

# DU MOULIN EUGÈNE

Two Years on Trek: Being Some  
Account of the Royal Sussex  
Regiment in South Africa

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**Some Account of the Royal**  
**Sussex Regiment in South Africa**

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# **Louis Eugène Du Moulin Two Years on Trek: Being Some Account of the Royal Sussex Regiment in South Africa**

## **PREFACE**

*Louis Eugène du Moulin was of French descent. By birth he was a New Zealander. He passed through Sandhurst and entered the army in 1879, joining the 107th Regiment – now the Second Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment. With this battalion all his service was spent, until his promotion in 1899 as second in command of the First Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment (the old 35th).*

*He served in the Black Mountain Campaign of 1888, in the Chin-Lushai and Manipur expeditions of 1889-91, and in the Tirah Campaign of 1897-98. Alike among the dark pine woods of the Himalayas, in the dense jungle of Manipur, or on the bleak, stony ridges of the Hazara country the name of du Moulin became a byword in the Regiment, and far beyond the Regiment, for*

*restless energy, never-failing resource and cool daring. He became known all over India as a musketry expert. Many of his ideas were adopted, and are in universal use by those who may never have heard his name.*

*Perhaps his real genius was for organization. This quality came conspicuously into notice in South Africa during the war. Many men who served in the 21st Brigade under General Bruce Hamilton had reason to bless the forethought and unstinted labour of the man who carried out so thoroughly the idea of the Brigade commander, and supplied the Brigade with those welcome additions to bully beef and biscuit which were obtainable at the Brigade Canteen. Often after a hard day's march and a tough fight have I admired the unselfish spirit in which, disdaining fatigue, he would set to work with his coat off to open stores and arrange the wagons lighted with "dips," which served as a "coffee shop" for famishing Tommy.*

*A tall, spare man, with keen, dark eyes, a courageous nose and a harsh-toned voice – such was the outward du Moulin. Feared not a little, loved greatly by those under him, afraid of no one, despising precedent and precaution, dependent only on his own iron will and keen intellect, he had a brilliant career before him when he fell gloriously at Abraham's Kraal on January 28th, 1902. He had gone through the campaign from the advance to Pretoria of Lord Roberts' army, down to the pursuit of De Wet and of the broken commandos after De Wet's time, without a wound, and, as far as I can remember, without a day's sickness – and*

*with very few days' rest from marching and fighting.*

*He always knew what it was he wanted and how to get it, and how to make others help him to this end.*

*One anecdote I may here relate: —*

*Worn out with much marching, ragged and hungry, the half battalion under du Moulin halted at Kroonstad to refit. Supplies, and especially clothing and boots, were hard to get. Some tired subaltern returned, repulsed from the Ordnance Store, empty handed.*

*The matter quickly reached du Moulin's ears, and he disappeared for what seemed a few minutes. Presently out of a cloud of red dust emerged a mule wagon at a hand gallop. Standing up, driving, cracking a long whip and yelling at the Kaffirs to clear the road, came "Mullins," as he was familiarly known to all. His grey regulation shirt was rolled up to the elbow, showing a pair of red muscular arms like copper wire. He shouted as he turned his team into the camp, and we hurried to his wagon, to have bundles of new clothes, white shiny rolls of waterproof sheets, and thick soft blankets rapidly allotted to our men; and to save time (for we were moving next morning) "Mullins" himself hurled out the bundles into our arms.*

*At another time, when we were at Ventersburg Road Station in one of the brief intervals of rest allowed by Boers who blew up the railway line three times a week (this was in 1900), the siding leading to the dock for entraining horses or cattle was completely blocked by the burnt remains of a train of trucks, rusty*

*and apparently immovable.*

*The railway staff smiled incredulously when du Moulin offered to remove the entire train of trucks. Without cranes or appliances they declared it was impossible.*

*Collecting all the spare rails, sleepers and fish-plates that could be found about the station yard, du Moulin started work, and a branch railway some 100 yards long was quickly laid leading into the veldt, with proper points connecting it with the siding. A hundred willing hands hauled at the ropes – the rusty axles, well greased, revolved. In half a day the siding was clear, and the ruined trucks were standing on the veldt, where they probably stand to this day!*

*Another picture of du Moulin under fire, and I have done.*

*On the 12th of June, 1900, at Diamond Hill, "B" Company was sent to support the three companies of the Royal Sussex under du Moulin, about midday. These three companies were lying under the scanty shelter of a few rocks at the edge of the flat-topped hill facing the main Boer position, at a distance of about 900 yards. The hail of bullets was incessant, the noise of guns and thousands of rifles deafening. As we arrived breathless, having crossed the 200 yards of flat open ground amid a "rush" of bullets, I sought du Moulin to ask where we were most wanted. He was standing up, a conspicuous figure amidst a "feu d'enfer" – pounding with the butt of a rifle a prostrate man, who would not move from the imagined shelter of a stone about as big as a Dutch cheese, and who could not see to fire from his position.*

*I got a very curt, lurid rejoinder, and promptly subsided behind a very inadequate rock myself.*

*Colonel du Moulin was shot through the heart, leading a charge against the Boers who had rushed his camp. Always in front – always the first to face the foe. "Felix opportunitati mortis." May he rest in peace.*

*J. G. PANTON.*

*Crete,*

*November, 1906.*



# EXPLANATORY

It was the design of Col. du Moulin to write an account of the doings of the Royal Sussex Regiment in South Africa, which should both serve to remind those of the Regiment who went through the campaign of the incidents in which they took part, and should also put on record another chapter of that Regimental History, made through many years in many lands, of which all who serve in the Regiment may be so justly proud.

During the months of November and December, 1900, he found, in the comparative quiet of the occupation of Lindley, an opportunity of completing his account up to date. His manuscript is typed (he managed to obtain a machine from somewhere) upon the only paper available – the backs of invoice sheets from a store in the town.

From the evacuation of Lindley in January, 1901, to his death a year later, Col. du Moulin was far too much occupied with his work in the field to do more than make a few notes for his book. And it is from these notes of his, and from the diaries, letters, and personal reminiscences of other Officers, that the later chapters have been compiled.

It has been thought better to leave Col. du Moulin's work practically untouched, although it was never subjected by him to a final revision, and although he had no opportunity of modifying anything he wrote, in the light of subsequent history. As it stands,

it gives a vivid picture of events that had only just occurred – drawn with a firm hand, while the impression was fresh upon the author's mind.

In compiling the subsequent chapters, the object has been merely to give a slight sketch of the experiences of the Regiment during the latter half of the war. It has not been attempted (nor would it have been possible) to enter into detail to the same extent as was done by Col. du Moulin, writing upon the spot. If one or two scenes are preserved, it is the utmost that can be hoped.

The Appendices contain the stories of the 13th and 21st M.I., on which several officers and a number of men of the Regiment were serving. The former is kindly contributed by Capt. G. P. Hunt, of the Royal Berkshire Regiment.

*H. F. Bidder.*

*December, 1906.*

# **CHAPTER I**

## **TO BLOEMFONTEIN**

**Malta – Orders for South Africa – The Pavonia –  
Cape Town – Port Elizabeth – Bloemfontein – Glen**

The senior regiment in the 1st Brigade in the 1st Army Corps at Aldershot and the first regiment on the roster for foreign service at the time war was declared in South Africa in 1899, we might fairly have expected to be one of the earliest regiments to embark for active service; but it was not to be. We saw our old friends in General FitzRoy Hart's Brigade – The Black Watch, the Welsh, the Northhamptons – and almost every other regiment in Aldershot receive their orders to mobilise, and with heavy hearts we proceeded to pack our kits for – Malta!

Even in this festive island our ill luck seemed at first to follow us unceasingly, and, notwithstanding all our field training at Mellieha and the numerous occasions upon which we defended Naxaro against overwhelming hordes of invaders, still we were not among the chosen. Our old friends the Sherwood Foresters took themselves off also, via the Suez Canal, for the seat of war, with a nice fat draft of seasoned soldiers from their Second Battalion, and we were left lamenting, to troop the Colour on the

Palace Square, and to go on guard with five nights in bed.

The very bad news which arrived soon after the opening of the campaign in Natal had a depressing effect on all of us, which soldiering in Malta is not calculated to remove, and any fresh news issued by Bartolo, the printer, was eagerly sought after. A glimmer of excitement was caused by the offer of His Excellency the Governor to the Secretary of State to provide a fully equipped company of Mounted Infantry from the troops in garrison, of which company the Royal Sussex hoped to form a large part; but in this again we were doomed to disappointment, as we were not even asked to send in our names.

Things were in this unhappy state – everyone with long faces and villainous tempers – when the New Year was ushered in and found us at Verdala Barracks. From there, towards the middle of the month, five companies were sent to the new barracks at Imtarfa and the other three were put out into various holes and corners at Zabbar, Salvatore and other undesirable residences. We all thought this was putting the climax on our misfortunes, but we little knew then that in another five days we were to be raised to the seventh heaven of delight by the news that we were at last selected to proceed to South Africa.

This welcome news was hurriedly brought out to the exiles at Imtarfa by Captain Aldridge, his face fairly beaming again, and shortly afterwards we heard that we were to go home to be mobilised for active service, and that we were to be relieved in Malta by the Royal Berkshire regiment. Immediately everything

was hurry and bustle, and we were all writing to our friends and making our arrangements for a prolonged absence, except, alas, some of the younger soldiers, who could not reasonably expect to fulfil the conditions of being over 20 and having completed a year's service.

Shortly afterwards the glad tidings arrived that we were to mobilise in Malta, that our reservemen would join us there, and that we should proceed straight to the Cape.

On one occasion, whilst at Imtarfa, when an unusually stirring account of the battle of Colenso appeared in the *Daily Telegraph*, one of the officers went down to the Recreation Room at night and read it to the men. Mr. Bennett Burleigh, the writer of the vivid piece of word painting, would have been flattered if he could have seen the great crowd of men in the room, absolutely still and motionless, following with breathless interest the splendid description of the gallant behaviour of our gunners on this fatal day, when they bravely tried to work their guns within 600 yards of the enemy's riflemen, and the magnificent story of how young Roberts, Captain Congreve and others endeavoured to save the guns.

On the 16th of January after a prolonged field day over the rocks beyond the Victoria Lines, which lasted from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., we marched off to Pembroke to execute the annual course of musketry, which we succeeded in doing in some of the most villainous weather which it has ever been a soldier's lot to experience. This concluded, back the five companies went

to Imtarfa, being relieved by the other three from Headquarters; and now a constant succession of field days and route marches of a more or less interesting character opened for us and continued until the 12th of February, when the whole regiment was collected together on the Cottonera side of the water, and those who were not to go to the Cape were definitely weeded out.

Sir Francis Grenfell inspected the Battalion on parade at Zabbar Gate a day or two before we embarked, and was good enough to make some very complimentary remarks. The "Pavonia," a big Cunarder, which arrived early on the morning of the 19th of February with our reservemen on board and no end of our mobilisation stores, impressed us very favourably, and our liking for her as a comfortable ship increased with our acquaintance of her.

