceed to Southampton and embark in the above vessel on the 2nd May by 12.30 p. m., reporting yourself before embarking to the military staff officer superintending the embarkation.

“You must not ship more than 55 cubic feet.

“I am further to request you will acknowledge the receipt of this letter by first post, and inform me of any change in your address up to the date of embarkation.

“You will be in command of the troops on board.

“I have the honour, etc.,

“Evelyn Wood, Q.M.G.”

What better invitation could one want than that? I accepted it with greatest pleasure.

I had had warning that it might come, by telegraph from Sir Frederick Carrington, who had that day arrived in England from Gibraltar *en route* to South Africa. He was about to have command of troops in Matabeleland operating against the rebels there. His telegram had reached me at Belfast on Friday afternoon, when we were burying a poor chap in my squadron who had been killed by a fall from his horse. I had a car in waiting, changed my kit, packed up some odds and ends, arranged about disposal of my horses, dogs, and furniture, and just caught the five something train which got me up to town by next day morning. At midday the General sailed for South Africa, but his orders were that I should follow by next ship; so, after seeing him off, I had several days in which to kick my heels and live in constant dread of being run over, or otherwise prevented from going after all. But fortune favoured me.

2nd May.– Embarked at Southampton in the *Tantallon Castle* (Captain Duncan) for Cape Town. On board were 480 of the finest mounted infantry that man could wish to see, under Colonel Alderson; also several other “details.” Then, besides the troops, the usual crowd of passengers, 200 of them – German Jews, Cape Dutch, young clerks, etc., going out to seek their fortunes in El Dorado. (You don’t want details, do you, of this, my fourth voyage to the Cape?)

4th May.– Perfect weather, palatial ship, and fast. Delightful cabin all to myself. Best of company. Poorish food, and a very good time all round.

6th May.– Madeira. You know. Breakfast WITH FRUIT at Reid’s Hotel. The flowers and gardens. Scramble up on horses to the convent, up the long, steep, cobbled roads, and the grand toboggan down again in sliding cars. How I would like to live there for – a day! Then back on board, and off to sea by eleven. Deck loaded up with Madeira chairs and fruit skins.

*8th May.*— Daily parades, inspection of troop decks, tugs of war, concerts on deck, and gradual increase in personal girth from sheer over-eating and dozing.

Our only exercise is parade for officers at seven every morning in pyjamas, under a sergeant-instructor, who puts us through most fiendish exercises for an hour, and leaves us there for dead.

We just revive in time to put the men through the same course in their turn, stripped to the waist, so that they have dry shirts to put on afterwards. “Knees up!” I’d like to kill him who invented it – but it does us all a power of good.

*10th to 13th May.*— Hot and muggy off the coast of Africa from Cape de Verd to Sierra Leone, though out of sight of land. Not many weeks since I was here, homeward bound from Ashanti – same old oily sea, with rolling swell, and steamy, hot horizon.

*14th May.*— A passenger, who so far had spoken little except to ask for “another whisky,” found dead in bed this morning, and buried overboard. Poor chap! He had opened a conversation with me the night before, and seemed a well-intentioned, gentle soul, although a drunken bore.

Now was the best part of the voyage as far as climate went – bright, breezy days and deep blue sea, and the ship just ripping along – perfection.

*15th to 18th May.*— Athletic sports, tableaux, concerts, *and* the fancy dress ball, and our dinner-party to the captain.

The ball was interesting in showing the diverse taste of diverse nationalities. Four Frenchmen and one lady so prettily and well got up. The British officer, save in one or two instances (of which, alas! I wasn’t one), could not rise to anything more original than uniform. An ingenious young lady put us all to shame appearing as Britannia, “helmet, shield, and pitchfork too,” all complete. (Nose and helmet didn’t hit it off, – at least – yes – the nose *did* hit it (the helmet) off, and the hat had to be worn the wrong way round to allow more room.)

*19th May.*— At 4 a. m. I awake with an uncanny feeling. All is silence and darkness. The screw has stopped, the ship lies like a log, the only sound is the plashing of the water pouring from the engine, and occasionally sharp footsteps overhead.

And, looking from my port, I see, looming dark against the stars, the long, flat top of grand old Table Mountain – its base a haze from which electric lights gleam out and shine along the water.

A busy day. No news except that Sir Frederick had gone on up to Mafeking, and I was now to follow.

General Goodenough inspected our troops upon the wharf among the Cape carts, niggers, cargo, trollies (drawn by the little Arab-looking horses), and the Cape Town dust. The troops go off by train to Wynberg Camp to await Sir Frederick’s orders.

Old Cape Town just the same as ever. Same lounging warders and convicts digging docks. Malays and snoek fish everywhere. Adderley Street improved with extra turreted, verandahed buildings. The Castle venerable, low, and poky as of yore, and – of course – under repair. Short visits there, to Government House, and to that beautiful old Dutch house in Strand Street where one learns the Dutch side of the questions of the day.

By nine o’clock at night we’re all aboard the train for Mafeking – a thousand well-remembered faces seem to be there on the platform cheering us away as we steam out into the night.

Hard beds, cold night, bumpity flap we go.

*20th May.*— Rattling along over the Karoo. Stony plains with frequent stony hills and mountains. The clearest atmosphere, and air like draughts of fresh spring water. Up hill, down dale – the train crawling up at foot’s pace with heart-breaking, laboured panting of the engine, then down the other side rattling and swaying about like a runaway coster’s barrow.

Three times in the day we stop at wayside stations where there’s a kind of *table d’hôtel* prepared – much as it is in India, only less so.

Very little life along the line, beyond an occasional waggon with its lengthy team of oxen or of donkeys, creeping at its very slowest pace along the plain.

Our own pace, however, is not much to boast about; we don't go fast, and often stop to execute repairs.

The scenery remains much the same, except that the stony plain gives place to white grass veldt sparsely dotted with little thorn-bushes – its only beauty (and that is matchless of its kind) the wonderful colours of the distant hills, especially at dawn or sunset.

We pass by little groups of iron-roofed houses – sanatoria where people come to live – or die – whose lungs are gone.

Kimberley. Miles of mineheads, mounds of refuse, town of tin houses and dust, a filthy refreshment room, – and on we go.

*22nd May.*– At last, after three nights and two days jogging along in the train, we rattle into Mafeking at 6 a. m.

“*Into Mafeking?*” Well, there's a little tin (corrugated iron) house and a goods shed to form the station; hundreds of waggons and mounds of stores covered with tarpaulins, and on beyond a street and market square of low-roofed tin houses. Mafeking is at present the railway terminus. The waggons and the goods are waiting to go north to Matabeleland, but here they're stranded for want of transport, since all the oxen on the road are dying fast from rinderpest. However, every train is bringing up more mules and donkeys to use in their stead.

Near to the station is the camp of the 7th Hussars and mounted infantry of the West Riding and the York and Lancaster Regiments. These troops are waiting here in case they may be wanted in Matabeleland.

Thus Mafeking is crowded.

Sir Frederick is here, and we, the staff, take up our quarters for a few days in a railway carriage on a siding. The staff consists of Lieutenant-Colonel Bridge, A.S.C., as Deputy Assistant Adjutant-General (for Transport and Supply), Captain Vyvyan, Brigade Major; Lieutenant V. Ferguson, A.D.C.; my billet is Chief Staff Officer.

While here at Mafeking we are the guests of Mr. Julius Weil, the genius – in both senses – of this part of South Africa. He works the machinery of transport and supply of the Chartered Company; his “stores” have in them everything that man could want to buy. “Weil's Rations” are known half the world over as the best tinned foods for travellers; he owns the best of dogs and horses; he is Member of the Legislative Assembly of the Cape: and withal he is young and lively!

*23rd May.*– Our only news from Matabeleland is that Cecil Rhodes has safely got across from the East Coast, through Mashonaland, to Buluwayo, with a column under Beal. And that Plumer's force, specially raised here in the south, had got within touch of Buluwayo without fighting. Rhodes had said the neck of the rebellion now was broken – and with it go the necks of all our hopes.

But still we shove along.

Packed up our kits, and in the afternoon embarked, the four of us (the General, Vyvyan, Ferguson, and self), in the coach for Buluwayo. The coach a regular Buffalo-Bill-Wild-West-Deadwood affair; hung by huge leather springs on a heavy, strong-built under-carriage; drawn by ten mules. Our baggage and three soldier-servants on the roof; two coloured drivers (one to the reins, the other to the whip). Inside are four transverse seats, each to hold three, thus making twelve “insides.” Luckily we were only four, and so we had some room to stretch our legs. We each settled into a corner, and off we went, amid the cheers of the inhabitants of Mafeking. One, more eager than the rest, – a former officer of Sir Frederick's in the Bechuanaland Police, – jumped on, and came with us for thirty miles, trusting to chance to take him back again.

That night we reached Pitsani, a single roadside inn, – the starting-place of Jameson's raid into the Transvaal. We stopped, and supped, and slept, and started on at daybreak. This stopping to sleep was but a luxury which we did not come in for afterwards along the road.

*24th May.*– Does it bore you, a daily record of this uneventful journey? Well, if it does, you easily can skip it, which is more than we could do, alas!

All day over a sandy track, on open, white grass veldt, which generally changed into hilly country, dotted with thorn-bushes. All waterless. The mules, of which we get a change every ten or twelve miles, in very poor condition – so our pace is very slow.

Reached Ramoutsa after dark, after 65-mile drive. Tin hotel, and large native kraal town (said to have 10,000 inhabitants in its mass of beehive huts). Boyne living here; a well-known hunter on the Kalehari, and had shot with “Ginger” Gordon (15th Hussars).

A native “reed dance” was going on in the “stadt” (as they call the native town), – every man blowing a reed-whistle which gives two notes, and, played in numbers, gives a quaint, harmonious sound. The men dance in a circle, stamping the time; the women waggle round and round the circle, outside it. Altogether a very “or’nery” performance, especially as all were dressed in European store-clothes.

*25th May.*– Struggling on with weak mules to Gaberones (18 miles in 5 1/2 hours) And on again. Every mile now began to show the grisly, stinking signs of rinderpest. Dead oxen varied occasionally with dead mules – the variety did not affect the smell —*that* remained the same. Occasionally we passed a waggon abandoned owing to the loss of animals.

The road at times was hard, but generally soft red sand. The scenery had a sameness of level, white, grass land and thorn-bush.

Reached a big kraal (Matchudi’s) of 700 inhabitants, at midnight. Deep sandy road. It took our fresh (!) team over half an hour to get us outside the village. Our pace was now so slow, and the whacking of the whip so painful merely to listen to (happily, the mules don’t seem to feel it half so much as we), that we did much of the journey walking on ahead. Sun baking hot, and flies as thick as dust, and *that* was bad.

*27th May.*– By walking with a gun we managed to get a good supply of partridges and guinea-fowl as we went along. To-day we passed the downward coach, in which was Scott-Montague, M.P. He gave us lots of information; and we felt we were not having the worst of the journey, when we saw him packed in with twelve other “insides,” one of whom a woman, and another her baby, *which wasn’t very well!*

Reached Pala – a group of stores – at midnight. Here were collected some two hundred waggons, stopped by loss of all their oxen from rinderpest. Three thousand two hundred beasts dead at this one place!

*28th May.*– We trekked along all day. Bush country; lots of partridges. One of our mules died on the road. Passed through Captain Lugard’s camp about 11 p. m. Only Hicks, his manager, awake. He had thirteen waggons, and nearly two hundred mules and donkeys. He is taking an exploring expedition of eleven white men to the Lake N’Gami district, prepared to remain away two years if necessary.

*29th May.*– Outspanned, 4.30 a. m., and had our first wash since starting, in liquid mud from water-holes. The road was now through heavy sand. We walked over 20 miles of our journey on foot.

Reached Palapchwe (Khama’s capital) at midnight.

Found a dozen telegrams awaiting us, describing fights round Buluwayo, such as put some hopes into us again.