She was crowded with old comrades and new friends, both officers and men, and we gave each other a cheery reception – not quite so cheery, however, as the send-off from Chichester, which we had all heard about by the mail a few days previously, and regarding which a large amount of good natured chaff continued to pass for a long time. Many is the time since then that some of us have longed, and with some reason too, for one of the Mayor's famous pork-pies!

The reservemen, especially those of Section D, were a fine lot, and made one's heart swell with pride to think that at last the reward of years of parades and routine would be reaped, and that a battalion of thoroughly seasoned soldiers, second to none

serving Her Majesty, was to have an opportunity of showing what it could do in the field.

Major Scaife, who had been left at home on the sick list when the battalion embarked for Malta, but who had succeeded in passing a medical board, was on the "Pavonia," as well as Captain Gilbert and Lieut. Wroughton, of the Second Battalion. Both these had been attached to this Battalion for duty during the campaign; so also had Captain Blake of the Third Battalion, who had volunteered for duty as a subaltern. Lieut. Harden, who had been promoted into the regiment from a West India Battalion and had already seen considerable service on the West Coast of Africa, and Lieut. Gouldsmith from the Dépôt, with four new officers, 2nd Lieuts. Paget, Anderson, Montgomerie and Leachman, had also come to join. These latter young officers were to purchase their experience somewhat dearly as after events proved, but luckily with no fatal results to themselves.

The send-off of the battalion from Malta, although not equalling in magnificence that accorded to our reservemen by the generous citizens of Chichester, was no less cordial. The battalion concentrated in Margharita Square and marched to the Bakery Wharf, the scene of endless similar departures, played down by the band of the 3rd Royal West Kent regiment and by the civilian band of Cospicua. We embarked about mid-day, but remained in harbour that night to complete the loading of the mobilisation stores and also to embark the Malta Company of Mounted Infantry, which some weeks before we had been so

chagrined at our inability to join. This company was commanded by Captain Pine-Coffin of the Loyal North Lancashire regiment, and he had with him a fine lot of men of the Derbyshire, North Lancashire and Warwickshire regiments.

At half-past ten on the 20th of February the screw made its first revolution on its long journey, and we were fairly moving at last. The Baracca and the fortifications overlooking the harbour were crowded with people to see us off, and there was a scene of great enthusiasm as we slowly steamed past St. Elmo, the bluejackets on the ships in harbour giving us cheer after cheer.

Between Malta and Gibraltar a great many stowaways turned up, some of them having succeeded in bringing their full kit on board. Unhappily for them the "Pavonia" called in at Gibraltar in obedience to signals from the shore, the Malta authorities having telegraphed ahead; so our friends were hunted up and taken ashore, terribly dejected at their ill-luck. One or two, however, were 'cute enough to hide again, and this time succeeded in coming with us all the way.

The voyage was a slow and uneventful one. Absolutely nothing occurred to vary the monotony or to increase the speed. The "Pavonia," although an Atlantic liner, was not by any means the flyer that we had anticipated, and performed all her duties with deliberation even to coaling. This was carried out in a slow and stately manner in two days at St. Vincent, many of our men, who volunteered for the purpose, being utilised in assisting, owing to the dearth of coolies. Crossing the line on the 8th of March



we had the usual visit from Father Neptune, who arrived on board about 7 p.m., and proceeded to hold his court according to ancient custom, when numbers of his young subjects were presented to His Majesty in due form and greeted by him in proper sea style.

During the voyage every endeavour was made to give the men exercise and to keep them in condition, no easy matter with such a large number of men on board and so little room. However parades were held every day, and signalling and semaphore classes were kept going, which relieved the monotony a little. When we could not think of anything else for the moment it was always easy to have a round-up amongst the kit bags or a worry around the helmets on the lower deck! The band played on deck pretty often, and so the weary time passed slowly away until the 20th of March, when Table Mountain was at last sighted. We should never have believed it possible that it was to be our fate to remain six days at anchor, but such was the fact. The number of ships – mostly with troops, but many with horses, cattle and coal – lying in the harbour was prodigious, and we had of course to wait our turn before going into the docks. This we did on the 26th, and we were enabled to give the battalion a run ashore in the shape of a route march. Passing through the streets of Cape Town we excited a good deal of comment owing to our strength, which was over 1,200 and caused people to think we were two battalions. A certain amount of liberty was accorded the men to go ashore which they were not slow to avail themselves of, though

they took no undue advantage of the permission. Numbers of men seized the opportunity to remit various sums to their families at home, and a draft, one amongst several, for over £242 was sent to the Dépôt on account of these small remittances. The Dépôt authorities sent out these sums to the families, but for some idea best known to themselves, informed them that the money was part of a subscription from officers and men, which led to endless correspondence, as the families immediately with one accord wrote and demanded to know what had become of their husbands!

Cape Town is a fine city and contains some splendid public buildings, whilst its situation at the foot of Table Mountain is magnificent. The suburbs at Green Point and Wynburg are excellently laid out, and it is very pleasing to see the way trees are planted in the streets, and how open spaces are encouraged. The electric trams are splendid, and many of the battalion amused themselves by riding on the top of a car as far as it went and coming back again. There is no better way of seeing a town.

The streets were crowded with soldiers of all sorts. Every kind of corps, Horse, Foot and Artillery, was represented, not only of the Regular Army but of Colonials also. Here were Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, men from India and Ceylon, men from Malta, men from the West Indies, men from Natal and all parts of South Africa, and crowds of adventurers and dare-devils from every quarter of the globe, who had enlisted in various local corps. Not only the Army, but the whole British

nation, owe to Mr. Kruger a debt of gratitude that can never be repaid, inasmuch as the South African war has brought about such a reorganisation and betterment of the Army and such a magnificent outburst of patriotic feeling among our vast colonies as could never have been excited by any other means. The ordinary individual who remains in England all his life or potters about the Continent cannot, unless he is a man of an open mind and phenomenal intelligence, grasp the enormous size and resources of our colonies such as India, Australasia, the Cape Colonies and Canada, and it has remained for Mr. Kruger to compel this fact to become startlingly patent to the minds of many men, both at home and out in the Colonies, who had never given any attention previously to the subject.

On the 30th March orders were received to proceed to East London to disembark there, as apparently the traffic on the Cape railways was congested to a degree, and some of it must be diverted on to the East London line. So we steamed out again, passing round the Cape of Good Hope in the afternoon and arriving on the 2nd of April at East London, where we lay off the harbour, as we drew too much water to pass over the bar and enter the channel.

Captain Pine-Coffin and his Mounted Infantry were the first to disembark, and were followed by A, B, and C companies under Major O'Grady. F, G, and H companies under Major du Moulin were the next to land on the 3rd of April, and were followed by Headquarters and D and E companies the same evening. Each

of these parties were entrained on successive days with their kits and rations and ammunition, and were despatched up country, meeting with great demonstrations from the residents along the line. Some ladies at Fort Jackson were kind enough to turn out late at night and provide tea for us, than which nothing could have been more acceptable. A run of about eighteen or nineteen hours brought us to Bethulie Bridge, where the fact that we were actually at the enemy's country became as evident as a slap in the face when we saw the railway bridge with its piers destroyed and its enormous arches blown into the river. The Railway Pioneer regiment, a local corps composed mostly of railway men and miners, was hard at work making a diversion over the road bridge, which, luckily for us, had been saved from the enemy by Major Shaw and Lieut. Popham of the Sherwood Foresters a short time previously.

The road bridge had had a line of rails laid along it, and trucks were pushed over one by one, as the bridge was not strong enough to bear the weight of an engine. This method of procedure was slow, but the advantages of a through line were enormous; and considerable precautions had to be maintained to guard against the likelihood of any further disaster, since it was possible at any time that the enemy might try and blow up the sole remaining bridge over the river, and it was, therefore, needful to take especial care. Each party of troops arriving detrained in succession and marched over the river about a couple of miles to the railway station, where, in due course, they were entrained

and despatched up country.

Head Quarters and D and E companies, however, remained for some little time at Bethulie, relieving the Royal Scots on picket, and performing the usual garrison duties. Alarms were several times raised that the advance of a party of Boers, bent on wrecking the bridge, was imminent, and all the troops stood to arms and reinforced the pickets; but nothing further was ever heard.

At last, on the 20th April, these two companies started on their march to join the remainder of the battalion, which about this time was concentrating at Ferreira, a siding on the railway a few miles south of Bloemfontein. However after marching about 60 miles, and reaching Edenburg at the end of a long and trying tramp of fully 24 miles, orders were received to go on by train to Bloemfontein; and on arriving there the two companies were sent on at once to Glen, which they reached early on the 27th of April. Headquarters had detrained at Ferreira in passing, and had joined the remainder of the battalion.

Meanwhile, A, B, and C companies had been having some adventures, B company having been fetched out of the train at Edenburg and ordered to place the little town in a state of defence, as the advent of the enemy was hourly expected. The Boers, however, failed to turn up, and B company was then, on the 6th of April, ordered off to Bethany, about 10 miles distant, where the company entrained, reaching Ferreira Siding late at night. They stayed here and took their share of picket duty until

the end of the month.

A and C companies, under Major O'Grady, after dropping B at Edenburg, went on by rail to Bloemfontein, arriving there on the 5th April, and receiving orders next day to camp on a hill about 2 miles south-east of the railway station. This was in a dangerous neighbourhood, as about this time the Boers were threatening the Waterworks and Springfield, which is not far to the East; so a defensive work was laid out on this hill by the Royal Engineers, which these two companies amused themselves by erecting. Lord Roberts visited the site on the 10th of April and christened it "Sussex Hill." The usual picket precautions were taken by day and night, and the men were kept busy with pick and shovel; but a good deal of rain interfered with the work, which was not completed until the 17th of April, when orders were received to move to Ferreira and join the remainder of the battalion.

F, G, and H companies arrived at Bloemfontein on the 5th of April, but after waiting some hours were entrained and moved down the line about 6 miles to Ferreira Siding, where the pickets of the Royal Scots on Leeuberg and the surrounding kopjes were relieved, and a guard mounted on the bridge.

At Ferreira, close to our little camp, a brother of Mr. Steyn, the late President of the Orange Free State, had a sort of country residence, and we saw a good deal of him, as he and his wife were very civil in allowing the men to purchase bread, butter, and other things from their farm.

Mr. Steyn was a typical Boer, a fine, big man, with a long, black beard; he was a solicitor in Bloemfontein, and of course an educated man, who had travelled over England and the continent. Both he and his charming wife used to be astonished, or pretended to be astonished, at the never ending succession of troops daily passing their house on their way up to the front, and used to ask us where all the troops came from. We, naturally, did not give the show away, and explained carefully that there were lots more where they came from, and that there was our magnificent Indian army behind them again, only waiting to be called on.

Around the Steyns' farm French's cavalry had encamped during Lord Roberts' dash on Bloemfontein, just before entering the town, and there was ample evidence of the fact in the shape of dead animals and empty biscuit tins strewn for miles over the veldt.

Mr. Steyn had, of course, been made a prisoner by the first arrivals of our cavalry, but had taken the oath of allegiance, and had been given a special pass to enable him to reside peacefully on his farm and to prosecute his business in the town.

He was occasionally subjected to a good deal of annoyance, it is a pity to relate, from our own troops, and had several times to send over to our detachment and ask for a sentry to be posted on his house. The intruders were usually men of the Colonial forces who apparently thought they had a right to order meals to be prepared and fowls to be handed over at any time, and that

they could remove Mr. Steyn's horses and wagons in defiance of the written permit to retain them which he used to show.

On the 7th of April B company arrived, and also a battalion of the Scots Guards and a squadron of Mounted Infantry. G and H companies went to Kaal Spruit during the night, and from that date to the end of the month the outposts were furnished by the Scots Guards and ourselves.

On the 21st of April A and C companies arrived from Sussex Hill, and a new camp was formed and tents pitched in anticipation of the arrival of the remainder of the battalion. The Volunteer company arrived somewhat unexpectedly early on the 24th, and went off to take their turn on picket the same evening. The Colonel and the regimental staff arrived the next day, and the battalion was then almost complete.

Orders were shortly afterwards received to proceed to Bloemfontein; at 3 p.m. on the 27th of April the seven companies left by road, and on arrival camped in the Highland Brigade camp just south of the town. The men's blankets and baggage had been sent by rail, and, as no transport could be procured until late, the blankets did not reach camp until nearly midnight. However the men were in tents, and the bivouac poles came in handy for making tea, no fuel of any kind being procurable in camp.

Lord Roberts, accompanied by Major General Kelly, who had served many years in the battalion, inspected us on parade the next day at 10 a.m. preparatory to marching off to Glen. This march, a long and tiresome one, gave us our first experience of



the veldt, and we were not sorry to find ourselves at Glen after our 16 miles tramp. D and E companies were already there, and had camp pitched for us; our baggage, however, did not turn up until the early morning, so we had to put in the night the best way we could, under bags and tent walls, in the absence of blankets. The whole Brigade was camped here, and the next day we fairly started on our travels.

# **CHAPTER II**

## **THE 21ST BRIGADE.**

### **THE TREK BEGINS**

**Composition of the Brigade – Start from Glen**  
**– Transport arrangements – To Jacobsrust**  
**– Rations – Halts – Pickets – Tobacco – Tea**

The 21st Brigade was composed of four regiments, of which the Royal Sussex (under Col. Donne) was the senior. Next came the Sherwood Foresters, under Major Gossett (commanding in place of Colonel Smith-Dorrien, who was then in command of the 19th Brigade), who had under him a splendid body of men, the majority having served in their Second Battalion during the Tirah campaign. The experience gained in this war against the Afridis was extremely valuable to the officers and men, as the system of fighting adopted by the crafty Pathan bore many points of similarity to that carried out by brother Boer. The next regiment in the brigade in order of seniority was the Cameron Highlanders, commanded by Lieut. – Colonel Kennedy. This regiment was practically just off one campaign, as they had served in the last Omdurman expedition and had not left

Egypt until ordered to the Cape. The men were in magnificent condition, hard as nails, and, throughout the campaign, they amply justified the opinion formed of them at first sight. The remaining battalion in the brigade was the famous regiment of the City Imperial Volunteers. They were, of course, men of fine physique, having been especially selected for their physical fitness and their soldierly qualities, and I think it has been allowed by everyone who has marched and worked in the field side by side with this battalion of citizen soldiers that their conduct and bearing has at all times been equal to that of the best infantry battalion in the Regular Army.

They had a cyclist section with them, but this was too small to be of any use except as orderlies, or despatch riders.

I think there is a great future before the cyclist soldier, and I should like to have seen a cyclist battalion, 1000 strong, employed in this campaign with the Mounted Infantry Brigades. There is one point I am quite positive about, and that is, that after having trekked over 1,500 miles in all parts of the country, from Pretoria to Bethulie, and in all weathers, I have seen no district, not even in the Caledon Valley, where cyclists in large numbers could not have been utilised in place of or in addition to Mounted Infantry.

The Brigade was commanded by Colonel Bruce Hamilton of the East Yorkshire regiment, who was promoted to Major-General before the conclusion of the campaign. General Hamilton has a long record of active and staff service, having

taken part in the Afghan war, the Burma war, and campaigns in Ashanti and on the West Coast of Africa; one of his earliest experiences of active service being in the Boer War of 1881, when he was A.D.C. to Sir George Colley and was present at the historic fights of that campaign, Laings Nek and the Ingogo. He afterwards served on the Staff at Bombay and at Simla, and, at the time our battalion was at Aldershot in 1899, he was an A.G. to General Lyttleton's Brigade, eventually going out to Natal as an A.G. when the war broke out, and later receiving command of the 21st Brigade.

Major Shaw, the Brigade Major, belonged to the Sherwood Foresters and was in Malta with us in that regiment, with which he also served in the early part of the campaign in the Orange Free State, distinguishing himself at the capture of the bridge at Bethulie. The General's Aide-de-Camp was Lieut. Fraser of the Cameron Highlanders, who was afterwards assisted in his duties by Lieut. Clive Wilson of the Yeomanry. The Brigade Transport Officer was Major Cardew of the Army Service Corps, and the officer in charge of Supplies was Lieut. Lloyd of the same corps, who had lately returned from active service on the West Coast.

Our medical officer was Major Dundon, R.A.M.C., who had accompanied us from Malta, and who on board ship had inoculated a great many officers and men of the battalion against enteric fever. Major Dundon's own health, however, gave way, and he suffered so much from fever that he had to be admitted to hospital and sent down country, so that he did not afterwards

return to the regiment.

On the 29th of April we started from Glen on our travels, but we did not move until one o'clock, as there was a good deal of work to be done first, leaving extra kit behind and issuing rations, of which we carried two days' supply in our haversacks and four days' on the wagons. Some of us have often, on after days when we were hard up for a bit of breakfast, looked back on this morning at Glen and wished we could lay hands on the piles and piles of biscuits which were thrown away by the men.

At Glen our transport was issued to us; there were nine wagons altogether, but as it was impossible to obtain mules, our four ammunition carts, which we had brought out from home with us, and the great casks of harness, had all to be left behind. We had no water-carts either, except the one which had been lent to the detachment at Ferreira, and which, under the circumstances, it was thought advisable to retain. We should also have had led mules to carry ammunition, the medical panniers and the signalling gear, but none were available for this purpose; so all this gear had to be loaded on the nine wagons, which were pretty full in consequence.

One wagon was allowed to every two companies to carry blankets, great-coats, cooking pots, ration baskets, etc. Our nine companies thus took four and a half wagons, leaving the same number to carry all the miscellaneous gear, the officers' kits, the ammunition, entrenching tools, and two days' rations, besides the reserve ration of bully beef.

It always struck us as being somewhat ironical having to carry a reserve ration of bully beef while on the march, as the country was full of cattle, which could have been driven in if required. If the worst had come to the worst we could, in an emergency, have eaten the trek oxen, which were quite as tender as the slaughter bullocks.

The company wagons were terribly overloaded; each company was about 120 strong, so the wagons had to carry 240 blankets and waterproof sheets and 240 great-coats, besides the other impedimenta.

As time went on, Major Cardew succeeded in getting us other wagons, and some small carts were picked up at farms and utilised to carry our reserve ammunition, the signalling gear, the doctors' boxes and the tools; but the difficulty was to find animals to draw these carts. There were plenty of carts at the farms, but the only beasts that we could get were such stray mules as we encountered on the road, or which were found in camp. They were mostly quite unfit for work and had been abandoned on that account, but, anyhow, we had to put them in harness and get what work we could out of them until we found better ones.

Each large wagon was drawn by ten mules, and looked after by two black boys as drivers, and one soldier as wagonman, who applied the brake when necessary. The wagons were large and heavy, and the wheels too light and spidery to stand much rough usage; and each wagon was cumbered with a huge box or driving seat which must have weighed at least one hundredweight, the

use of which was not very obvious.

All wagons, and indeed all the transport carts, and the guns too, were fitted with the South African brake, which is applied or taken off by means of a hand-wheel at the back of the cart. These powerful brakes are very necessary owing to the steep descents sometimes met with, and the erratic behaviour at all times of the mules. These animals gave much trouble at first, but soon, with hard work and scanty feed, became more docile.

The native drivers had been enlisted evidently because they were natives, not on account of what they knew about mules or oxen. Many of them were quite ignorant of how to treat the mules, and flogged them all day without cessation, until at last the use of long whips was forbidden.

The mules suffered a good deal from the want of water on the march. They will not drink before about eight o'clock in the morning, and by that time we were on the road usually, and there was no opportunity, until we arrived at our destination, of watering the animals. This was a pity, as they would have travelled much the better for it. Sometimes we had a rest of a couple of hours in the middle of the day, when the animals were allowed to water and graze; but more often the exigencies of the campaign would not allow of our halting for long.

Some of the artillery baggage wagons were of the old box pattern which, it is understood, was condemned in 1881, after the first Boer war, as being quite unsuitable; but now they appeared again. The artillery used to mount a driver on the leading mule of

the team and this plan seemed to have many advantages. There is always much trouble in starting a team of mules, as the natural perversity of the animals prevents them from all pulling at once and together, until they are fairly started.

To humour the wretched beasts it is sometimes necessary to get men to give the van a shove along, so that the ten mules, when they find the wagon moving, get at once into their collars and step out together in the most docile fashion. Give a mule a slight ascent in the road in front of him and the extraordinary creature is in his element at once, and puts all his weight into his work; but on level ground or on a down grade, a good deal of attention is necessary to keep the traces taut and the mules from hanging back and getting their legs over them.

We crossed the river by a footbridge and marched about eight miles to Klein Ospruit. The baggage wagons had some adventures at the drifts and did not arrive till fairly late, so that we had some trouble sorting out our kits and other property in the dark.

Next day we marched to Schanz Kraal, a short march over grassy veldt. The Volunteer company had the honour of being the first to come under the enemy's fire on this occasion, as they were plugged at by one of the Boer guns whilst they were acting as escort to our battery. The shells, however, dropped short and did no damage. The 1st of May saw us up at 6.30, and on the tramp on an exceptionally long march to Jacobsrust, or Steynspruit as it is sometimes called. The weather was the most charming that



could be wished for, a true South African day, and, had the march been 12 miles instead of the 18 or 19 that it actually was, we should have been better pleased. Arriving on the top of a nek, or dip in the hills, we saw a huge plain in front simply covered with troops, all dismounted and resting. These were Broadwood's Cavalry and Ian Hamilton's Mounted Infantry, and, after a while, they moved off in advance of us, we following in an hour's time and reaching Jacobsrust just before dusk.