Here we slept in beds!

*30th May.*– Before breakfast, who should stroll in, all by himself, but Khama! Thin, alert, and looking quite young, in European clothes.

He had not much to say. He knew me as George’s brother, and asked about the baby niece.

His town is certainly well-ordered, and he manages everything himself.

There are three or four European stores; otherwise the town is an agglomeration of kraals, and thus stands in several sections, each under its own headman. It is situated on an undercliff of a bush-grown ridge; is fairly well supplied with water; and commands a splendid view over 100 miles of country. Khama had moved his people here only a few years ago, from Shoshong, which used to be

his capital farther west. He rules his country effectively. No liquor may be sold, even among white men; and all along the road while in his country we found the rinderpest carcasses had been burned.

But he might with advantage do something for the road. Leaving Palapchwe at 10 a. m., we bumped and jolted down the stony hill in a manner calculated to mash up not only the coach and its insides, but *their* insides as well. Any person or persons afflicted with liver should go and live a week at Palapchwe, and drive down this hill daily – once a day would be enough!

And then beyond – across the plains, grown with mopani bush – the road was all deep sand. We merely crept along. But still we had broken the back of our journey —

Mafeking to Palla	225	miles
Palla to Palapchwe	110	"
Palapchwe to Tati	107	"
Tati to Buluwayo	115	"
	—	
Total	557	"

A certain sameness of scenery and want of water all the time, but compensated for by the splendid climate, the starry nights, and the “flannel-shirt” life generally.

Every one of the few wayfarers, in waggons or otherwise, along the road is interesting, either as a hunter, gentleman-labourer, or enterprising trader. They all look much the same: Boer hat, flannel shirt, and breeches – so sunburnt that it is hard at first to tell whether the man is English, half-caste, or light Kaffir.

One we met to-day, creeping along with a crazy, two-wheeled cart drawn by four donkeys. He himself had only been two months in South Africa: came from Brighton. Heard that food and drink were at a premium in Buluwayo; so had loaded up this drop-in-the-ocean of a cargo of meal and champagne, and was steadily plodding along with it to make his fortune. We lightened his load by two pints, and weightened his pocket with two pounds. And we afterwards heard he sold his whole consignment at a very good profit long before he got to Matabeleland.

*31st May.*— All day and all night we go rocking and pitching, rolling and “scending” along in the creaking, groaning old coach: just *exactly* like being in the cabin of a small yacht in bad weather – and the occasional sharp swish of the thorn-bushes along the sides and leathern curtains sounds just like angry seas. Then frequently she heels over to a very jumpy angle, as if a squall had struck her. One of these days the old thing will go over.

Strange that in all this endless, uninhabited, and bushy wilderness there is scarcely any game.

We carry our own food, chiefly tinned things, with us, and at convenient outspans (when we are changing mules) we boil our kettle and have a meal of sorts and thoroughly enjoy it – especially the evening meal, under the stars.

*1st June.*— Reached Tati Gold Fields, 1 a. m. A collection of three or four tin stores, one of them an hotel, where we rolled into bed for a short rest.

We breakfasted with Mr. Vigers, the Resident Commissioner. Tati is a British Protectorate of older standing than the Chartered Company, and independent of it. It has its own administrative machinery, – a mining population of whites and blacks and “wasters,” and yet not a single policeman! “Wasters?” – oh, it’s a South African word, and most expressive; applies to the specious loafer who is so common in this country, – the country teems with him in high grades as well as low, *hinc multæ lacrimæ* in the history of South African enterprises.

Twenty miles beyond Tati we crossed the dry bed of the Ramakan River, the border of Matabeleland. Close by the river stands the ruin of a “prehistoric” fort, built of trimmed stones. There are several similar forts about the country, offshoots of the famed Zimbabwe ruins near Victoria.

We nearly killed our General to-day in crossing a dry river bed. The descent into the drift was so steep that the wheelers could not hold back the coach, so our drivers sent them down it at a gallop. Half-way down there was a sill of rock off which the coach took a flying leap into the sand below. We inside were chucked about like peanuts in a pot, and Sir Frederick was thrown against the roof and his head and neck were stiff for some time afterward.

Had dinner (!) at a roadside shanty "Hotel," where the waiter smoked while he served us.

*2nd June.*— Signs of war and of colonisation at last. We reached Mangwe, 6.30 a. m. An earthwork fort with a waggon encampment outside it. In this laager were all the women and children, chiefly Dutch, from farms around; the men acting as garrison under command of Van Rooyen and Lee, — two well-known hunters, who were here in Lobengula's time.

In the fort they showed with pride some half a dozen Matabele prisoners they had captured in a fight. I looked well at them, fearing that they might be the only enemy that I should see. Happily I might have spared my eyes.

We now went through the Mangwe Pass. The road here winds its way through a tract of rocky hills and koppies, which are practically the tail of the Matopo range, running eastward hence for sixty miles. It would have been a nasty place to tackle had the Matabele held it. They might easily here have cut off Buluwayo from the outer world, but their M'limo, or oracle, had told them to leave this one road open as a bolt-hole for the whites in Matabeleland. They had expected that when the rebellion broke out, the whites would avail themselves *en masse* of this line of escape; they never reckoned that instead they would sit tight and strike out hard until more came crowding up the road to their assistance.

The scenery is striking among these fantastic mounts of piled-up granite boulders, with long grass and bushy glades between. For ten miles the road runs between these koppies, then emerges on the open downs that constitute the Matabele plateau, — the watershed, 4000 feet in altitude, between the Zambesi and Limpopo.

Now we come to forts every six or eight miles along the road for protection of the traffic. They are each manned by about thirty men of the local defence force, — men in the usual shirt-sleeve costume, but fine serviceable-looking troops. Some forts are the usual earthwork kind; others are such as would make a sapper snort, but are none the less effective for all that. They are just the natural koppie, or pile of rocks, aided by art in the way of sandbag parapets and thorn-bush abattis fences, — easily prepared and easily held. One we came to had been threatened by Matabele the previous night, and some rebels had been reported near the road this same morning, — so things were getting a little more exciting for us.

By and by we met a troop of mounted men twenty-five miles out from Buluwayo. These had come out to act as escort. At first glance, to one fresh from Aldershot or the Curragh, they looked a pretty ragged lot on thin and unkempt ponies; but their arms and bandoliers were all in first-rate order, and one could see they were the men to go anywhere and do anything that might be wanted in the fighting and campaigning line. However, we did not take them with us, Sir Frederick telling them to follow on at leisure, a couple of scouts from a fort being sent ahead of us at the worst part to see that the road was clear.

The coach in which Lord Grey, the Administrator, had come a short time before us had been seen and pursued by Matabele, but we had no excitement, and soon after midnight we rolled into Buluwayo.

## CHAPTER II

### State of Affairs in Matabeleland

Buluwayo – Too many Heads may spoil the Campaign – The Situation – Origin of the Rebellion – The Power of the M'limo – The Outbreak of Rebellion – Defence Measures and Rescue Patrols – Native Police – Sorties from Buluwayo inflict Blows on the Enemy – MacFarlane's Attack relieves the Pressure on the Town – Plumer's Relief Force continues the driving back of the Enemy – Sir Frederick Carrington's Plan of Campaign.

*3rd June.*— Unpacked ourselves at 1 a. m. from our lairs in the corners of the coach, with something akin to regret at leaving the old thing after ten days and nights in her. But it *was* a blessing to bed down in a house, and the bath on waking was worth gold. (Bathroom was the verandah in the main street.)

Our lodging was next door to the club buildings, now used as a barrack for Grey's Scouts, and defended with a small bastion of tin biscuit-cases and sacks filled with earth. By breakfast-time I had investigated Buluwayo.

A red earth flat laid out by ditches, in blocks and streets, over two miles long and half a mile wide. The centre portion of the town well filled with buildings, all single-storeyed, some brick, some tin, some "paper" (*i. e.* wire-wove, ready-made in England, sent out in pieces), all with verandahs. The more outlying blocks only boasting a house or shanty here and there. Most of the houses built with a view to ultimate extension; *e. g.* one consisted of, evidently, the scullery, back kitchen, and "offices," the front to be added later, when better times came round. The gardens, streets, and vacant lots richly sown with broken bottles, meat tins, rags, and paper; scarcely a garden, shrub, or tree in th place. The houses generally, if they are not "Bottle stores" (*i. e.* public-houses), are either dry-goods stores or mining syndicate offices. Everywhere enterprise and rough elements of civilisation, – not forgetting the liquor branch.

Half a mile southward of the town lies a bush-covered rising ground, on which are a good number of "villas," with their two or three acres of bush fenced in to form their gardens in the future. At present they are deserted, the owners living in town while the Matabele are about.

In the centre of the town is the market square with its market house – a big brick building which is now used as the main refuge and defence of the town. Round the market house is drawn up a rectangular laager of waggons, built up with sacks full of earth to form a bullet-proof wall. Outside the laager the ground for twenty or thirty yards is rendered impassable by means of "entanglements" of barbed wire and a fence of the same, as well as by a thick sprinkling of broken bottles all over the ground itself.

Up on the roof of the hall is a look-out turret, from which, by touching a button, an observer can at will fire any of the electric mines which have been laid in the various approaches to the market square.

Although most of the people who have houses in Buluwayo are now living in their homes again, there are numbers of families from suburban or outlying farms who are still living in the laager. And at the western end of the town is another smaller laager of waggons round a house, in which a number of Boer farmers, with their families, are living.

We had a very nice house "commandeered" (*i. e.* taken over by Government at a fair rental), and handed over to us for our use as a dwelling-house, ready supplied with furniture, etc.; and then the offices of one of the gold-mining companies were similarly commandeered and assigned to us for offices. In a very short time we had settled down and were hard at work – and there was lots to do.

Of course our first business was to interview all the heads of affairs, and so to form an idea of the situation.

Sir Richard Martin (with whom I had served previously, when on the mission to Swaziland, under Sir F. de Winton) is Deputy Commissioner, appointed since Jameson's raid to regulate the use and moves of the armed forces in the Chartered Company's territories, so as to prevent any further adventurous departures on their part. Lord Grey is Administrator of the Government of the whole country of Rhodesia, which includes Matabeleland and Mashonaland, etc. – a tract of country 750,000 square miles in extent, or equal to Spain, France, and Italy together. Mr. Cecil Rhodes, while bearing no official position, practically represents the management of the country as well as of the Company, and his advice and experience are of the greatest value, since all the other "heads" are new arrivals in the country. And it is in this number of heads that our danger would apparently, and our difficulty will most certainly be. Virtually, of course, the General is *the* head while active operations are in progress, but he has to cut his cloth according to the style approved by the Deputy Commissioner, according to the expense sanctioned by the Administrator, and according to the general design required by the High Commissioner, while not totally disregarding the local experience of Mr. Rhodes and others. Altogether, the principle of strategy, which directs that "the General in command should merely have his objective pointed out to him, and a free hand given him," seems to be pretty well entrenched upon by the present arrangement, though, under the circumstances, it could not well be helped. This, however, has always been the case in the history of South African warfare, – frequently with fatal results, – so it is nothing new: the only thing is to make the best of it, and pull together as much as possible.

And this is what we find is the situation of affairs.

Matabeleland had been captured by the Chartered Company's troops, acting from Mashonaland, in 1893, and Lobengula driven to his death as a fugitive. Since then the country had been governed by the Administrator and his magistrates and native commissioners in the various districts into which the country was divided.

By 1896 the white population had increased to nearly four thousand, guarded by an armed police force distributed about the country. At the end of 1895 the greater part of this police was taken from Rhodesia, in order to take part in Jameson's raid into the Transvaal.