Our first business on arrival in camp each day was to see to the provision of wood and water for cooking purposes, no easy matter in a treeless country like the Orange Free State. When there were trees, wood parties were sent out under an officer, and sometimes wooden fencing posts were brought in from round the fields. Later on, when we moved further North and wood became more scarce, men used to pick up these fencing posts on their march home into camp, but, as they never knew where camp was to be until they reached it, sometimes they were let in to carry these logs of wood for miles. Occasionally, but very seldom, a few small houses were ordered to be destroyed, and in that case the troops were allowed to take the wood out of the doors and windows, floors and ceilings. This did not often happen, though, as great precautions were always being taken not to do any unnecessary damage or to alarm the people of the country needlessly. A better substitute for firewood was also found, under the guidance of stern necessity, to be dried cowdung, and towards the close of the campaign the men used this in preference to

wood, as it was easier to get and lighter to carry.

Whilst the wood and water parties were out, there was nothing more to be done except to wait until the wagons arrived with the blankets. This was a matter, sometimes of minutes, sometimes of hours, and it was in order to guard against any possible delay in the movements of the wagons that every man was ordered to carry, in addition to a blanket, two days' rations of tea, sugar and biscuit, and one day's ration of meat in his haversack and canteen, which were regularly replaced when consumed. Thus every man had in his possession the wherewithal to make a meal, either in the middle of the day when a halt took place with the intention of allowing the men to cook, or on arrival in camp.

The meat ration was driven with us in the form of slaughter oxen, and immediately on arrival in camp the butchers, who rode on a wagon and did not have to walk, set to work and killed sufficient oxen to supply the Brigade. It is said that sometimes the butchers killed a tough old trek ox by mistake for a young heifer, but this statement is, I am sure, a libel. The butchers were allowed to sell the liver, heart, head, etc. of the bullocks and sheep killed, at a certain fixed price; so, when the slaughtering was going on, there was sure to be a small crowd of would-be purchasers waiting.

Sometimes when the Brigade arrived late in camp the issue of rations would take place several hours after dark; but as every man had that day's rations carried on his person in addition to the next day's groceries and biscuit, there was not really

anything to complain about, except the inconvenience, which was unavoidable. Many men did not at first, however, realise that they had two day's biscuit in their haversacks, and used to eat it all, or most of it, on the first opportunity. There came a time, also, when, without notice, *flour* was issued for the second day's ration, and our improvident friends were fetched up with a round turn.

Owing to the difficulties of transport and to the fact that every mortal thing had to be carried with us – the country furnishing nothing but cattle and forage – the ration question was always a troublesome one to the regimental officer. No doubt it is an awkward thing issuing fresh meat on the march, but what could be done? Preserved meat could not be carried owing to the weight, and so the trek ox had to be cut up and served out at no matter what hour. No doubt the pound-and-a-half of meat, when cut up into portions, looked very small, and was often so uninviting, that many of the men threw away their meat ration, such as it was. Personally I do not think that the meat ration issued in this way is nearly large enough, and it might with advantage be doubled at the very least. By the time the bone, scraps, skin and dirty pieces are cut away from a portion of meat representing the rations of a section calculated at three pounds per man, and this again is subdivided into each man's little chunk, it will be found that what was originally considered as three pounds has dwindled to a pound-and-a-half or less. The Boer prisoners, whom we rationed, laughed at the idea of

existing on the soldier's ration of a pound-and-a half of meat, and complained to the General and got more.

Whilst on the march it was impossible to make any other arrangement than that each man should be responsible for his own cooking. This was necessary in consequence of the liability of any man to go off on picket, on guard, or on any duty where he might be detached from the bulk of his comrades. The utmost that the company cooks could do to be of benefit was to occasionally boil the water for the tea and let each man make his own brew. Not that he could make many brews out of his ration; far from it. In a laboratory, no doubt, carefully weighed rations of tea will make a certain quantity of quite a respectable drink, but in the field when the soldier has to carry his tea, tied up in a bit of rag, it certainly does not go far enough, and the man has to drink water, with every possibility of enteric supervening. Again, tea made in bulk as in military kitchens at Aldershot is quite a different matter to the same article made in a canteen out of the miserable pinch which constitutes one man's ration for one day. Similar arguments apply to the coffee and sugar; in fact the whole question of rations in the field needs revision. What we would have done without the Brigade Canteen which the General started, I do not know; but the quantity of tea, sugar and foodstuffs generally sold in that institution was only limited by the amount that could be purchased in the towns.

On the march, the column usually halted at the regulation intervals of time as prescribed in the drill books, of five

minutes after the first half-hour's marching and ten minutes on the completion of each succeeding hour. There is some slight modification needed in this regulation, as experience gained in marching, not only in South Africa, has shown: the first halt is not long enough and should be at least ten minutes or even longer, to enable men to fall out if they wish it. After that, the halts should be for five minutes on the completion of each half-hour's marching.

A full hour is too long to continue moving, carrying the heavy weight that men do on the march, and a few minutes rest after half an hour's walking is better than a long spell after an hour's march. The weight of the blanket and the other equipment on the shoulders, which may not appear to be great on first putting it on, soon reminds one of its presence, and the half-hourly halt enables the men to sit down and relieve their aching shoulders.

According to the regulations the proper place for the stretchers of a battalion is for all of them, with their stretcher-bearers, to move in rear under the medical officer, but common sense points to each stretcher being always kept with its own company.

In South Africa, movements were so extended and companies so far apart, sometimes, that the stretchers would have been useless if kept together; and it is much more reasonable for the two men to go with their company, wherever it might be, on picket or baggage guard, or escort to guns, or any similar duty.

All regiments did not do this, however; and once during the mid-day halt, we were much amused at the antics of a very

military Volunteer doctor, who was in charge of a squad of stretcher bearers, and was trying to move them off with due decorum and a proper observance of their importance. After falling-in and telling-off, they took up and laid down their stretchers several times, just to wake things up a bit, and then they received the order – "Stretcher party, r-r-right – form!"

This not being satisfactory, the doctor exclaimed "As you were! Now on the word 'Right!' the right hand man turns to the right, the remainder at the same time making a half-turn in the same direction," etc., and he delivered the order again; upon which, this intricate manœuvre being executed to his satisfaction, the whole party solemnly moved off, followed by the smiles of our men and a few muttered remarks, such as "'e must 'ave thought 'e were in 'Ide Park"!

When our baggage wagons arrived in camp they were unloaded at once, and the rolls of blankets and great-coats taken off to the sections that owned them. The men then proceeded to erect their bivouacs, if they were particular, or to spread their blankets on the ground, if they were tired.

Sometimes it was our duty to furnish the pickets to protect the camp during a halt, and when this was the case the companies used to go off, as soon as they arrived in camp, to the spots pointed out by the Brigade Major, and make themselves comfortable there until daybreak the next morning; when either they were relieved, or else the column marched off and the pickets followed behind as a rear guard. The wagons used to

go out to the pickets, if they were any distance off, with their blankets and great-coats; but if they were at all close to camp, as they frequently were, then the men used to carry out their bundles themselves. As a rule, we camped in a hollow close to water, which was either in a dam or a spruit (small stream), and the pickets were posted in prominent places on the surrounding hills. We had early learned to consider these pickets as really defensive posts, put out to hold certain prominent features, with a view to preventing the enemy from occupying them with guns and riflemen and from annoying us in camp, and not as outpost pickets with their visiting and reconnoitring patrols by day and night.

Cover from view was as much to be desired as protection from bullets and possible shell fire, and every man was told off to his own little position some distance away from the next man. Permanent objects like sangars and walls in exposed positions might serve to draw the enemy's fire more than was desirable, so, to deceive him, other positions were whenever possible utilised. At early daybreak every man stood to his arms for a while, watching especially points from which fire might be opened by the enemy. Cordite being smokeless, we, of course, never knew where the enemy actually was concealed, and could only fire at likely places, in the hope that he *was* there and that our bullets would make him keep his head and rifle safe under cover. Double sentries, especially at night, were of course an absolute necessity, and signalling communication was invariably

maintained between the pickets and the camp, both by day and by night.

In the field there ought to be a weekly issue of tobacco, which should be considered as part of the rations: it is impossible, sometimes for weeks on end, for the men to purchase tobacco for themselves, and the loss or absence of this luxury is very severely felt. Tobacco is certainly procurable at some of the Supply Dépôts at the bases, on payment, and twice during the nine months of our wanderings an issue was made to those companies which had money on hand with which to pay for it; the amounts which were due from the individual men were then charged through their accounts and, after a good deal of clerical labour, the transaction was concluded.

Owing to the greater necessity for carrying food, our Supply wagons usually had no room to carry tobacco; so that it was not often, in fact only twice, as has been said, that it was procurable.

The price was very inconvenient too; in a land where copper coins are unknown and the smallest coin is a "tikky," or threepenny piece, to charge 1s 4d. for an article means that there is always trouble over the change, which is increased if only half the quantity is asked for.

Smoking before food has been taken as productive of eventual thirst. It is extraordinary how men will smoke at all hours of the night, in fact whenever they are awake; but it is a practice which ought not to be allowed on the march, as the effects are surely felt later in the day when the heat and consequent thirst rapidly



increase: this engenders drinking, and the water bottles are soon emptied before there is any chance of replenishing them.

Undoubtedly, men require careful training and education in these little matters, and, if they are properly attended to, as a result a long march may be comfortably carried out and the men brought in to camp in good physical form, not exhausted to the last stage, as they frequently are.

Our water supply when we were on the march was usually procured from the spruits or streams, but in the Orange River Colony we frequently had no other water than that procured from pools, more or less stagnant, and of a dirty yellow colour from the suspended impurities. The section of the Royal Engineers with our Brigade had a couple of hand pumps in their carts with the picks and shovels, explosives and other things that they carry in the field; and these pumps, immediately on arrival in camp, were fixed up at the water supply, and a sentry posted to keep off cattle and to see that the water was not contaminated by men washing in it.

Whilst on the march there was very little sickness from bowel complaints. No doubt the constant daily exercise in the magnificent climate and the excitement combined to render the men somewhat innocuous to the attentions of the enteric microbe, or, more probably, the water that we drank had not, up to then, been poisoned with these germs, although it was dirty enough in all conscience.

What with the constant smoking and want of self control, men

usually drank a good deal of water on the march and during the day in camp or on picket: were the ration of tea increased in the field, as it might well be, to three times the present quantity, men would drink considerably less water on service and would save themselves a good deal of sickness. Men will not go to the trouble of preparing boiled water for their bottles; but if they have sufficient tea to spare, they will often fill up their bottles with it.

There is nothing better to drink on the march than cold tea: it is an excellent mild stimulant, it is a gentle aperient, and it is also a febrifuge in a small way, besides being somewhat astringent: it clears the brain, too, and leaves a clean taste in the mouth. Veldt water, on the other hand, besides being a breeding establishment for the germs and microbes of nearly all the diseases under the sun, is nasty to look at, horrid to smell, and disgusting to drink: it invariably pours out in the form of sweat if the weather is at all warm, and it clogs the mouth and tongue with a mawkish taste which speedily requires more water to remove it.

Why the microscopic ration of tea should be increased on the same day by equally minute portions of coffee and cocoa has always been a puzzle. The advantage and necessity of varying the drink ration is understood, but why issue three kinds in one day, instead of tea one day, coffee the next, and cocoa the third? At the best of times the men had no place in which to stow the small portions of each of these articles which comprised the daily ration, and were, perforce, compelled to wrap each lot up in bits

of rag and carry them in their haversacks.

Ration baskets were provided in which one day's groceries could have been carried in bulk by each company, but, as an order had been issued for each man to carry his own, these baskets proved to be useless lumber.

# **CHAPTER III**

## **TO ZAND RIVER**

### **On the March – Formations – Protection – Necessity of Mounted Troops – Engagement at Welkom Farm – Capture of Winburg – Soldiers and their Boots – Naval Guns**

In order to enable the force to be concentrated, the 21st Brigade halted on the 2nd of May at Jacobsrust, continuing their march the following day to Isabellafontein. The names of some of the farms are very curious and depend greatly on local conditions. The thick-skulled Boer farmer when he first arrived and selected his farm lost no time in dubbing it with a title, which, in after years, appears somewhat incongruous and confusing, as numbers of farmers hit upon the same happy idea of naming their locations Klipfontein, Doornberg, or Leeukop; and the result is that there are hundreds of places in the Orange River Colony with the same name – Doornkops are as common as dirt, whilst Deelfonteins, and farms called Modderfontein, or Muddy Spring, are quite numerous. Then, again, the settler, instead of naming his farm from the physical properties of the land or the quality of the water, frequently called it after his

vrouw, so that one often came across farms called Ellensrust, for instance. Many others are named after animals, such as Hartebeestefontein, Wildebeeste Hoek, or Quaggafontein, while others are called Welkom Rust or Wonderfontein, the meaning of which is apparent.

The farms are all fenced with barbed wire, of generally three strands, with posts of wood or, more usually, of big slabs of quarried stone. These wire fences were of course a great hindrance to all mounted men and had to be cut in all directions.

On the march we used to move in column of fours, unless the veldt was broad and open, when we still kept our fours but moved the companies out to the right and left, so that we were really in a column of double companies moving in fours to a flank. This was a very good and simple formation, since the companies could open out or close in to the centre without difficulty, and at any time they were all handy and ready to move in any direction without the slightest delay. The battalion seldom or never moved in column of companies, as it was found that this was the most tiring formation of all in a long march, especially when the men were carrying a full kit. This full kit consisted of rifle, with magazine charged; haversack, with one day's complete rations and one day's issue of tea, sugar and biscuit; canteen and water-bottle; sidearms and equipment with 100 rounds of ammunition; and a blanket, strapped on the waistbelt at the back. All this totals up a good load, but there was nothing that could have been dispensed with, the blanket, which was most cumbersome and

unwieldy, being really as necessary as anything.

The officers wore equipment the same as the men, and nearly all of them carried a rifle or a carbine. This was a most necessary precaution, as there is no doubt the enemy invariably directed their fire on the officers, and of course anyone seen to be dressed differently to the men, or not carrying a rifle, would be immediately spotted by the Boers. I asked some of the prisoners this question when we were escorting them from the Golden Gate, and they said at once that they always concentrated their fire on those who appeared to be the leaders.

The advanced flank and rear guards were always found by the mounted troops, who kept well away from us; as indeed they ought to, if they intend to keep the column beyond rifle shot of the enemy, which may be taken as fully 2,000 yards, or about a mile and a quarter. It will easily be seen what a farce a flank guard of infantry must be, unless it can move at such a distance from the column as will enable it effectually to protect that column, without hampering it or checking its progress. On the other hand, if the flank guard gets too far away from the column, it is liable to be cut off itself, whilst if it remains too close in, it does no good and merely masks the fire of the main body. It is a difficult question to answer – how is a column to protect itself in these days of long range rifle fire unless it has mounted men?

I saw a column on the march once which consisted of an infantry battalion with its full complement of transport and with a couple of guns, with their wagons, and the way the flank guards

were put out was a study in how *not* to do it. Imagine an enormous rectangle, stretching along the road and extending about 200 yards on each side of it, the ends and sides of this rectangle being composed of men moving in single file and about three or four paces apart. Inside this rectangle was the main body, the baggage and the guns; and it is easy to conceive that, owing to so many men being used to form the ends and sides of the rectangle, there were hardly any left to make up the main body or to act as a reserve, while, from the formation adopted, nothing could be done by the men forming the sides, except to lie down if they were attacked. I never saw a more hopeless instance of slavish adherence to the drill books and utter want of common sense and adaptability to the conditions of service in this country. The commanding officer, who was a Staff College man, has since been badly stellenbosched.

A story is told of General Smith-Dorrien which is very characteristic of that gallant officer and worth repeating.

It seems that on one occasion, somewhere in South Africa, the officer commanding a certain battery of artillery was somewhat chary of getting too close to the enemy: perhaps he was thinking of his horses.

Getting tired of finding the battery to be always out of effective range, the General sent an order that the battery was to be brought up to where the 19th Brigade flag was planted. So the Major limbered up and advanced his battery up to the General, who promptly galloped on, flag and all, another 600

yards nearer the enemy, where he stuck his flagstaff into the ground and waited for the battery to carry out their orders, to come "up to where the flag was!"

On the 4th May, whilst on the march northwards, we had our first experience, as a battalion, of shell fire at the engagement of Welkom Farm, or Wellow as it is sometimes called. The brunt of the fighting was borne by the Cavalry and Mounted Infantry, but the enemy dropped several shells in our direction, two of which burst at the head of the battalion, but luckily did no damage. The battalion had advanced in column of companies, extended of course, in support of the mounted troops, who were manœuvring on our front and on our left. To our right and left front the hills converged and were held by the enemy's riflemen, who were, however, out of range. A couple of companies were detached to guard our right flank, moving parallel with us and keeping the enemy behind his cover, whilst a couple more advanced against the hills on our left front, which had by this time been cleared by our cavalry, not before they had come under shell and pom-pom fire and had experienced a few losses. One of our men,<sup>1</sup> was severely wounded on this occasion.

After climbing the low hills on our left front, we sat and watched the remainder of the Brigade coming along, and waited until the Cavalry had scouted some miles to our front before we finally left our position.

A very good view was obtainable from this hilltop, and it was

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<sup>1</sup> Private D. Downer of A company.



disgusting to have to sit still and watch the Boer convoy trekking away in a north-easterly direction and about 4 miles off. We could see the wagons and long lines of bullocks distinctly, and little specks, which were probably mounted men, darting about up and down the road. However, nothing could be done to stop them, and so they slowly passed out of sight.

It was very interesting to see, watching from the top of the hill, one of the other regiments of the Brigade advancing in attack formation, in column of companies extended about ten paces; and, even at the very great distance they were away, it was curious to notice how the officers and section commanders showed up in the intervals between the long extended lines. They were, of course, in their proper places and only a few paces in rear of their sections, but, even two miles away, one could recognise the black speck in front of the centre of the company, and the other tiny atoms moving along in rear of the half-companies and sections.

There is no doubt it is a sound principle that, when extended, officers, supernumeraries and buglers should invariably march in the extended line amongst the men, from whom, if this is done, they are practically indistinguishable. The companies and sections can just as well be controlled from the ranks as from any other position half a dozen paces in rear, and the reduction in the size of the objective which the enemy is looking at is worthy of consideration.

During the afternoon we went on to the farm near the river and there camped, but after this long day's work we still had the

pickets to furnish, and sent out several companies to the hills to the north and west of the camp for this purpose. However, picket duty, except for the slight extra marching entailed, is no great hardship on a fine night when wood and water are plentiful, and one has always the consolation of knowing that some other regiment will be on duty the day after.

Winburg was reached on the evening of the next day after a long and tiresome march. We camped near the railway station, and found the piles of wooden sleepers very easily split and very useful for our fires. The town is situated at the end of a branch railway which joins the main line at Smaldeal Junction, about 20 miles off, and which will in time, no doubt, be prolonged to the north-east and connect with Senekal, which is distant about 34 miles. Winburg is a small town of the usual description – Church in the middle of the market square, a couple of small hotels, two or three decent-sized general stores and a few small houses. The railway makes a curious curve when entering the town, and runs round three parts of a circle before it finally pulls up at a tiny station.

The line and the station buildings were untouched when we arrived, but no engines or rolling stock were left for us. The Boers had not long been gone when our cavalry entered the town and demanded its surrender, but our horses were too much done up for the mounted troops to continue the pursuit. The Boer forces were so very mobile – as they naturally would be when moving about in their own country and acting always on the defensive

– that to allow our mounted troops to get too far in front and away from the infantry would have been a tactical error. It might have resulted in the separation of our columns and their attack in detail by the Boers, who would then have had a great advantage.

The battalions in the Brigade were ordered to be weeded out of all men unable to perform steady and continuous marching, and we accordingly had to leave a goodly number of lame ducks behind in charge of Major Panton.<sup>2</sup> Some of them had bad and worn-out boots, ruined, most likely, by the salt water on board ship, and by the want of dubbing but the large majority were suffering from sore feet, caused in nine cases out of ten either by badly-fitting boots or by want of attention to the feet. These had occurred in spite of orders and warnings without number, but it seems impossible to get the soldier to pay any attention to his feet.

There is not a medical man or a pedestrian who will not say that it is absolutely necessary to change the socks frequently and to wash the feet invariably at the end of a march. There is not a soldier in the service who will not insist that this practice softens the feet and leads to blisters and subsequent falling out.

Until some very drastic measures are introduced preventing men from receiving boots too small for them, and legislating for their better preservation and for proper cleanliness of the feet,

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<sup>2</sup> Major Panton ultimately succeeded in marching these men (drawn from all four battalions) up to Irene, where they rejoined the Brigade on the 9th of June, three days before Diamond Hill. They had covered 15 miles a day, acting as escort to a large ammunition column.

our army will never be able to march any better than it does at present. The man to blame is the man who wears the boots, but he cannot be brought to see that, or to listen to words of experienced men who were marching with soldiers when he was in his cradle. The agonies which some men will endure from a badly-fitting boot are beyond belief. I have seen, in Ireland, a man draw out his foot, covered with blood, from his boot, after a 5 miles' walk, and be unable to march for weeks afterwards.

The pluck and endurance and indomitable perseverance shown by men with ill-fitting boots proves devotion worthy of a better cause, but it has been a marvel to me for the last twenty years, why bitter experience has never taught the foot soldier to wear boots large enough for him. It is a well-known fact that after some marching has been done, a larger size in boots is required, as the feet swell and need more room; but the soldier, with an 8-2 foot when he joins, will go on asking for 8-2 boots until doomsday, and will have a grievance if he is compelled in the field to wear a pair of 9-3's, as he should be.