Just about the same time the terrible scourge of rinderpest came down upon the land. Three years before, it had made a start in Somaliland, and had steadily and persistently worked its way down the continent of Africa – and it now crossed the mighty barrier of the Zambesi, and was sweeping over the great cattle-country, Matabeleland. With a view to checking its ravages, the Government took all possible steps for preventing the transmission of infection, and, amongst others, that of slaughtering sound cattle was adopted. This procedure was perfectly incomprehensible to the native mind, and before long it was mooted among them that the white man's idea in slaughtering the cattle was to reduce the native to the lowest straits, and to starve him to death.

The natives had only been very partially beaten in the war in 1893, and the memory of it rankled strongly in their mind. They had thought the war was merely a passing raid, and it was only now they were realising that the whites had come to stay, and to oust them from their land. They were only waiting for their opportunity to rise and drive out their invaders.

Then, ever since the war, there had been a partial drought over the land, and what little crops there were had been devoured by unprecedented flights of locusts. All these misfortunes tended to spread among the people a general feeling of sullen discontent.

And this was increased to a feeling of bitter resentment against the whites, because they, the Matabele, found that the one remedy for want which in the old days they had been wont to ply so readily – namely, the wholesale raiding of their weaker neighbours – was under the new régime denied them. Nowadays, not only was every such raid prevented or punished as unlawful, but even in their home life their liberties were interfered with, and trifling thefts of cattle from a neighbour's herd, or the quiet putting away of a lazy slave or of a quarrelsome stepmother, were now treated as crimes by

policemen of their own blood and colour, but creatures of the white man, strutting among them with as much consequence and power as any of the royal indunas.

These things developed their hatred against the whites, and served as plausible reasons for their conduct when the chiefs came to be questioned later on in giving in their surrender.

Meanwhile, the chiefs and headmen, hoping to get back their ancient powers, fomented this feeling for all that they were worth. And they had a ductile mass to handle, for to the vast majority of their people the question of rights and wrongs was an unknown quantity, but the lust of blood – especially blood of white men, when, as they anticipated, it could be got with little danger to themselves – was an irresistible incentive.

The withdrawal of the armed forces from the country for the Transvaal raid gave them their opportunity.

The Matabele have no regular religion beyond a reverence for the souls of ancestors, and for an oracle–deity adopted from the Mashonas, whom they call the M'limo. The M'limo is an invisible god, who has three priests about the country, one in the north–east beyond Inyati, one in the south in the Matopo hills, and one south–west near Mangwe. The pure–bred Matabele, as well as the aboriginal natives, the Makalakas and the Maholis, all go to consult these priests of the M'limo as oracles, and place a blind belief in all they say. In addition to the three high priests, there are four warrior–chiefs of the M'limo. These men working in with the priests brought about the outbreak of rebellion. Three of these warrior–indunas are Matabele, the fourth – Uwini – heads the Makalakas.

Choosing well their opportunity, when, as they thought, all the white fighting men had left the country, and none but women, children, and dotards were left behind, they spread the message through the land – with that speed which only native messages can take. They called on all the tribes to arm themselves, and to assemble on a certain moon round three sides of Buluwayo. The town was to be rushed in the night, and the whites to be slaughtered without quarter to any. The road to Mangwe was to be left conspicuously open, so that any whites who might escape their notice would take the hint and fly from the country. Buluwayo was not to be destroyed, as it would serve again as the royal kraal for Lobengula, who had returned to life again. After the slaughter at Buluwayo the army would break up into smaller impis, and go about the land to kill all outlying farmers and to loot their farms. The M'limo further promised that the white men's bullets would, in their flight, be changed to water, and their cannon–shells would similarly turn into eggs.

The plan was not a bad one, but in one important particular it miscarried, and so lost to the Kafirs the very good chance they had of wiping out the white men.

About 24th March the outbreak began – but prematurely. In their eagerness for blood some bands of rebels, acting contrary to their instructions, worked their wicked will on outlying settlers and prospectors before attempting the night surprise on Buluwayo. *That* was their mistake – it gave the alarm to the whites in town and enabled them to prepare their defence in good time.

Among the Insiza Hills, some thirty–five miles east of Buluwayo, on that fateful day, seven white men with their coloured servants were butchered at Edkins Store, and at the Nellie Reef Maddocks a miner was murdered, while a few miles farther on a peaceable farming family were brutally done to death. The white–haired old grandfather, the mother, two grown–up girls, a boy, and three little yellow–haired children – all bashed and mangled.

At another place a bride, just out from the peace and civilisation of home, had her happy dream suddenly wrecked by a rush of savages into the farmstead. Her husband was struck down, but she managed to escape to the next farm, some four miles distant – only to find its occupants already fled. Ignorant of the country and of the people, the poor girl gathered together what tinned food she could carry, and, making her way to the river, she made herself a grassy nest among the rocks, where she hoped to escape detection. For a few terrible days and nights she existed there, till the Matabele came upon her tracks, and shortly stoned her to death – another added to their tale of over a hundred and fifty victims within a week.

The only comfort is that their gruesome fate saved many other lives, for the news spread fast, and as more reports from every side came in of murdered whites, those in Buluwayo realised that the rising was a general one, and merciless. They promptly took their measures for defence.

The laagers were formed, as I have described, to accommodate the seven hundred women and children in the place; while the eight hundred men were organised in troops, and armed and horsed in an incredibly short space of time.

Patrols were promptly sent out to bring in outlying farmers, and to gather information as to the rebels' moves and numbers.

Ere long the rebel forces were closing round Buluwayo. North, east, and south they lay, to the number of seven thousand at the least. Throughout the country their numbers must have been but little under ten to thirteen thousand.

Nearly two thousand of them were armed with Martini–Henry rifles. A hundred of the Native Police deserted, and joined them with their Winchester repeaters. Many of them owned Lee–Metfords, illicitly bought, stolen, or received in return for showing gold–reefs to unscrupulous prospectors. And numbers of them owned old obsolete elephant guns, Tower muskets, and blunderbusses. So that in addition to their national armament of assegais, knobkerries, and battle–axes, the rebels were well supplied with firearms and also with ammunition.

In saying that the Native Police deserted and joined the rebels, I must in justice add that it was chiefly the younger members of the force who did so: the old hands remained loyal, and though at first they were disarmed as a precautionary measure, they proved most useful to our side later on, though very few in numbers. Much has been said against them as having been the cause of the revolt, through their overbearing conduct. I am perfectly convinced that the rebellion would have occurred just the same had there been no such body as the Native Police in existence. At the same time, I don't mean to say that they did not abuse their powers. I should think that they most probably did, but that is no reason why they should incontinently be done away with. I don't see, for one thing, how proper government of the natives is going to be carried out without a native police: the only thing is that the force must be very closely and effectively commanded. The same difficulty has been encountered, and has thus been dealt with, by us in Natal, in India, in West Africa, everywhere, in fact, where natives form a large proportion of the population.

But I am wandering from my point into discussion and argument, which are not in my line. I am supposed to be giving you a résumé of what had been happening up to the time of Sir Frederick's taking over command in Matabeleland.

Directly after the outbreak, Colonel Napier, with his usual energy, lost no time in getting together a few men, and, with a party of sixty, he went off to the Shangani, thirty miles north–east of Buluwayo, and brought into safety over forty white settlers.

At the same time, Captain the Hon. Maurice Gifford, with forty–four men, made a dash to Cumming's Store, through difficult country in the Insiza Hills, fifty miles east of Buluwayo, and rescued over thirty people, losing one man killed and six wounded.

Captain F. C. Selous raised a troop of forty mounted men the same day, and made a bold reconnaissance southward of Buluwayo for thirty miles, to the Matopos.

Three days later (29th March), Captain MacFarlane, with thirty men, went out to Jenkins' Store, and relieved Pittendrigh's party, who were hard pressed there. One man was killed and two wounded in this affair.

On the 4th April, Maurice Gifford again went out, with 140 men, to Fonsecas, just north of Buluwayo, where he was hotly attacked by the enemy, losing four men killed and seven wounded. He himself lost his arm on this occasion, and Captain Lumsden, who took his place, was mortally wounded. MacFarlane, with sixty men, relieved him.

Brand and Niekerk took a strong patrol down to the mining camp in the Gwanda district, to find the miners had already safely got away south. On their return journey this patrol was attacked

and very nearly cut off in passing through the eastern end of the Matopos. Out of their total of a hundred they lost five killed and fifteen wounded besides thirty horses killed; but with sheer hard fighting they got through in the end.

Then, when the enemy closed on Buluwayo, as if to swamp it, Bissett led the garrison out in a sortie on 22nd April. There was a stubborn fight, in which neither side gained any ultimate decisive advantage, but it was remarkable for the fact that perhaps in no fight in history have there been so many deeds of gallantry performed among so small a body of men. No less than three men have since been recommended for the Victoria Cross for separate acts of heroism in this fight.

Three days later, Captain “Mickey” MacFarlane – an old friend of ours in the 9th Lancers – again led out the Buluwayo Field Force, and this time dealt the enemy a very heavy blow, such as changed the aspect of affairs, and relieved Buluwayo from any immediate danger of being rushed.

In these early fights and patrols the Buluwayo Force had lost twenty men killed and fifty wounded, while over two hundred settlers in surrounding districts had been murdered. Meanwhile, a relief force was being organised at Salisbury in Mashonaland, three hundred miles to the north, under Colonel Beal, and another at Kimberley and Mafeking, nearly six hundred miles to the south, under Colonel Plumer of the York and Lancaster Regiment. In the last week in May these two forces appeared in the neighbourhood of Buluwayo from their opposite directions, Cecil Rhodes arriving with that from the north; Lord Grey arriving about the same time as Colonel Plumer’s from the south.

Meanwhile, Colonel Napier, with the bulk of the Buluwayo Force, had gone out to meet the Salisbury Force, and in combination with it did much to clear the country east of Buluwayo.

[P.S.– A most interesting detailed account of the outbreak, and of these early operations – including the acts of individual gallantry on the part of Baxter, Crewe, Henderson, Grey, and others – will be found in Captain F. C. Selous’ book, *Sunshine and Storm in Rhodesia*.]

Colonel Plumer had raised, organised, and equipped his force of eight hundred Cape Colony men and horses in an incredibly short space of time; but that is one beauty of South Africa – that it teems with good material for forming a fighting force at a moment’s notice. Nor did the “M.R.F.” (Matabele Relief Force), as Plumer’s corps was styled, lose any time in getting to work after its arrival at Buluwayo. For three days (23rd–26th May) it was hammering at the various impi threatening Buluwayo on the north and east with complete success.

Thus, when we arrived a week later, we found that the immediate neighbourhood of Buluwayo had been cleared of enemy, but the impi were still hanging about in the offing, and required to be further broken up.

The General’s plan, accordingly, was to send out three strong columns simultaneously to the north–east, north, and north–west, for a distance of some sixty to eighty miles, to clear that country of rebels, and to plant forts which should prevent their reassembly at their centres there, and would afford protection to those natives who were disposed to be friendly. The southern part of the country, namely, the Matopo Hills, was afterwards to be tackled by the combined forces on their return from the north. Such was the situation in the beginning of June.

And now I’ll continue the diary.

## CHAPTER III

### Our Work at Buluwayo

Organisation of Supply and Transport – The Volunteer Troops – Experiences on Patrol – Sir Charles Metcalfe reports the Enemy just outside the Town – The first sight of the Enemy – Fight on the Umgusa River, 6th June – Maurice Gifford – Reconnaissance of the Inugu Stronghold – Burnham the Scout – Rebellion breaks out in Mashonaland – The Difficulties of Supply – The Humours of Official Correspondence – Colonel Spreckley writ down an Ass – Colonials would serve under Sir Frederick Carrington, but not under the ordinary Imperial Officer.

*4th June.*— Office work from early morning till late at night. To say there is plenty of work to be done does not describe the mountain looming before us. The more we investigate into such questions as the force and strong points of the enemy, and the resources at our command wherewith to tackle him, the more huge and hopeless seems the problem.