Whilst on the march we were compelled to resort to individual cooking, since every man carried his own ration, and this practice worked well, although a great deal of time was taken up by each individual which might have been better employed in sleep or rest. The men seemed to be always cooking; what with looking after the fires, collecting wood and *mest*, or dried cow-dung, and fetching water, the whole camp seemed to be perpetually moving round their camp fires, frying and boiling until a very late hour at

night. The issue of flour instead of biscuit was responsible for a great deal of the time wasted in cooking. Some of the companies used to arrange for the cooks to prepare, in the camp kettles, hot water for the men to make their own tea, but it was impossible to arrange to cook the meat in this way, as each man had his own portion served out to him by his section commander.

Many men cooked and ate their scrap of meat in the early morning, others finished it off at the mid-day halt, whilst a great number threw away their little bit of tough trek ox rather than carry it all day, steaming and jostling about in a smelly canteen, or wrapped in a dirty piece of rag and crammed into a haversack, cheek by jowl with some tobacco and a pair of socks, perhaps.

This canteen was the only cooking pot the men had, although in the course of time many of them procured tin cans, the Australian "billy," to assist in making their tea or coffee. The canteen is not an easy thing to keep clean at the best of times when it is in constant use, and we had no opportunity of replacing those which wore out by the constant cooking.

We had to thank De Wet for this. One of the trains which was wrecked by him contained many thousands of new canteens which, months afterwards, could be seen lying by the side of the line, reduced to their original factor of sheet iron.

After leaving Welkom Farm the rearguard was overtaken by the Highland Brigade, who were following in support to our Brigade; with them were two of the famous 4.7 naval guns, manned by a party of bluejackets – at least the men wore straw

hats, but the rest of their kit was the same as ours.

The guns had been rigged up on temporary field carriages, designed by some bold man, which would have made an official in the Royal Gun-carriage Factory turn ill with horror.

First of all came bullocks – about forty of them – dragging an absurd-looking gun, mounted on an equally curiously-made limber, with enormously broad wheels. This was dragged muzzle first, contrary to all precedent, with the gun pointing over the bullocks' backs. The trail was supported on a little low carriage with a boom sticking out behind like a tiller; and a tiller it was undoubtedly, for two bluejackets hung on to it, and, by shoving it to port or starboard, guided the gun in the proper direction.

Whilst in Winburg the following order was issued by General Ian Hamilton, commanding the entire force, which was henceforward called the Winburg Column: —

## **Extract from Brigade Orders. Winburg,**

**5th May, 1900**

"The G.O.C. Winburg Column has much pleasure in informing the troops under his command that he has received from the F.M. C. – in-C. in South Africa a telegram, in which Lord Roberts expresses his high appreciation of the good work

recently performed by all ranks in the Winburg Column. His lordship has yet to hear of the further success achieved by the capture of Winburg. During the past thirteen days a portion of the Winburg Column has marched over 100 miles, fighting the enemy on nine separate occasions, and capturing two important towns. The other portion of the column has borne at least its full share of the very successful operations which have followed the battle of Houtnek. The G.O.C. cannot therefore but feel that his column has fairly earned, not only the praises of the F.M. C. – in-C., which are published separately, but also a day or two of comparative rest. In the same message, however, in which Lord Roberts expresses his high appreciation of the successes we have achieved, he directs us not to slacken our efforts for several days to come. The enemy is hurrying northwards to concentrate, and it is of nothing less than national importance that his movements should be impeded, and his guns and convoys if possible captured. Thanks to the good work which has already been accomplished, this column now finds itself better placed to carry out the Field-Marshal's wishes than any other portion of the troops under his command. The opportunity is a great one, and Gen. Ian Hamilton confidently appeals to the officers and men of the Winburg Column to make the very best of it, regardless of the fatigue and privation which will probably have to be undergone before success is secured."

The next day – the 6th of May – we made an afternoon march, together with the 19th Brigade, Smith-Dorrien's, and the

Cavalry and Mounted Infantry, of about 9 miles, to a farm called Dankbarsfontein. The "fontein" in this instance belied its name, and instead of being a gushing spring of clear, sparkling water, which would have pleased the heart of Sir Wilfred Lawson, it was a succession of dirty puddles which would have created dismay among the ranks of the A.T.A. had there been any of their members left!

We remained a couple of days at this festive spot, but marched on the 9th of May to Bloomplaats. This was a well-to-do farm, with plenty of water and good grazing, and with a herd of half-tame buck which careered about all round the camp at 40 miles an hour, raising clouds of dust. Of course some sportsmen went out and stalked these frolicsome animals, and were followed by others, the result being that in a short time there was a good deal of indiscriminate shooting going on, and life hardly became worth living; so that these keen *shikaris* had to be fetched back. The amusing part of the show occurred later, when a Mounted Infantry picket, who were lying about on the look-out a mile or so away, had a shell dropped close to them by the Boers. They scattered with promptitude, and a few more shells came over in the same place. We could not see the Boer gun, which was fully two miles away, for a long time, but at last we caught the flicker of the sun on the breech block as it was swung into position.

In addition to all the firing at the buck every time they raced round our camp, there had been a good deal of desultory firing going on all the afternoon between the Mounted Infantry, who



were on our right, and the Boers, who were holding some low hills some miles from us. We could see a few mounted Boers riding about now and then, but their guns were well concealed, and their men did not show themselves.

# **CHAPTER IV**

## **THE FIGHT AT ZAND RIVER**

### **Description of the Action – The Final Charge – Necessity of continuing to Advance – Prisoners – Their Impressions – Fire Tactics**

On the 10th of May we made an early start from Bloomplaats, leaving the camp at 4.30 a.m. This means being up at three o'clock, and it was pitch dark at that hour; but the General's object was to reach the drift, a few miles away, before daybreak. This we did just before early dawn, and found a company of the Derbyshire Regiment holding it on the far side. There was water, about a couple of feet, in the drift proper, but boldly – and like fools – we waded across and clambered up the other side, and extended among the mimosa bushes. Fools we were, indeed, as a few yards further up the sluit we could have crossed dry shod, and saved ourselves the tender feet from which most of us suffered, brought about by a long day's marching with wet socks – which resulted in our poor feet being simply boiled in our boots.

It was just after dawn and fairly cold, so that we were glad to see the sun rise and to get on the move ourselves again. Bye-and-bye an order came for us to pass on through mimosa bushes

which were scattered about on the north bank of the Zand stream, towards the hilly ground on the east. Towards the north the ground was open and level and treeless for a couple of miles; then it rose a little, and ended on the skyline with a biggish kopje to the north west. To the east the ground also rose a little, and about 2 miles away culminated in a ridge running across our front from north-east down to east, gradually getting higher, and ending in a confused jumble of black hills running down to the river; somewhere among these black hills being the gun, which I have previously mentioned as having dropped a shell or two into the Mounted Infantry picket, near our camp at Bloomplaats. The whole of this ground was treeless and grassy, but a few mimosa bushes were scattered about on the hills to the east, and there was a good fringe of these prickly bushes down on the river banks.

Through these bushes, and past a couple of isolated houses, we were working our way in column of companies, extended, towards a low hill, an underfeature which jutted out towards us from the higher hills beyond. Having gained the shelter of this, we closed in a bit, ascended the slope, and lay down in quarter column, the leading company just below the top of the hill, and the rear company at its foot.

So far all had been peaceful and quiet, and some of the hungry ones had already started on their biscuits, when phit, ping-boom, phit, phit, came the Mausers, and we woke up to try and grasp the situation. The General had sent forward a few men over the hill-top to the other side, Captain Robinson and some of C

company had gone, and the enemy, who, up to now had lain low, had greeted them with every demonstration of affection, and continued to do so for some little time. Our men could do nothing but take cover and return the fire of the invisible Boers: they had played their part, had drawn the fire of the enemy, and had induced him to show his hand.

Apparently expecting that a column of troops would soon advance against them over the top of the hill, following on the track of our few men of C company, the enemy now maintained a heavy rifle, shell and pom-pom fire on the edge of the crest line, a few feet above us. We, sitting on the ground close under the lee of the hill, were perfectly safe, and could not be touched by any Boer shell so we had nothing to do but to listen to the bursting of the shells and to watch for the fragments striking the ground beyond. The noise was terrific, and at one time there was a perfectly awful outburst of roars and screams and pounding, as the pieces of shell went shrieking and whizzing over our heads, while, throughout the fearful din, we could hear that infernal pom-pom-pom-pom-pom, five times, which denoted that the Vicker's-Maxim, belonging to the Boers, was hurling its disgusting little shells at us.

The whirring and the shriek of these spiteful little beasts, as they strike the ground and burst into hundreds of vicious, stinging fragments, is, at first experience, the most disconcerting sound that I know. Throughout the whole of this pandemonium – which lasted perhaps ten minutes, and then settled down into

the occasional dull roar of a bursting shrapnel, and the whiz and flop of the fragments – the Mausers were going ping-boom, ping-boom, and the enemy's Maxim was in full blast at frequent intervals.

Sitting under the side of the hill, we could see to our rear, most of the other troops of the Division, all advancing to take their part in the attack, and hastening lest they should be too late. Following in our path through the mimosas, and in similar formation, came one of the regiments of our Brigade; they had just reached an open space half a mile in rear, when, being apparently spotted by the Boer gunners, plump came a shell, close in front of the column. A little to the left it was, so the bursting fragments flew harmlessly onward, while the onlookers drew a deep breath of relief, and the regiment quickened its pace, well knowing what was to be expected next. Soon it came, plunk-plunk, and we held our breath; two shells, two clouds of dust, in rear of the hastening battalion. Luckily the Boer gunners had not allowed sufficiently for the distance advanced by the regiment, while they were laying the guns.

Following in rear of this battalion came the Camerons, but they wisely led off to their right, and got under shelter of the high banks of the river – not, however, without being spotted and plugged at by the enemy, harmlessly as it turned out; and so they passed on beyond us.

Far away out in the open veldt dashed a battery of our Artillery: round it swung and unlimbered: in a second or two off

trotted the horses to shelter, and the gunners began to drop their shells, at 3,000 yards, on to the ridge held by the Boers – not, however, without reply, as the enemy shelled that battery with vigour for some little time. Over and over again did we, from our shelter, see a cloud of dust rise amongst the guns, now in front, now between them, now in rear; and yet the little black specks ran unconcernedly from the guns to the limbers and back again, and every now and then, with a sheet of flame and a muffled roar, did the gunners send back their defying answer to their hidden enemies.

A similar game was being played on the other side of the river, where, miles away, came a battery in column of route, heading unostentatiously for the drift: suddenly the enterprising Boers flopped a shell, followed by another, first on this side of the battery, then over their heads. "Action-right" was the yell, round wheeled the guns, and boom-boom, came the answer to the Boers. A few shells exchanged places, and then the battery limbered up and trekked on quietly to the drift.