Our force is far too small adequately to cope with so numerous and fairly well-armed an enemy, with well-nigh impregnable strongholds to fall back on, and with his supply and transport train ample and effective – as furnished by his wives and children.

Our force, bold as it is, is far too small, and yet we cannot increase it by a man, for the simple reason that if we did, we could not find the wherewithal to feed it. There is practically no reserve of food in the country, rinderpest has suddenly destroyed the means of bringing it, and here we lie, separated from the railway by a sandy road 587 miles in length!

Nor on the spot has any adequate provision been made to meet the future wants of the small force we have. All the food-stuffs in the place have been brought together, and the commissariat organisation and system has so far amounted to showing to an officer requiring rations for his troop a pile of stores, with “There you are! Take what you want.”

One of the first steps has been to telegraph for Colonel Bridge, who had been left at Mafeking, to come and organise a system of transport and supply. Then we have to make a medical staff and an ordnance department.

In the meantime three columns are being organised, and such provision as is possible is being made for their supply for patrols of about three weeks’ duration, to the northward of Buluwayo. And we hope to start them off to-morrow.

During the brief intervals from office work for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, one has most interesting glimpses of the sunny street, crowded with throngs of “swashbucklers,” each man more picturesque than his neighbour. Cowboy hat, with puggree of the colour of his corps, short-sleeved canvas shirt, cord breeches, and puttees, with bandolier across his chest, and pistol on his hip, is approximately the kit of every man you meet. The strong brown arms and sunburnt faces, the bold and springy gait, all show them soldiers, ready-made and ripe for any kind of work. Good shots and riders, and very much at home upon the veldt, no wonder that they form a “useful” crew – especially when led, as they are, by men of their own kidney.

Among the leaders are Micky MacFarlane, erstwhile the dandy lancer, now a bearded buccaneer and good soldier all the time; Selous, the famous hunter-pioneer of Matabeleland; Napier and Spreckley, the light-hearted blade, who is nevertheless possessed of profound and business-like capacity; Beal, Laing, and Robertson, cool, level-headed Scotsmen with a military training; George Grey, “Charlie” White, and Maurice Gifford, for whom rough miners and impetuous cowboys work like well-broken hounds.

Indeed, the Volunteer troops seem to have thoroughly adapted themselves to the routine of soldiering, as well as to the more exciting demands of the field of action.

Night guards, daily standing to arms before sunrise, patrols, and other uncongenial duties are all carried out with greatest regularity; but the following amusing account of a morning patrol – which appeared in the *Matabele Times* this week – shows some of the drawbacks under which they carry on their work: —

“Standing to arms at 4 a. m. is not in itself a joy, but its cruelty is accentuated when the troop orderly takes that opportunity of informing you that you are to leave the laager at 5.30 and go on patrol to Matabele Wilson’s, in company of three other unfortunates, for the purpose of ascertaining whether the road be clear travelling.

“On the occasion of which I write this was my fate, and our little party, with noses that needed constant attention with a handkerchief, and numbed fingers claspings cold rifles, stood shivering outside the stable gates, viewing life despondently and swearing at the remount staff. All things, pleasant and otherwise, have an end, and at last, in response to frequent knocks, the gate opened, and we followed a depressed-looking official to where four alleged horses, with drooping heads and downcast mien, disconsolately champed the half-ton of rusty iron which South Africans call a bit, and dreamed of oats. Each man chose a horse, and with the assistance of sundry stable-boys induced him to leave his empty manger and move wearily out into the street. Here great care was necessary in mounting, as it was yet to be ascertained whether the crocks could stand up straight under the weight of a rider, but at last we fell in, and by dint of spur and rein reached the laager.

“The corporal in charge of the patrol then went to wake up the orderly officer and get his orders, and my horse edged sideways towards the windmill; he wanted something to lean against. By and by out comes the corporal, we awakened our mounts, and started. ‘Our orders are to go out to Wilson’s and meet a patrol from the Khami River, then return to town,’ and ‘You’re not to gallop all the way,’ added the corporal. We at once said we wouldn’t, and just then one of the horses fell down in endeavouring to step over a gutter. We dismounted and put the turn-out on its feet again, and proceeded.

“Just past the Dutch laager some one said, ‘By Jove, the laager smells peculiar.’ Another man said, ‘Yes; the big laager is just the same.’ We passed a bush and struck the source of the odour, a dead ox; and promptly apologised to the laagers.

“All went well for a mile or so, and the corporal says, ‘Let’s have a trot.’ We rammied in the spurs and shook the reins; one horse started a feeble lolling trot which he maintained for at least twenty yards before he fell down; two horses shook their heads and whisked their tails, but took no further notice of the appeal for more speed; and the fourth, a grey, with fine prominent points, stopped dead short. We all passed a few remarks about the gentlemen who had selected the horses for duty, and resumed our wonted ‘crawl march.’

“More rinderpest, and my horse made a movement as if to lean against the smell, but it was too strong for him, and he moved on, to prevent being knocked over. On passing dead horses and cattle we used to draw in a long breath and endeavour to spur up a trot that would carry us out of range, before we were again compelled to breathe or ‘bust,’ but our horses used generally to land us in the middle of the stink and then pull up. You would see a man get black in the face trying to hold his breath, and at last have to burst out and refill his lungs with the very richest of the odour.

“Passing the remains of the kraal where the transport riders, Potgieter and his mate, were murdered, we saw the heaps of earth piled over the victims’ bodies. Here one of our number dismounted to light his pipe. This was the last we saw of him; he never caught up, though we only walked our horses; and he finally rolled up at the fort, half an hour after we had arrived, on foot, having tied his horse on to a tree. He said he found it considerably easier walking. Dawson’s Fort is splendidly placed, and commands a fine view of the surrounding country; the walls are built up with stone topped with two courses of sandbags, shelter for the garrison being afforded by sails; permanent running water passes the foot of the hill.

“A number of donkey waggons were outspanned on the road beneath the fort, and out by Wilson’s house, where now a hotel flourishes with the success usual in Matabeleland, we could see the coolies working in the gardens, planting to renew the crops of vegetables reaped with zeal and thoroughness by troops and travellers evidently determined that the enemy shouldn’t have them any way. Rinderpest is very much in evidence round the fort, and oxen lie dead literally in troops, long regular lines of carcasses lying together.

“At the foot of the hill leading to the fort one of the horses gave out altogether, having clean knocked up in five miles of travelling, the whole of which was done at a walking pace.

“If the loudly expressed wishes of the unfortunate wight who had to walk and carry a heavy rifle from Wilson’s to Buluwayo under a hot sun, have any effect on the official who was responsible for sending horses barely strong enough to move their own shadows on a duty in the course of which speed might have been necessary to save their riders’ lives, he will some day find himself on a weak horse as per sample supplied to us, and a score of Matabeles with sharp assegais and a taste for fancy experiments in the torture line after him, with the certainty that he will have to get off and try his individual sprinting powers before reaching a place of safety. Not that there could be the least spice of danger between here and Wilson’s, but that the official who would allow horses which to the most unversed eye are only fit for the sick lines to leave the stable at all, would just as readily send the same variety of mounts on hazardous service.”

*5th June.*— Colonel Plumer’s column, 460 strong, moved off to the country of the Guai River, north–west of Buluwayo.

And Macfarlane’s column of 400 went away to the north.

Spreckley’s column was to make its start next day, but the unexpected happened to prevent it.

At ten o’clock at night, just as Sir Frederick was thinking we had done enough office work for the day, Sir Charles Metcalfe and the American scout Burnham rode up and came into the office, looking a bit dishevelled and torn. They had been riding out in the evening to visit Colonel Beal’s column from Salisbury, which was camped about three miles out of the town. Seeing fires close to the road, and near to where they thought the camp must be, they had ridden up to them, and found themselves in the camp of a large impi of the enemy! They only escaped by making their way home by a détour through the bush. The news seemed almost too improbable to be true, and yet the bearers of it were not men to get excited and bring in a false report.

So I telephoned to a piquet we had at Government House (about two miles out of town) to send a patrol to investigate. But the subsequent reports were not wholly satisfactory, and I roused up Spreckley in the middle of the night to show me the way, and we rather upset the sleep of the inhabitants of Government House by appearing there to make further inquiries at about three in the morning. Nothing satisfactory to be learned there; so back to Buluwayo, and, getting a fresh horse and a police–trooper as guide, I went out again towards Beal’s camp.

There, in the early dawn, I was at last able to see the enemy clearly enough. On the opposite bank of the Umgusa River they were camped in long lines, fires burning merrily, and parties of them going to and from the stream for water. I took my information on to Beal’s camp. I was much taken with the coolness with which the news was received there. It was not above two miles and a half from that of the enemy. The men were ordered to get their breakfasts without delay, and a patrol of a sergeant and two men was sent out to the stream to see if there were good water there, and also (apparently as an after–thought) whether they, too, could see any enemy there. Before we had finished breakfast they returned.

“Well, is it all right? Is there water there?”

“Yes.”

“Is it good water?”

“I couldn’t tell.”

“Why not?”

“Because the Matabele were there, and wouldn’t let us come near.”

So we saddled up and moved off towards the spot to await the arrival of more troops from Buluwayo, for I had sent my police-trooper back with a note to tell them there that “it was good enough,” and asking that Spreckley’s mounted column should be sent out to join us. Presently they came up, followed by a few volunteers in carts who wanted to join in the fun.

Our strength was 250 mounted men, with two guns and an ambulance.

The country was undulating veldt covered with brush, through which a line of mounted men could move at open files.

As we advanced, we formed into line, with both flanks thrown well forward – especially the right flank under Beal, which was to work round in rear of the enemy on to their line of retreat – a duty which was most successfully carried out.

The central part of the line then advanced at a trot straight for the enemy’s position.

The enemy were about 1200 strong, we afterwards found out. They did not seem very excited at our advance, but all stood looking as we crossed the Umgusa stream, but as we began to breast the slope on their side of it, and on which their camp lay, they became exceedingly lively, and were soon running like ants to take post in good positions at the edge of a long belt of thicker bush. We afterwards found that their apathy at first was due to a message from the M’limo, who had instructed them to approach Buluwayo and to draw out the garrison, and to get us to cross the Umgusa, because he (the M’limo) would then cause the stream to open and swallow up every man of us. After which the impi would have nothing to do but walk into Buluwayo and cut up the women and children at their leisure. But something had gone wrong with the M’limo’s machinery, and we crossed the stream without any contretemps. So, as we got nearer to the swarm of black heads among the grass and bushes, their rifles began to pop and their bullets to flit past with a weird little “phit,” “phit,” or a jet of dust and a shrill “wh–e–e–w” where they ricocheted off the ground.

Some of our men, accustomed to mounted infantry work, were now for jumping off to return the fire, but the order was given: “No; make a cavalry fight of it. Forward! Gallop!”

Then, as we came up close, the niggers let us have an irregular, rickety volley, and in another moment we were among them. They did not wait, but one and all they turned to fly, dodging in among the bushes, loading as they ran. And we were close upon their heels, zigzagging through the thorns, jumping off now and then, or pulling up, to fire a shot (we had not a sword among us, worse luck!), and on again.

The men that I was with – Grey’s Scouts – never seemed to miss a shot.

The Matabele as they ran kept stopping behind bushes to fire. Now and again they tried to rally, but whenever a clump of them began to form or tried to stand, we went at them with a whoop and a yell, and both spurs in, and sent them flying. Of course, besides their guns they had their assegais. Several of our horses got some wounds, and one man got a horrid stab straight into his stomach. I saw another of our men fling himself on to a Kafir who was stabbing at him; together they rolled on the ground, and in a twinkling the white man had twisted the spear from its owner’s hand, and after a short, sharp tussle, he drove it through the other’s heart.

In one place one of the men got somewhat detached from the rest, and came on a bunch of eight of the enemy. These fired on him and killed his horse, but he himself was up in a trice, and, using magazine fire, he let them have it with such effect that before they could close on him with their clubs and assegais, he had floored half their number, and the rest just turned and fled.

And farther on a horse was shot, and, in the fall, his rider stunned. The niggers came louping up, grinning at the anticipated bloodshed, but Sergeant Farley, of Grey’s Scouts, was there before them, and hoisting up his comrade on to his horse, got him safe away.

Everywhere one found the Kafirs creeping into bushes, where they lay low till some of us came by, and then they loosed off their guns at us after we had passed.

I had my Colt's repeater with me – with only six cartridges in the magazine, and soon I found I had finished these – so, throwing it under a peculiar tree, where I might find it again, I went on with my revolver. Presently I came on an open stretch of ground, and about eighty yards before me was a Kafir with a Martini–Henry. He saw me, and dropped on one knee and drew a steady bead on me. I felt so indignant at this that I rode at him as hard as I could go, calling him every name under the sun; he aimed, – for an hour, it seemed to me, – and it was quite a relief when at last he fired, at about ten yards distance, and still more of a relief when I realised he had clean missed me. Then he jumped up and turned to run, but he had not gone two paces when he cringed as if some one had slapped him hard on the back, then his head dropped and his heels flew up, and he fell smack on his face, shot by one of our men behind me.

At last I called a halt. Our horses were done, the niggers were all scattered, and there were almost as many left behind us hiding in bushes as there were running on in front.

A few minutes spent in breathing the horses, and a vast amount of jabber and chaff, and then we reformed the line and returned at a walk, clearing the bush as we went.

I had one shave. I went to help two men who were fighting a Kafir at the foot of a tree, but they killed him just as I got there. I was under the tree when something moving over my head caught my attention. It was a gun–barrel taking aim down at me, the firer jammed so close to the tree–stem as to look like part of it. Before I could move he fired, and just ploughed into the ground at my feet.

He did not remain much longer in the tree. I have his knobkerrie and his photo now as mementos.

At length we mustered again at our starting–point, where the guns and ambulance had been left. We found that, apart from small scratches and contusions, we had only four men badly wounded. One poor fellow had his thigh smashed by a ball from an elephant gun, from which he afterwards died. Another had two bullets in his back. Four horses had been killed.

And the blow dealt to the enemy was a most important one. A prisoner told us that the impi was composed of picked men from all the chief regiments of the rebel's forces, and that a great number of the chiefs were present at the fight.

[P.S.– We learned some months afterwards from refugees and surrendered rebels that this was true, and that no less than fifteen headmen had been killed, as well as more than two hundred of their men.]

Of course this was a very one–sided fight, and it sounds rather brutal to anyone reading in cold blood how we hunted them without giving them a chance – but it must be remembered we were but 250 against at least 1200. Lord Wolseley says “when you get niggers on the run, keep them on the run” (this we did, for half a mile beyond the spot where we pulled up, Beal with his column cut in from the flank and bashed them from a new direction), and our only chance of bringing the war to a speedy end is to go for them whenever we get the chance, and hit as hard as ever we can: any hesitation or softness is construed by them as a sign of weakness, and at once restores their confidence and courage. They expect no quarter, because, as they admit themselves, they have gone beyond their own etiquette of war, and have killed our women and children. We found one wounded man who had hanged himself after the fight. This is not an uncommon occurrence in these fights.

[P.S.– I did not at the time fully realise the extraordinary bloodthirsty rage of some of our men when they got hand to hand with the Kafirs, but I not only understood it, but felt it to the full myself later on, when I too had seen those English girls lying horribly mutilated, and the little white children with the life smashed and beaten out of them by laughing black fiends, who knew no mercy.]

Don't think from these remarks that I am a regular nigger–hater, for I am not. I have met lots of good friends among them – especially among the Zulus. But, however good they may be, they must, as a people, be ruled with a hand of iron in a velvet glove; and if they writhe under it, and don't understand the force of it, it is of no use to add more padding – you must take off the glove for a moment and show them the hand. They will then understand and obey. In the present instance

they had been rash enough to pull off the glove for themselves, and were now beginning to find out what the hand was made of.

After the fight I made tracks for Buluwayo, got in in time for late lunch, made up for lost time in the office, and was quite ready to go to bed soon after dinner. But I called in at the club on my way, to have a peep at the wonderfully picturesque collection of warriors, who were, many of them, – most of them in fact, – still in their fighting-kit (for many had no other), talking over the day's doings.

*7th June.*– Rode out early, with a police-orderly to guide me, to inspect the fort at Hope Fountain, ten miles south of Buluwayo, from which one could just see the tops of Matopo Mountains, in which so many of the rebel chiefs are said to be taking up their position. This fort had been attacked about ten days ago, but the enemy never came on with any boldness, and drew off after losing eleven killed. The mission station close by, a very pretty little homestead with nice gardens and trees, had been looted and burnt by the rebels.

I got back to Buluwayo just in time to see Spreckley's column march off to patrol the country north-east of Buluwayo. A fine body of 400 of the roughest, most workman-like fighters one could wish to see. It comprised both infantry and mounted infantry, artillery, and a levy of wild-looking friendly Matabele.

In the afternoon I rode over yesterday's battlefield with Vyvyan, recovered my gun, – which, by the way, Sir Frederick has christened "Rodney," – and photographed the chap who potted me out of the tree.

*8th and 9th June.*– Office work from early morning up to late at night.

*10th June.*– Lunched with Maurice Gifford, who had lost his arm in one of the first fights of the war. He is not really in a fit state to be about, – it still hurts him badly, poor chap, and he is a bit feverish, – but quite anxious to have another go at the enemy. He says he feels the pain as if it were in his hand, whereas the arm was taken off at the shoulder.

News came in from MacFarlane of a skirmish he had had near Redbank.

In the afternoon I rode out with Vyvyan to Taba-s'-Induna, a flat-topped hill that stands up bold and abruptly out of the sea-like veldt ten miles from Buluwayo. It was the place of execution for many of Lobengula's Indunas. Beautiful view from the top over a widespread yellow prairie, with sharp blue mountains on the horizon.

*11th June.*– The hospital, which has a number of wounded men among its sick, stands away at one corner of the town, and is fortified and garrisoned in case of attack. Eight nuns work their lives out nursing there, and the men, if not demonstrative, are to the full appreciative and grateful, and would do anything for them.

Close to the hospital, on a rise, stands the "Eiffel Tower": a skeleton look-out tower about 80 feet high, from which the country round for many miles can be watched. The look-out man to-day says he can see a fight going on in the far distance to the north, apparently somewhere in MacFarlane's direction.

De Moleyns, adjutant of the 4th Hussars, arrived from England, anxious for a job, and we took him on as head of the Remount Department.

*12th June.*– Office as per usual. But vague rumours of what the enemy are doing in the Matopos made me impatient, especially owing to their vagueness. So in the evening I started off with Burnham, the American scout, to go and investigate. Delightful night ride to Kami Fort, sixteen miles south-west of Buluwayo. Jam, cookies, and tea with the two officers there, and a few hours' sleep on that best of beds – the veldt tempered with a blanket and a saddle.

*13th June.*– At 4 a. m. we were off again, Burnham and I and Trooper Bradley of the Mounted Police, who knew this part of the country well.

We got to Mabukutwane Fort – one of the natural koppies strengthened with sandbags, etc. – in time for breakfast. Here we found some excitement, as a transport rider in charge of waggons had just come in from the road, reporting that he had been fired on by Matabele about two miles out. A

patrol was sent out, and we sent warnings to waggons and to the coach, which was due to pass to-day, telling them to wait at the fort till the road had been reconnoitred. It ended in nothing – the patrol returned having found no Matabele nor any spoor of them.

So, having been joined by Taylor, the Native Commissioner, we rode off across the veldt towards the Matopos, some six miles distant from the fort. On arriving at Mapisa's Kraal, a friendly chief, we off-saddled our horses (but never let our guns out of our hands, for even friendlies are not to be too blindly trusted), and, taking two or three of his scouts with us, we climbed up into some koppies which commanded a view of the enemy's position, and of the Matopos generally. Awful country, a weird, jumbled mass of grey granite boulders thickly interspersed with bush, and great jagged mountains.

The Matabele had never before been reduced to the necessity of taking to these mountain fastnesses, but they were the regular refuge of the Makalakas, the original inhabitants of the country, when raided by their Matabele conquerors. This particular stronghold before us, the Inugu Mountain, with its neighbouring gorges and its labyrinths of caves, had been chosen by Lobengula as the safest refuge in the country, and consequently he had made it the home of his favourite queen, Famona.

It is now held by an impi of about a thousand Matabele. Their outposts, in talking with some of Mapisa's spies (they shout to each other at a safe distance across a valley), have said that they mean to draw the white troops on when they come to attack them, till they have got them well inside the gorge under the mountain, and then to "give them snuff."

[P.S.– A month later, as will presently be seen, they tried this on with Laing's and Nicholson's columns.]

While we were staring our eyes out at the position, taking bearings, and making sketches, etc., I suddenly saw a distant cow, and, by getting on to a better rock, I soon discovered a herd of cattle feeding in the valley below the enemy's position. Here was a chance for a lark – to mount, swoop down, and round up the cattle under their very noses, before they had time to interfere! But to my surprise, on mooted the idea, the niggers with us let out that these cattle did not belong to the enemy, but to another friendly chief, Farko, who lived near by.

That the enemy should leave these cattle untouched was a revelation to me, and I then saw that the so-called friendlies were on pretty good terms with the rebels. But for this chance eye-opener – of having, in the first instance, seen a solitary cow in the distance – I might have been led to trust to friendlies and their reports. It was well I didn't.

Having seen all we could, and made a map, Burnham and I started out for home; reached Kami in the middle of the night, and early next day were back in Buluwayo.

Burnham a most delightful companion on such a trip; amusing, interesting, and most instructive. Having seen service against the Red Indians, he brings quite a new experience to bear on the scouting work here. And, while he talks away, there's not a thing escapes his quick-roving eye, whether it is on the horizon or at his feet. We got on well together, and he much approved of the results of your early development in me of the art of "inductive reasoning" – in fact, before we had examined and worried out many little indications in the course of our ride, he had nicknamed me "Sherlock Holmes."

[P.S.– We planned to do much scouting together in the future, but, unfortunately, it never came off, as he was soon afterwards compelled, for domestic reasons, to go down country.]

The following is an extract from a business-like offer I received to-day, one of the developments of war in modern times: —

"We, A – and B –, certified engineers, wish to place our services at the disposal of the Chartered Company in any offensive or defensive operations against the rebels. *Speciality*– Construction of forts, bridges, and dynamite operations. References," etc. etc.

It is another step towards carrying on war by contract.

14th and 15th June.– Office again, up till late into the night. Colonel Bridge arrived with his staff-clerks, and much relieved our pressure of work by taking over the commissariat and transport

arrangements, which are our main anxiety. Indeed, we are on half-rations of tinned meat now; fresh meat unprocurable, and prospects of immediate further supply rather vague.

*16th June.*— Yesterday, with the arrival of Colonel Bridge, our clouds seemed to be lightening up a bit. To-day a thunderclap has come. Telegrams from Salisbury (sent round by Victoria and Macloutsie, owing to the direct wire being cut) tell us of murders of whites in three widely separate parts of Mashonaland. It almost looks as though the Matabele rebellion were repeating itself there. If so, the outlook is very bad indeed. Salisbury is 270 miles from here by road. We have here a number of troops who were sent from Salisbury to help us, and now their want will be acutely felt over there. In Mashonaland they have only one line of road to the coast for their supplies, and if that gets cut, we cannot help them; we have not sufficient for ourselves.

Indeed, if we cannot manage to get up immense supplies within the next two or three months (it takes over a month for a mule-waggon to get here from Mafeking), I don't see how we are going to hold on to the country. The rains may set in in October, and, once they have begun, the transport of supplies and troops becomes impossible; the veldt becomes a bog, and the rivers rise into turgid torrents.