In the far distance, towards the south-west, came acres of troops, clouds of cavalry, columns of infantry and the dense dust of great baggage lines, while over the sky-line sailed peacefully a huge balloon, looking unconcernedly down at us pigmies below, striving to oust each other from tiny little kopjes. This was Tucker's Division, coming up from the railway on our left rear, and by this movement causing the Boers, in due course of time, automatically to fall back from their right flank.

About this time, we also began to move – half of B, the rear company, being sent out to our left front, where a battery was coming into action behind the hill by indirect laying, and the other half moving along about a mile to our left, and slightly to the rear, to a point where the ground rose gradually in a long gentle swell until it joined the ridge above. This half company was sent by way of keeping an eye on the other side of the grassy slope, and it soon reached the ground and lay down in extended order. Letter A Company was then dribbled out, man by man, each about ten yards apart, in the same direction, with orders to move towards the end of the ridge: they came under some long range fire as soon as they quitted the shelter of our hill, and, bearing off rather too much to their left, eventually got round where B company was, lay down and opened fire. The Volunteer company was then sent on in the same way, and worked along to the spur, where A and B companies were gradually creeping along, upwards towards the ridge. Meanwhile D and E companies had moved out about a quarter of a mile to their left, and then turned and advanced towards the ridge. C company remained where it had halted earlier in the day, and was joined by F, both companies being held in reserve. The Maxim gun had been sent to a low spur on our left, where it came into action at 2,200 yards against a sangar on the top of the ridge, so as to cover the advance of the other companies; and the remaining two companies, G and H, were brought along behind the Maxim, and then sent forward in front of it.

This was the situation at about the middle of the morning. The battalion was extended over about a mile and a half of front, facing a ridge occupied by the enemy and distant some 1,500 yards, the companies being, in order from right to left, thus: D, E,  $\frac{1}{2}$ B, G, H, Vols., A, with C and F and half B in reserve. Our right was on a spur rising up towards the ridge, the centre was lined across a large open valley, and the left was on another spur which also ran up the ridge.

There was a round kraal on the summit of the ridge, at about the centre, in which the enemy had a gun, and where one or two men could be seen moving. The battery, over our heads, shelled this spot briskly, but without much effect, and we, from a closer range of 2,200 yards, turned our Maxim on to it, and searched the whole hillside in the neighbourhood. After a while a man, shown up distinctly against the sky-line, walked calmly out of this kraal, passed along and disappeared over the hill. One or two more followed, and then a little clump with, presumably, the gun in their midst, moved slowly out and away beyond view. All this time a heavy fire was being kept up by all the companies in the firing line, the Maxim was stuttering out bullets like mad, and the guns were dropping shells along the ridge, whilst these plucky Boers calmly and deliberately moved their gun clean away.

The instant it was gone, our slow and cumbrous Maxim hitched in its mules and advanced to a closer position, where, behind a wall at about 1,600 yards, its fire again searched out the slopes of the hill, especially to the left of the circular kraal –



the spot where the enemy's gun had been – where a number of stone walls, rising in tiers, seemed to point out a likely hiding-place for Boer sharpshooters. Meanwhile the firing line had been gradually closing up nearer to the foot of the hill, and we had spotted, at 600 yards, a Boer using black powder behind one of these stone walls, and were making it warm for him. Another advance or two, and we were nearer still to the ridge, when suddenly, like a flock of pigeons, up rose a crowd of men from behind the tiers of stone walls, and bolted up the hill. With a roar, our men were on their feet and after the Boers, racing madly up the hill, shouting, cheering, cursing the heavy blankets bumping at their backs, yelling with delight, regardless of the shells from our battery in rear screaming and whistling over their heads and plumping on the ridge.

Panting and blowing, the heavy equipment dragging them back, our fellows struggled on, and when close to the top of the ridge, with a final rush (headed in the centre by Markwick, Treagus, and H. B. Mills), gained the summit and paused to take breath. A few Boers had waited too long and now remained for ever, one with Mobsby's bayonet in him, whilst the others were trekking as fast as their ponies could carry them away from the cursed rooineks.

Numbers of loose ponies were about, and a few Boers opened fire on us from a knoll about 600 yards to our right front; while many others could be seen riding rapidly away. To hasten their departure, we fired a few volleys at 1,100 yards at these gentry,

the squad who fired at them being rather a mixed one, consisting as it did of the Second in Command, the Adjutant, a Second Lieutenant, and four or five men hastily scratched together – the whole under command of Lieut. Ashworth, who had only enough breath remaining to yell "Fire!" It is said that the oldest soldier of this squad "pulled off" and spoiled a volley; but perhaps he did not know very much about musketry!

The advance was continued very shortly afterwards, as soon as the men had got their breath; and soon all firing ceased, the Boers disappeared, and we devoted ourselves to looking about us and wondering where the Cavalry had got to.

After a few minutes, by which time most of the battalion had come up, we continued our advance as we were, without reforming, down the slope of the hill, across the valley, and up the gentle slope of the opposite hill, where we posted look-out men and reformed the companies.

Those that were on the right originally had been pushed off slightly to the right front, after occupying the hill we attacked, in order to search a kopje some little way off. Coming down the hill, after the rout of the Boers, everyone was on the look out for loot, as there were all sorts of articles strewn about, such as rifles, saddles, bandoliers, blankets, and great-coats; while there were numbers of loose ponies, ready saddled and bridled, quietly cropping the herbage. Quite a dozen of these were promptly annexed and mounted by the captors, who rode along in great pride. Each had a great coat and a blanket rolled

on the pommel, with a horse blanket under the saddle, and a couple of saddle-bags, usually containing a quantity of Mauser cartridges in addition to some food. One man was lucky enough to find a bag of coffee and a bag of sugar on one saddle, and others found Boer tobacco, dried fruit and other small articles. Several dead Boers lay about on the ridge, and a number of dead and wounded horses were on the reverse slope of the hill, whilst our Volunteers, when they came in with A company from the left flank, brought about a dozen prisoners, who had surrendered.

It was a fortunate thing for us that we did not remain on the top of the ridge, but continued our rapid advance without delay, as this prevented the Boers from collecting and opening fire on us. That they attempted to do this is certain, as one man of ours was shot dead on the top of the hill, and Second-Lieut. Paget was severely wounded, about the same time. The sharpshooters, however, who caused us these casualties, fled and left us in peace, when the companies on the right advanced towards them.

The usual practice at a field day is for the operations to conclude when the final charge has been delivered. Everyone then stands about, preferably on the skyline, in full view of the supposed retreating enemy, who may perhaps be merely removing to a better position in rear.

To do this on active service is, I think, criminal. The advance should certainly be continued by some, if not all, of the first line; or at any rate the first arrivals should push on so as to cover the advance of those behind them. There should be no stopping; the

enemy should be kept on the run, unless, of course, he has taken up another position in rear, in which case a bold front should be shown and he should be attacked at once while he is disorganised. There is always, however, the possibility of a trap having been prepared, and it has been a favourite trick of the Afridis to draw on our men to a position where they can be shot down at known ranges; so that considerable caution is necessary.

After forming up the whole battalion and calling the rolls, we joined the rest of the Brigade, and moved on a few miles to Erasmus Spruit, a nice little camp with good water and shade, and plenty of grass and wood. Now that the excitement was over we all felt pretty tired, and were glad to rest and get a meal.

The next morning we had some conversation with the prisoners, one or two of whom spoke English. They were the usual farm hand sort of type, some of them being young lads, of about the stamp of the recruits whom we get. They did not seem to mind having been captured, and were very grateful for what tobacco, coffee and other little luxuries we could give them.

One of them told me that the Maxim fire was terrible —*they dared not put their heads up to fire.*

I have never forgotten that remark, since the man made it to me, and there is a great deal in it to which the attention of company officers and section leaders might with advantage be drawn. The main point is that we Infantry do not fire nearly enough ammunition when delivering an attack. Of course we see no enemy: we only hear the crack of his rifle and the whiz of

his bullets: but we sometimes see the splash of the bullet on the ground, and can from that obtain some slight idea of his position at the time. Having found that, a constant hail of bullets should be directed at all parts of the position, high and low, at rocks, at bushes and at all places likely to afford a hiding spot, with the object always in view of making the enemy keep his head down behind his cover.

For this purpose volley firing is useless, and what should be adopted is controlled individual firing, using the magazine *always*, and refilling it behind cover when, and as often as, an opportunity occurs of so doing. There should be no breaks or intervals, either in the firing or in the advance: the latter should be continuous, as in the old skirmishing days, until the last possible moment, when, if the men cannot advance any further, they should take cover and employ themselves in firing as rapidly as possible.

The wretched system of false economy in the use of blank ammunition at instructional field days, when a man carries perhaps five rounds in his pouch and five in reserve, is responsible for the fact that men cannot be got to fire fast enough in the field, and that they lie under cover and husband their ammunition, firing only occasional shots, as they have been taught in peace time. They forget that they are now more widely extended than formerly and that one man now occupies as much space as was formerly allotted to five, and that he should, therefore, fire five times as fast as before. The present system of

widely extended lines is merely what was learned by the troops employed in the Chitral and Tirah expeditions, two or three years ago; and the system of fighting adopted by the Afridis is practically the same as that used by the Boers in the Free State and the Transvaal.

Owing to the widely extended lines adopted by us in our advance at Zand River, and to the steady shelling by the batteries which the enemy received during the attack, our casualties were not very heavy.<sup>3</sup>

The following order was published by the General on the day after the battle: —

*Twistniet, Zand River,*

The Major General Commanding desires to express his pleasure at the behaviour of the brigade yesterday. The good leading of the officers and the conduct of the men enabled a strong and numerously held position to be captured with a slight loss.

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<sup>3</sup> Our losses on this day were as follows: —

# CHAPTER V

## ACROSS THE VAAL

### **Kroonstad – The Road to Lindley – Drifts – Lindley – Heilbron – Elysium – The Vaal at last**

The day after the Zand River fight we had a long rest, and did not start on the march again till after mid-day; and a terribly long march it was, the Brigade not getting into camp till considerably after dark. It being our turn to be advanced guard, we had to find the pickets as soon as we arrived in camp. The worst part of all night marches is the slowness of the pace; the troops creep along with frequent halts, either to rest or to reconnoitre the road, and what appears to have been a twenty mile march, has in reality not been more than half that distance.

On the 12th May we started off after breakfast at about nine o'clock, with another long march of 17 miles before us; but this one was done in good style, as we halted for three hours in the middle of the day to rest and cook a meal. Eventually we fetched up in our new camp, a few miles outside Kroonstad, about six in the evening.