Our only chance of maintaining our hold on the country is to plant outlying posts, and to fill them up with a sufficient stock of food to keep them throughout the four months of the rainy season. And, in the meantime, we must also thoroughly smash up the enemy.

Owing to rinderpest, it seems almost impossible to get sufficient waggons in Cape Colony to bring up the required supplies. So that we're in a quandary. Either we smash up the enemy, and get up supplies for outlying posts before the rains come on, or else we draw in our horns, concentrate nearer to our base, organising our measures for a real effective campaign directly the rains are over. But the loss of prestige, of time, and of property involved in this second course would be deplorable, so we mean to have a good try to gain the first, and win the race against weather, rinderpest, and other bad luck.

*17th June.*— Having heard of some Matabele firing on a party of our men, about three miles out on the Salisbury Road, yesterday, De Moleyns and I took an early morning ride with one of the morning patrols. Started in the dark at 4 a. m., and moved out along that road. Presently we came upon an armed nigger squatting at the roadside, so muffled up in a blanket and a sack that he did not hear us coming. We captured him, and then found that he was a sentry of one of our own outlying "Cape Boys" piquets.

I said to him, "Where is your piquet?"

He replied, with much haughtiness, "I not carry a ticket; I am soldier!"

[*Explanation.*— All ordinary natives have to carry a "ticket" or pass, so that they may not be taken up and shot as spies.]

We went on, but saw no signs of Matabele. At daybreak we got to Beal's camp, had a cup of coffee there with Daly (formerly in the 13th), and got home in time for breakfast, much refreshed by our morning's ride, and especially as we saw, on our way home, paauw, guinea-fowl, hares, and pheasants. Office all day.

More outbreaks telegraphed from Mashonaland. No doubt now that it is rebellion there too.

It is a curious experience sitting with Sir Richard Martin, Lord Grey, and the General, in the telegraph office, and listening to a conversation being ticked to us from Salisbury, some 800 miles away, just as if the sender (Judge Vintcent) were in the next room – the message being a string of startling details of more murders, impis gathering, heroic patrols making dashing rescues, preparations for defence, and state of food supplies and ammunition.

*18th to 21st June.*— Days of office-work, literally from daylight till – well, long, long after dark. Not a scrap of exercise, nor time to write a letter home.

Office work, however interesting it may be, would incline sometimes to become tedious, were it not for rays of humour that dart in from time to time through the overcharged cloud of routine.

Here are some items that have come to us in the past few days, and which have tended to relieve the monotony of the work.

A letter from a lady, who writes direct to the General, runs as follows (she desires information as to the whereabouts of her brother): – “I apply to you direct, in preference to my brother’s commanding officer, because it is said, ‘Vaut mieux s’adresser au bon Dieu qu’ à tons ses saints.’

“If anything has happened to my brother, I hold Mr. Ch – accountable for it, as, but for his playing lickspittle to Oom Kruger – but for his base betrayal of the Johannesburgers, which has made England the laughing-stock of all her enemies, there need have been no kissing at all. Probably the poor natives hoped to be magnanimous, *à la* Kruger, by screwing £25,000 out of each of their prisoners, and that England would follow suit by trying our chief defenders *at bar* as convicts, in spite of a protesting jury.”

Then, from the officer commanding one of the outlying forts, comes a letter to say: “... This being only a small fort, and no fighting to be done, I consider it only a waste of time to remain here. If you cannot place me in a position where active service can be done, I beg respectfully to submit my resignation.” I have had many letters of that kind from various volunteer officers.

Then, from England: “Dear Sir, – Could you kindly give me any details as to the death of my brother Charles. He is supposed to have been eaten by lions about four years ago in Mashonaland.”

My orderly (a volunteer) was not to be found to-day when I wanted him, but a loafer, hanging about the office door, said that the orderly had left word with him that “he was going out to lunch, but would be back soon, in case he were wanted.”

One volunteer trooper, apparently anxious that the routine of soldiering should, in his corps at anyrate, be carried out in its entirety, takes it upon himself to write to me as follows: —

“I beg to request that the following charges may be made the subject of inquiry by court martial:

—  
“(1) I charge the orderly officer, whoever he may be, with neglect of duty, in that he did not visit the guard-room last night when I was there.

“(2) I charge the corporal of the guard with neglect of duty, in that he was absent from the guard-room at 9.32 p. m., at the Spoofery.

“(3) I charge the same corporal of the guard with not officially informing the guard that there was a prisoner in the guard-room.

“(4) I charge the corporal of the guard with using unbecoming language, in that he used the phrase, ‘Why the h – I don’t you know?’ to me.”

Etc. etc. etc.

Another trooper, not quite so enthusiastic, writes to tell me that at his fort the drill and discipline are “*heart-rending*.”

An Italian surgeon writes that he is “anxious to be engaged in the British Army in Matabeleland.” He hopes that the General will “approve his generous intention,” and will “grant him the admission in the army which many persons, not more worthy than him, so easily obtain.”

Among the many interesting experiences of a campaign, carried on, as this one is, under a varied assortment of troops, is that entailed in receiving reports from officers of very diverse training. Some are verbose in the extreme, others are terse to barrenness. But the latter is a most rare fault, and may well be called a fault on the right side. As a rule, reports appear to be proportioned on an inverse ratio to work performed. The man who has done little, tries to make it appear much, by means of voluminous description. I often feel inclined to issue printed copies, as examples to officers commanding columns, of Captain Walton’s celebrated despatch, when, under Admiral Byng, he destroyed the whole of the Spanish fleet off Passaro —

“Sir, – We have taken or destroyed all the Spanish ships on this coast; number as per margin. – Respectfully yours,  
*G. Walton, Capt.*”

There is no superfluous verbosity there.

Vyvyan ill with a very bad throat, and Ferguson away with one of the columns, so I have plenty to keep me occupied.

The outbreak in Mashonaland ever spreading like wildfire, till it covers an area of 500 miles by 200 – some 2000 whites against 18,000 to 20,000 blacks.

We have asked for imperial troops to be sent up without delay, both to Matabeleland and Mashonaland, only to the extent of about 500 in each country, for every nerve will have to be strained to feed even these – but we haven’t a chance of winning our race without them.

It is a great relief to realise that they are on their way, bringing with them their own transport and supplies.

*22nd June.*– Spreckley’s column returned from its three weeks’ patrol without having found the enemy in force, but it broke up his “bits” into smaller pieces, destroyed many kraals, took prisoners, and, best of all, captured much cattle and corn.

*23rd June.*– Dined at Spreckley’s house in the “suburban stands,” as the wooded slope outside the town is termed. A very pretty “paper” house. These “paper” houses are common in Buluwayo – they are really wire-wove, with wooden frames, iron roofs, cardboard walls, with proper fireplaces, windows and doors, verandahs, etc. Just like a stone-built house in appearance, but portable; sent out from Queen Victoria Street in pieces.

Spreckley himself is an ass<sup>1</sup> in one respect, namely, because he did not take up soldiering as his profession instead of gold and pioneering – successful though he has been in this other line. He has all the qualifications that go to make an officer above the ruck of them. Endowed with all the dash, pluck, and attractive force that make a man a born leader of men, he is also steeped in common sense, is careful in arrangement of details, and possesses a temperament that can sing “Wait till the clouds roll by” in crises where other men are tearing their hair.

Owing to all the extra work in the office due to the Mashonaland outbreak, I had been unable to go on a little expedition with Burnham. A rumour had reached us that the natives in the south-west of the country intended rising. Hitherto they had remained quiet, and the road towards Mafeking had not been stopped; but now there appeared the danger of this road being blocked, and of our supplies, etc., being cut off from us. At the western end of the Matopos lived a priest of the M’limo, and the people took their orders from him. If he now were to direct them to rise, our line of communications would be in great danger. So we wanted him captured. The difficulty was that if a large party went there, he would have early intimation of its coming, and would decamp in good time. So a young fellow named Armstrong, the Native Commissioner of that district, and Burnham volunteered to go alone and capture, or, if necessary, shoot him. To-day we had a telegram from Burnham giving the result of it. He had gone to Mangwe, and, accompanied only by Armstrong, he had ridden over to the cave of the local priest of the M’limo – pretended that if the M’limo would render him invulnerable to Matabele bullets he would give him a handsome reward – saw the priest begin to go through the ceremony (so there was no mistake as to his identity), and then shot him. It was a risky game, as in the next valley were camped a large number of natives who had come for a big ceremony with the M’limo the next day. But the two men got away all right, having to gallop for it. The natives never rose to stop the road.

*26th June.*– I had not been outside the office for four days, and was feeling over-boiled with the sedentary work, so after dinner I saddled up and rode off ten miles in the moonlight to Hope

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<sup>1</sup> This was not intended for publication, and if it should happen to meet the eye of the gentleman alluded to, I trust he will be magnanimous enough not to sue me for libel – especially as I make the statement believing it to be true.

Fountain. Here I roused out Pyke, the officer in command. (Had lost an arm in the previous Matabele war when with Forbes' patrol down the Shangani after Lobengula.) He roused out Corporal Herbert, and we rode down in the dark to the Matopos, and had a very interesting look round there in the early morning. I much enjoyed it. Was back in the office by 10.30, all the better for a night out.

Pyke is one of three fine, athletic brothers who are all serving here in different corps.

This evening we had a cheery little dinner at the hotel, to which came Sir Richard Martin, Colonel and Mrs. Spreckley, Captain and Mrs. Selous, Captain and Mrs. Colenbrander – all heroes and heroines of the rebellion.

How Spreckley made us laugh, fooling around the piano as if he were just going to sing!

It is daily a source of wonder to me how the General manages to handle some of the local officers and men. Of course, with the better class it is impossible not to get on well, but there are certain individuals who to any ordinary Imperial officer would be perfectly "impossible." Sir Frederick, however, is round them in a moment, and either coaxes or frightens them into acquiescence as the case demands; but were any general, without his personal knowledge of South Africa and its men, to attempt to take this motley force in hand, I cannot think there would be anything but ructions in a very short space of time. A little tact and give-and-take properly applied reaps a good return from Colonial troops, but the slightest show of domineering or letter-of-the-regulations discipline is apt to turn them crusty and "impossible." A very good instance of the general feeling that seems to influence the local troops is shown in the following letter which the General has received. (The writer of it leaves it to the discretion of the General where to insert commas and stops.)

"To Mr. Frederick Carrington – General.

"Sir Seeing in the papers and news from the North the serious phase that affairs are taking I am willing to raise by your permission a set of Good hard practical colonials here that have seen service Farmers Sons and Chuck my situation and head them off as a Yeomanry Corps I have been under you Sir in the B.B.P (Bechuanaland Border Police) and am well acquainted with the Big gun Drill and a Good Shot with the maxim. We will consider it an honor to stand under you Sir but object to eye glasses and kid gloves otherwise

*"Yrs to command*

*"H – "*

"Eyeglass and kid gloves" standing in the estimation of this and other honest yeomen of the colony for "Imperial officer."

Unfortunately the Colonials have had experience of one class or another of regular officers, which has not suited their taste, and his defects get on their nerves and impress themselves on their minds, and they are very apt to look on such individual as the type of his kind, and if they afterwards meet with others having different attributes, they merely consider them as exceptions which prove the rule.

No doubt there are certain types among us, and our training and upbringing in the service are apt to gradually run us in the groove of one type or another.

The type which perhaps is most of a red rag to the Colonial is the highly-trained officer, bound hand and foot by the rules of modern war, who moves his force on a matured, deliberate plan, with all minutiae correctly prepared beforehand, incapable of change to meet any altered or unforeseen circumstances, and who has a proper contempt for nigger foes and for colonial allies alike.

And there is, on the other hand, the old-woman type, fussy, undecided, running ignorantly into dangers he wots not of; even in a subordinate position his fussiness will not allow him to be still, and so he fiddles about like a clown in the circus, running about to help everybody at everybody's job, yet helping none.

Happily – and the Colonials here are beginning to realise it – these types are not the rule in the service, but the exception. What is now more often met with is the man who calmly smokes, yet works as hard and as keenly as the best of them.

Quick to adapt his measures to the country he is in, and ready to adopt some other than the drill-book teachings where they don't apply with his particular foe. Understanding the principle of give-and-take without letting all run slack. The three C's which go to make a commander – coolness, common sense, and courage – are the attributes *par excellence* of the proper and more usual type of the British officer. For be it understood that “coolness” stands for absence of flurry, pettiness, and indecision; “common sense” for tactics, strategy, and all supply arrangements; while “courage” means the necessary dash and leadership of men.

## CHAPTER IV

### Scouting

**26th June to 14th July**

Single Scouts preferable to Patrols – How to conceal yourself – Skirt–Dancing a Useful Aid to evading an Enemy – The Enemy’s Ruses for catching us – The Minutiæ of Scouting – The Matopo Hills – Positions of the Enemy – A Typical Patrol – The Value of Solitary Scouting – Its Importance in Modern War – The Elementary Principles of Scouting.

*14th July.*– A bit of a break in the diary, not because there was nothing doing, but just the opposite.

For one thing, we have been pretty busy in sending off three small columns to the assistance of Mashonaland. And also, personally, I have been fully occupied in another way: that is, in repeating my experiences of the 26th June, and frequently by day, and very often by night, I have been back in the Matopos, locating the enemy’s positions. I go sometimes with one or two whites, sometimes with two or three black companions; but what I prefer is to go with my one nigger–boy, who can ride and spoor and can take charge of the horses while I am climbing about the rocks to get a view.

It may seem anomalous, but it is in the very smallness of the party that the elements of success and safety lie. A small party is less likely to attract attention; there are fewer to extricate or to afford a target, if we happen to get into a tight place; and I think that one is more on the alert when one is not trusting to others to keep the look–out.

Then we have a nice kind of enemy to deal with. Except on special occasions, they don’t like going about in the dark, and cannot understand anybody else doing it; and they sleep like logs, and keep little or no look–out at night. Thus one is able to pass close through their outposts in the dark, to reconnoitre their main positions in the early dawn (when they light up fires to thaw away their night’s stiffness), and then to come away by some other route than that by which you entered.

So long as you are clothed, as we are in non–conspicuous colours, you can escape detection even from their sharp eyes; but you must not move about – directly you move, they see you, and take steps to catch you. Half the battle in keeping yourself hidden, while yet seeing everything yourself, is to study the colour of your background; thus, if clothed in things that match the rocks in colour, you can boldly sit out in front of a rock, with little risk of detection, so long as you remain motionless; if you are hiding in the shadow alongside of a rock or bush, take care that your form thus darkened is not silhouetted against a light background behind you. To show even your hand on a skyline would, of course, be fatal to your concealment.

[*P.S.*– Do not wear any bright colours about you. I noticed that after I had been on the sick list and resumed my scouting expeditions, the enemy caught sight of me much more quickly than they used to, though I took just as much care, and remained just as motionless; and I then came to the conclusion that this was due to the fact that I had, in accordance with the doctor’s advice, taken to wearing a flannel cummerbund wound round my waist – and the only flannel at that time procurable was of a brilliant red; and this was what caught their eye.]

Of course, anything liable to glitter or shine is fatal to concealment; rifle, pistol, field–glasses, wrist–watch, buckles, and buttons should be dulled, abolished, or held in such a way as not to catch the rays of the sun by day or of the moon by night.

For efficient scouting in rocky ground, in the dry season, indiarubber-soled shoes are essential; with these you can move in absolute silence, and over rocks which, from their smoothness or inclination, would be impassable with boots.

It is almost impossible to obliterate your spoor, as, even if you brush over your footprints, the practised eye of the native tracker will read your doings by other signs; still, it is a point not to be lost sight of for a minute when getting into position for scouting, and a little walking backwards, doubling on one's tracks over rocky ground, lighting a fire where you are not going to cook your food, or one of an hundred similar subterfuges may often relieve you from the attentions of a too-inquisitive enemy.

When they have found you watching them, they will not, as a rule, come boldly at you, fearing that you are merely a lure to draw them on into some ambuscade or trap, – for that is one of their own pet games to play, – but they will work round to get on to the track you have made in getting to your positions. Having found this, and satisfied themselves that you are practically alone, their general rule is to lie in ambush near the track, ready to catch you on your return. Naturally one never returns by the same path. (*P.S.*– Once I had to do it, later on, at Wedzas, when there was no other way, and nearly paid the penalty.)

Sometimes they try to shoot or to catch one; but so long as one keeps moving about, they do not seem to trust much to their marksmanship; and I have heard them shouting to each other, “Don't shoot at the beast, catch him by the hands, catch him by the hands!” Then they would come clambering over the rocks, but clambering awkwardly – for, lithe, and active though they be, the Matabele are not good mountaineers, especially in that part of it which Montenegriens say is the most difficult (possibly because they themselves shine pre-eminently at it), namely, in getting rapidly downhill. Consequently, if one is wearing indiarubber-soled shoes (not hobnailed boots, for with them you merely skate about the slippery boulders), it is not a difficult matter to outpace them, provided you have the natural gift or requisite training for “placing” your feet. I am a fair blunderer in most things, but I was taken in hand in the days of my youth by a devotee of the art of skirt-dancing, and never, till I was forced by dark-brown two-legged circumstances to skip from rock to rock in the Matopos, did I fully realise the value of what I then learned, namely, the command of the feet.

The enemy are also full of tricks and ruses for catching us by luring us into ambuscades. Thus they will show scouts, cattle, women, and, at night, fires, in the hope of our coming close to capture or investigate, and so putting ourselves in their hands. But even if we were so simple as to be tempted, we should probably see something of their spoor which would put us on our guard. And in this respect the stupidity of the native is almost incredible; he gathers his information almost entirely by spooring, and yet it is only occasionally that he seems to remember that his own feet are all the time writing their message to his enemies. Now and again he thinks of it, and leaps across a path or sandy patch; but I suppose that, knowing the hopelessness of trying effectually to conceal his trail, he has acquired the habit of disregarding its importance.

There is naturally a strong attraction in reconnoitring, for, apart from the fun of besting the enemy, the art of scouting is in itself as interesting as any detective work.

It is almost impossible to describe all the little signs that go to make up information for one when scouting. It is like reading the page of a book. You can tell your companion – say a man who cannot read – that such and such a thing is the case.

“How do you know?” he asks.

“Because it is written here on this page.”

“Oh! How do you make that out?”

Then you proceed to spell it out to him, letters that make words, words that make sentences sentences that make sense. In the same way, in scouting, the tiniest indications, such as a few grains of displaced sand here, some bent blades of grass there, a leaf foreign to this bit of country, a buck startled from a distant thicket, the impress of a raindrop on a spoor, a single flash on the mountain-side, a far-off yelp of a dog, – all are letters in the page of information you are reading, and whose

sequence and aggregate meaning, if you are a practised reader, you grasp at once without considering them as separate letters and spelling them out – except where the print happens to be particularly faint. And that is what goes to make scouting the interesting, the absorbing game that it is.

A small instance will show my meaning as to what information can be read from trifling signs.

The other day, when out with my native scout, we came on a few downtrodden blades of common grass; this led us on to footprints in a sandy patch of ground. They were those of women or boys (judging from the size) on a long journey (they wore sandals), going towards the Matopos. Suddenly my boy gave a “How!” of surprise, and ten yards off the track he picked up a leaf – it was the leaf of a tree that did not grow about here, but some ten or fifteen miles away; it was damp, and smelt of Kaffir beer. From these signs it was evident that women had been carrying beer from the place where the trees grew towards the Matopos (they stuff up the mouth of the beer-pots with leaves), and they had passed this way at four in the morning (a strong breeze had been blowing about that hour, and the leaf had evidently been blown ten yards away). This would bring them to the Matopos about five o’clock. The men would not delay to drink up the fresh beer, and would by this time be very comfortable, not to say half-stupid, and the reverse of on the *qui vive*; so that we were able to go and reconnoitre more nearly with impunity – all on the strength of information given by bruised grass and a leaf.

There should have been no reason for my going out to get information in this way had we had reliable native spies or fully trained white scouts. But we find that these friendly natives are especially useless, as they have neither the pluck nor the energy for the work, and at best are given to exaggerating and lying; and our white scouts, though keen and plucky as lions, have never been trained in the necessary intricacies of mapping and reporting. Thus, it has now fallen to my lot to be employed on these most interesting little expeditions.

Under present conditions we, staff and special service officers, have to turn our hand to every kind of job as occasion demands, and one man has to do the ordinary work of half a dozen different offices. It is as though, the personnel of a railway having been suddenly reduced by influenza or other plague just when the bank holiday traffic was on, a few trained staff were got from another company temporarily to work it. We find a number of porters, station-masters, cleaners, firemen, etc. available, but we have to put in a lot of odd work ourselves to make the thing run; at one minute doing the traffic management, at the next driving an engine, here superintending clearing-house business, then acting as pointsmen, and so on.

It makes it all the more interesting, and in this way I have dropped in for the scouting work.

The net result of our scouting to date is that we have got to know the nature of the country and the exact positions of the six different rebel impis in it, and of their three refuges of women and cattle. Maps have been lithographed accordingly, and issued to all officers for their guidance. These maps have sketches of the principal mountains to guide the officers in finding the positions of the enemy.

The Matopo district is a tract of intricate broken country, containing a jumble of granite-boulder mountains and bush-grown gorges, extending for some sixty miles by twenty. It lies to the south of Buluwayo, its nearest point being about twenty miles from that town. Along its northern edge, in a distance of about twenty-five miles, the six separate impis of the enemy have taken up their positions, with their women and cattle bestowed in neighbouring gorges.

On the principle “*Gutta cavat lapidem non vi sed saepe cadendo*,” we have taken innumerable little peeps at them, and have now “marked down” these impis and their belongings in their separate strongholds, a result that we could never have gained had we gone in strong parties.

Commencing at the western end, near the Mangwe road is the stronghold of the Inugu Mountain (see A in map), a very difficult place to tackle, with its cliffs, caves, and narrow gorges. The impi occupies the mountain, while the women and cattle are in the neighbouring Famona valley.

Five miles N.E. of this is the Chilili valley (B), in which are women and cattle of Babyan's impi. This impi is located deep in the hills near Isibula's Kraal on the Kantol Mountain (D); while Babyan himself, and probably the priest of the M'limo, are in a neighbouring valley at (C).

Eighteen miles to the eastward, eight miles south of Dawson's Store on the Umzingwane River, we come to a bold peak (F), that is occupied by Inyanda's people, with a valley behind it (E), in which are Sikombo's women and cattle.

A couple of miles farther west, Sikombo's impi is camped behind a dome-shaped mountain (G) close to the Tuli road.

On the west side of this road Umlugulu's impi was stationed when we first began our reconnaissance, but he moved nearer to Sikombo at (H), with Mnyakavula close by on (K). Each impi numbered roughly between one and two thousand men. Their outposts were among the hills along the northern bank of the Umzingwana River. We used to pass between these by night, arriving near the strongholds at daybreak.

The following account, taken from the *Daily Chronicle*, gives an idea of what one meets with when out on reconnaissance with a patrol: —

“Is it the cooing of doves that wakes me from dreamland to the stern reality of a scrubby blanket and the cold night air of the upland veldt? A plaintive, continuous moan, moan, reminds me that I am at one of our outpost forts beyond Buluwayo, where my bedroom is under the lee of the sail (waggon tilt) which forms the wall of the hospital. And through the flimsy screen there wells the moan of a man who is dying. At last the weary wailing slowly sobs itself away, and the suffering of another mortal is ended. He is at peace. It is only another poor trooper gone. Three years ago he was costing his father so much a year at Eton; he was in the eleven, too – and all for this.

“I roll myself tighter in my dew-chilled rug, and turn to dream afresh of what a curious world I'm in. My rest is short, and time arrives for turning out, as now the moon is rising. A curious scene it is, as here in shadow, there in light, close-packed within the narrow circuit of the fort, the men are lying, muffled, deeply sleeping at their posts. It's etiquette to move and talk as softly as we are able, and even harsh-voiced sentries drop their challenge to a whisper when there is no doubt of one's identity. We give our horses a few handfuls of mealies, while we dip our pannikins into the great black 'billy,' where there's always cocoa on the simmer for the guard. And presently we saddle up, the six of us, and lead our horses out; and close behind us follow, in a huddled, shivering file, the four native scouts, guarding among them two Matabele prisoners, handcuffed wrist to wrist, who are to be our guides.

“Down into the deep, dark kloof below the fort, where the air strikes with an icy chill, we cross the shallow spruit, then rise and turn along its farther bank, following a twisting, stony track that leads down the valley. Our horses, though they purposely are left unshod, make a prodigious clatter as they stumble adown the rough, uneven way. From force of habit rather than from fear of listening enemies, we drop our voices to a whisper, and this gives a feeling of alertness and expectancy such as would find us well prepared on an emergency. But we are many miles as yet from their extremest outposts, and, luckily for us, these natives are the soundest of sleepers, so that one might almost in safety pass with clattering horses within a quarter of a mile of them.

“There must be some merit in wrapping up your head when cold, – even at the expense of your nether limbs, – for here in Southern Africa the natives have identically the same way as the men of Northern India have of keeping up their warmth, and as they feel the cold increase, so do they 'peel' their legs to find the wherewithal to further muffle up their heads. The keen crispness of the air is in keeping with our spirits, as, all awake, we trek along the hazy veldt. And what a lot of foes one sees when one is looking out for them! Surely that's a man – yes – no – an upright bush! Ah, there! I saw one move. It is but the sprig of a nearer tree deluding a too-watchful eye; the Kaffirs do not move about as a rule alone at night, while if one is seen, you may be sure there is a party close at hand, and so one needs to keep a very sharp look-out. By going thus at night, we are hoping that

we may slip past the Matabele outposts stationed on the hills, and so gain the country that we want to see beyond. Were we to attempt this feat by day, or with a larger party, we should undoubtedly attract attention and have to take a longish circuit. As it is, we make our way for some ten miles along this valley, keeping off the stony path and in the grass, so as to deaden sound as far as possible. High above on either hand the hills loom dark against the stars, and on their summits our enemy's outposts, we know, are quietly sleeping.

“Now and again we cross a transverse donga or tributary watercourse that runs into our stream, the donga sometimes rising to the dignity of a ravine with steep and broken sides. And when we have found a place, and safely crossed it, we turn and approach it from the other side, so that should we happen later on to be pursued and want to get across it in a hurry, we shall know the landmarks that should guide us to the ‘drift.’ The stars are palpitating now and striving hard to increase their gleam, which means that dawn is at hand. The hills along our left (we are travelling south) loom darker now against the paling sky. Before us, too, we see the hazy blank of the greater valley into which our present valley runs. Suddenly there's a pause, and all our party halts. Look back! there, high up on a hill, beneath whose shadow we have passed, there sparkles what looks like a ruddy star, which glimmers, bobs, goes out, and then flares anew. It is a watch-fire, and our foes are waking up to warm themselves and to keep their watch. Yonder on another hill sparks up a second fire, and on beyond, another. They are waking up, but all too late; we've passed them by, and now are in their ground. Forward! We press on, and ere the day has dawned we have emerged from out the defile into the open land beyond. This is a wide and undulating plain, some five miles across to where it runs up into mountain peaks, the true Matopos. We turn aside and clamber up among some hills just as the sun is rising, until we reach the ashes of a kraal that has been lately burned. The kraal is situated in a cup among the hills, and from the koppies round our native scouts can keep a good look-out in all directions. Here we call a halt for breakfast, and after slackening girths, we go into the cattle kraal to look for corn to give our horses. (The Kaffirs always hide their grain in pits beneath the ground of the ‘cattle kraal’ or yard in which the oxen are herded at night.) Many of the grain-pits have already been opened, but still are left half-filled, and some have not been touched – and then in one – well, we cover up the mouth with a flat stone and logs of wood. The body of a girl lies doubled up within. A few days back a party of some friendlies, men and women, had revisited this kraal, their home, to get some food to take back to their temporary refuge near our fort. The Matabele saw them, and just when they were busy drawing grain, pounced in upon them, assegaing three, – all women, – and driving off the rest as fast as they could go. This was but an everyday incident of outpost life.

“And having fed our horses, each of us now got his ‘billy’ out, – a ‘billy’ (cooking-tin) is carried here by every officer and trooper in a case upon his saddle, – and, having lit a fire, we got our coffee boiled, and breakfast under way. Then two of us, taking with us our two prisoners, clamber up a koppie, from whose top we hope to get a view of the enemy's country. There is something ludicrous in, and yet one cannot laugh at, this miserable pair. Linked wrist to wrist, they move as would a pair of sullen Siamese twins. The grass is prickly hereabouts, and both want to keep to the tiny goat-track that we are following, and so they have to sidle up like crabs, going hand in hand along it. At length we gain the top; there is a splendid panorama, and now that the sun is well up, the mountains out across the plain look but a few hundred yards away, so clear is every rock, so deep the shadows. The prisoners have no hesitation in telling us exactly where their friends are camped upon the mountains, and where they keep their women and their cattle. We sit and stare for half an hour, and then agree that, having come so far without accident, we may as well go farther, and get a nearer view of these redoubtable strongholds. We return down to our party, and as we descend, we remember that our native scouts and the prisoners have had a pretty long walk as it is. They had shown us what we had come out to see, and we now proposed to send them back.

“So, having seen them shuffling homeward, we turned our horses' heads towards the mountains, and continued our way across the open valley. On and on, keeping everywhere a bright look-out

against surprise. The veldt was rolling grassy downs, all covered, sometimes sparsely, sometimes densely, with bushes, – mostly thorns. Every open speck of sand, every track, was keenly scrutinised for ‘spoor’ (or tracks of men), and though there was not a soul to be seen about the veldt, the signs of their propinquity were here too glaring to be missed.

“Leaving our horses, with the remainder of the men, well hidden behind a rise, we two walked on on foot, each carrying a rifle with him. It was an anxious time, as very soon the bush had shut us out of sight of our support, but still we kept along, anxious to gain the summit of a rounded, rocky hill, whence we could see all round, and so foresee all danger.

“Now, on the paths before us were fresh tracks of an ox, behind whom had walked a man with naked feet, and going a little lame on one – the left toes dragged, he used a stick. They had passed along before sunrise, because across the tracks there ran the spoor of guinea-fowl heading towards their feeding-ground in yonder patch of maize. A single ox thus driven in the night assuredly meant a pack-ox smuggling in supplies to one of the rebel strongholds. More paths converged into the one we followed, bringing more and more people, women’s feet and children’s, oxen and donkeys, all fresh, and heading in the same direction.

“Then, mounting on the rocks, we followed with our eyes the direction of the path through thicker bush until it reached a solitary mountain. There we could see a thin wreath of smoke curling up from the bush, and, looking through our powerful telescope, we soon could see some other fires high up the hillside close to some mighty caves. Dogs were barking, cattle lowing, at the back of one particular shoulder of the hill; and while we stared to try and distinguish figures in the rocks, a sudden flash up near the mountain-top just caught our eye. Then, focusing the glass upon it, soon we saw the dark brown figures of some twenty natives squatting up about the skyline, and the frequent glint and sparkle showed they carried guns and assegais. Nearer and nearer we crept, gaining another koppie, whence we had a better view, and from here we marked the line that our attacking parties ought to take, and where to post our guns with best advantage. We might have stayed there longer, for it was a tempting spectacle to sit and watch. But the niggers in the hills are calling to each other, evidently suspicious, if not actually aware of our presence – and they have eyes as strong as telescopes. Now some crows fly startled from the bush a few hundred yards to our right. Some one is moving there! Up springs a plover screaming farther on – they’re on the move. We have seen all that we want to see. To stay in one place for long when scouting is risky at any time; to-day it looks even dangerous. So we quietly slip away – not by the path we came – for that is the way you run into your enemy’s ambuscades.

“Then, as we went along, a novel footprint caught our eye, and struck us much as Friday’s must have struck old Crusoe. A deep indented hollow of the fore part of a foot showed plainly in the grass to one side of the path, heading as to cross it, and in the grass beyond the other side the deep indent was seen of a heel in the earth. This was the spoor of a man, running much in the same direction as ourselves, yet wishing to avoid notice, because he jumped the path. Evidently a messenger going out the way we had come, and knowing of our presence there, and on his way to warn the outposts, through whom we had passed in the dark, to catch us on our homeward road. Our horses now had had their second feed, the men had had a kind of meal, and so we started on again. We had to visit two more hills, but found them both unoccupied. And then we turned our heads for home. Caution became more than ever necessary now. There was only left the short afternoon of daylight, our horses were no longer over fresh, and we had five-and-twenty miles to go, ten of them along a defile valley. So with an advanced file sent well ahead, and one dropped well in rear, we journeyed on, each man keeping an ever-restless, bright look-out.

“And though we talked and chatted from time to time for many a weary mile, you never saw your neighbour’s eyes look at you for a moment. While talking, one had still to keep one’s eyes afield. And what a mixture in our little band of eight! Under the similar equipment of cocked-up Boer or cowboy hat, with ragged shirt and strong cord pants, with cartridge-bandolier, and belt from which

hung knife and pipe, tobacco-bag and purse, all grimy and unkempt, and sunburnt to a rich, dark brick colour, each individual was an interesting study in himself. Here is one with *pince-nez*– (*pince-nez* on a trooper!) – a Cambridge man of highest education, who thought he would take to farming in Rhodesia; but his plans are interrupted by the war, and while that lasts he takes his place, like others, in the ranks. Beside him rides a late A.B. seaman in the Royal Navy, a fine young fellow, full of pluck, who will press on where devils fear to tread, but he is disappointing as a scout, for, after having been close up to the enemy, he cannot tell how they are posted, what their strength, or any other points that the leader wants to know. This other man an architect, and yon a gold-pro prospector – in fact, there's a variety enough among them to suit almost any taste.

“The sun has set and darkness has drawn on before we are well out of the defile; but we are now beyond the rebel outposts, and getting nearer home, so there's nothing much to – bang! phit! – and a bullet flits just over our heads! It came from behind; we halt and hear the clatter of hoofs as the man who was left as rearguard comes galloping up the road. A moment later he appears in the dusk rounding the next turn. He no sooner sees us than he halts, dismounts, drops on one knee, takes aim, and fires straight at us. We shout and yell, but as he loads to fire again, we scatter, and push on along the road, and he comes clattering after us. The explanation is that nervousness, increased by darkness coming on, has sent the man a little off his head, and, ludicrous though it be, it is a little unpleasant for us. None of his comrades care to tackle him. ‘It is a pity to shoot him,’ ‘His horse is tired and cannot catch us up,’ and ‘He'll be all right as soon as he has got over the first attack of fright’; and so we leave him to follow us, keeping a respectful distance. At length the fires twinkle ahead, and, tired and hungry, we get back to camp.

“At dawn our missing man turned up – without his horse, it had dropped dead from fatigue. He had a wondrous tale of how he had pursued a host of enemies. The sole reward he got was a ducking in the spruit.”

A small party such as that mentioned in this account of a scouting expedition is often necessary, as in this case, for ensuring the safety of the scouts in getting to and from their work through defiles and the like, where it might happen that the way would have to be forced past the enemy's outposts. But once on their ground, the escort should be carefully concealed. Their work is over for the time being, and the essential part of the expedition, that is, the scouting by one or two trained individuals, has commenced.

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