This town is, after Bloemfontein, the largest and most important in the Orange River Colony; it is well situated on the

main line of railway, and is a popular resort in the summer owing to the boating on the river. There is one large hotel and several smaller ones, some large stores and the usual public buildings – landrost's office, post and telegraph office, bank, etc. The Boers had on their retreat done considerable damage in this town by burning the goods shed at the railway station, and by blowing up the railway bridge; but the latter was the most serious by far, as the loss of the goods shed did not affect the military situation in the least. The bridge was a fine lofty structure with huge stone piers and enormous steel girders; two of the piers were blown to pieces, and we found the girders hanging down into the water. There is another large railway bridge about a mile away, but luckily the Boers made no attempt to destroy it.

Our engineers were soon on the spot, and at the end of a few days (certainly under a week) had found and repaired the old deviation which was in use before the bridge was built, had made a low bridge of sleepers over the drift, and had trains running without any more trouble. These old deviations exist at every river where there is now a bridge, and were made years ago when the line was building; so that all our engineers had to do when a bridge was blown up, as they were at Glen, Vet River, and many other places, was to find the deviation, clear out the weeds, lay the rails, and repair the line where it required it; and trains were running again in, probably, a day or two. One great drawback, however, was the want of engines and rolling stock, as the Boers had removed all they could take away up country, and we could



not get nearly enough engines and wagons from the Cape railways to satisfy our requirements.

There were a few supplies left in the town, and a wagon load was bought for the regimental canteen, most of the contents, milk, jam, tobacco, matches, sugar and eatables generally, being sold out the same afternoon. The Staff Officer for Supplies had been round the town before our canteen people got in, and had collared nearly all the tea and sugar; but we managed to get a good quantity. After having been on three-quarter rations for the best part of a fortnight, our men were quite ready to buy any amount of foodstuffs, especially tea and sugar.

Two days did we halt here and enjoy our well earned rest, but on the 15th of May we were off again on the road to Lindley – and such a road! Even now, after many months, one remembers as in a nightmare that cursed road to Lindley, with its ever recurring drifts and its messages – "The General wishes you to send a company to the drift to assist the baggage," or to repair the road, or to pull wagons out of the mud. The drifts were the steepest and the worst that we experienced in perhaps all our trekking. The full distance to Lindley was about 48 miles, but, the first march being only a short one, we made the last two average over 15 miles each, both of which had more than their proper allowance of drifts.

It might be as well at this stage of the proceedings to describe what a bad drift looks like to an unprejudiced and impartial mind.

A drift is really a crossing place over a river, which latter is

called a sluit, if it has water in it, or a spruit if it is dry; and whether the drift is easy or difficult for wagons to cross depends on the banks and the bottom. Thus, a shallow drift gives no trouble at all; but if the banks are steep, the mules and oxen go down one side with a run, even if the brake be well screwed up on the wagons, and invariably get mixed up at the bottom, getting their legs over the traces and pole chain: or perhaps one is pulled down, when there is much confusion and delay. If the bank is very steep on the other side, fatigue parties have to come and push the wagons up by main force, or else a team of bullocks is brought from another wagon and hitched on in front of the team which is in difficulties. Even then there is more delay, as the business is to get all the thirty or thirty-six oxen to pull simultaneously; and to induce them to do this, half a dozen drivers with their enormous two-handed whips, like huge fishing rods, flog the wretched animals unmercifully, yelling and screaming all sorts of insults in Basuto at the trembling beasts.

If there is mud or water at the bottom of the drift, the difficulty is increased enormously, as the banks become slippery. It is doubtful which are the worst animals to have in your wagon when crossing a bad drift, mules or bullocks. The mules generally get mixed up with the harness, but on the other hand, when once they are started pulling all together, they certainly do tug all they know, and need no more incentive than a row of men on each side of the path yelling at them. Bullocks, however, are faint-hearted and difficult to manage, as they will lie down when they

have had enough of it, and nothing will induce them to pull when they think they cannot do any good. There is one good point about bullocks, and that is that if they can only be induced to lean into their yokes, all together, their enormous bulk and weight will move anything. The greatest abomination of all in a drift or on a road is sand, as that causes trouble with both mules and bullocks; and our worst drawback has been the native drivers, as, owing to the enormous number of wagons in use by the troops, the supply of good drivers ran short, and any coolie was accepted. It was the same with the conductors, or civilians in charge of wagons, who were all supposed to be experienced transport riders; but one little man confided to me that he was nothing more or less than a baker out of employment!

The Boers, when trekking with their wagons under ordinary circumstances, take things very leisurely at drifts, and hitch on an extra team at once if there is the slightest sign of trouble; but this, although the best plan, wastes a lot of time, and we never had any time to spare on the march.

Lindley, like most of the towns we visited, is situated in a hollow, and on topping a rise in the ground we saw it at our feet. It is a small town, but has<sup>4</sup> given more trouble than any other in the colony, as it and the neighbourhood has been nothing more than a hotbed of rebellion for months; in fact since we first entered it, when the majority of the surrounding burghers took the oath of allegiance and surrendered what old guns they had – of no use

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<sup>4</sup> December, 1900.

even to scare crows with. It is built on the same river, the Valsch, that runs past Kroonstad, and in its most palmy days contained only a few hundred inhabitants.

On the 19th of May General Ian Hamilton issued the following information in the Winburg Column Orders of that date: —

"With the occupation of Lindley, the provisional seat of the Free State Government, the first part of the task allotted to the Winburg Column has been accomplished to the satisfaction of the Field Marshal Commanding in Chief.

"The next task allotted to the Column is to lead the advance northwards and to capture the important town of Heilbron."

Our entry into Lindley was entirely unopposed, and we camped a mile south-west of the town, about four o'clock in the afternoon of the 18th of May. There was an immediate rush into the town of all those who could get passes in search of bread, besides butter and other delicacies to ameliorate the condition of the regulation biscuit, which by this time had become harder than usual. However, the Canteen cart got private information, and secured a cask of butter and several boxes of eggs, which were duly sold to the men of the regiment early next morning. There was nothing else procurable in the town, except a little fresh bread.

After a day's rest at Lindley, we trekked off again on the 20th of May, starting at seven o'clock; and fortunate it was that we did start so early, as there was a considerable amount of firing on the

rear guard, and a fairly lively action going on until about midday. We were with the main column in front of the baggage, and had of course to regulate our pace by the rear guard; but we heard afterwards that as they were leaving the neighbourhood of the town they were followed up by a large number of mounted Boers, whose presence was not expected by the Mounted Infantry forming the screen in rear of our troops; these Boers pressed our men rather closely, one or two of the Mounted Infantry, who found themselves hung up at a barbed wire fence, being captured, and a few men being wounded. There were some narrow escapes, Lieut. Lloyd, the Supply officer, having to ride all he knew to get clear, and the mess cart belonging to the Mounted Infantry being abandoned; the men in charge had only just time to take out the ponies and bolt for their lives.

We did not get into camp until after dark, and the baggage was later still, as there was a nasty drift over a sluit at the entrance to the camping ground; fires had to be lighted to show the wagons the way across. The 19th Brigade and some of the Mounted Infantry camped a few miles lower down, where there was another drift over the same stream.

After a march of seventeen miles, on the 21st of May, we found Heilbron in front of us; and the next day, after a short spell of ten miles, we camped to the south-east of the town, such as it is. Heilbron comes distinctly under the category of "one horse" towns, notwithstanding that it is connected by rail with important cities, and hopes in due course of time to have its

railway prolonged to Bethlehem; but until that happy occasion Heilbron is vegetating. It is a Mark IV town of the usual pattern – Dutch Reformed Church in the middle of the square, one or two melancholy streets stretching slowly away at right angles to each other, a hotel, conspicuous for the entire absence of anything which, in happier climes, constitutes refreshment for man and beast, a despondent-looking shop or two with a large stock of lemons, medicines, sheep dip and ironmongery, and some tired-looking inhabitants holding up the door-posts of their houses.

We headed off towards the railway main line on the 23rd of May, and camped that afternoon at a place called Spitzkop.

Next day, the Queen's Birthday, the band turned out at reveillé and played "God Save the Queen," causing the greatest outbursts of cheering from the other regiments, which was taken up and continued by the Cavalry and Mounted Infantry. That day we marched to the railway and struck it, and then trekked off, some miles north, to the neighbourhood of Elysium, where we camped on a great rolling plain, extending for miles in every direction. The march was an unpleasant and a lengthy one, as the whole surrounding country was either a burning grass fire or a place where there had been one, and we walked over dust and ashes, which parched the mouth and interrupted the breathing. In many places on the veldt the grass grows in small clumps, somewhat isolated from each other, and although this looks pleasant enough to walk upon, you soon find that these little grassy bunches put you out of your stride and upset your balance time after time.

This is, if anything, rather worse than when the grass has been burnt off.

The following Brigade Order was published on the 26th of May: —

"The G.O.C. wishes to express his appreciation of the fine spirit and excellent marching shown by the troops composing the 21st Brigade since it was formed at Glen on April 29th 1900. Since then the Brigade has marched 250 miles, and the effect of this long and rapid march has been that the enemy has been unable to complete his preparations for defence, and has been repeatedly compelled to retreat in front of us after a weak resistance. The force is now a few miles off the Vaal River and not 50 miles from Johannesburg, and the Major-General is sure that every man of the 21st Brigade wishes to share in the entry into that town, and that every possible effort will be made by all ranks to attain that object."

After starting on that day, the 26th of May, we halted for several hours to enable a part of Lord Roberts' main column to pass us, so that our baggage should not become intermingled. We were crossing their path, which led them to the north, while we were heading north-west.

The country is marvellously open between the the railway and the Vaal River; not a tree was to be seen, hardly a farm – nothing but endless rolling veldt as far as the eye could reach, covered with grass. There was no view, nothing to rest the eye or give the fatigued brain a little relief. As soon as a gentle rise was topped,

the same expanse was to be seen in front, with some slightly rising ground in the far distance, from which the same view of interminable veldt would, in due time, be procurable.

After many, many miles of this sort of travelling, we at last saw, from the top of a rolling down, a silvery streak winding in and out on our left front, fringed with a few scattered green bushes.

At once everyone's spirits rose, and we stepped out briskly, and, sure sign that camp was near, all the men began to chatter; and with reason too, for was not this silvery streak the great Vaal River, dividing us from Paul Kruger's territory, and would not we be over it before we halted? Certainly we would; we would get that far at any rate; no more camping for us till we had secured a sound footing in the Transvaal, which we had come so many thousand miles to see and conquer.

A couple of hours afterwards, under a setting sun, we were at the drift, and what a sight was there! We were fording a crossing at a shallow bend of the river, and it had been necessary to cut down the banks and improve the approaches, so that the wagons might have some chance of getting over. Meantime the south bank was crowded with wagons and vehicles of all kinds, guns, baggage-wagons, Cape carts, water-carts, ox-wagons, ammunition-carts, mule-wagons, drawn up in long rows, patiently waiting their turn to be dragged and pushed across.

The infantry troubled themselves not the slightest about all this, but passed stolidly down to the water's edge, stripped off



their boots and socks by companies, and stepped gingerly into the eighteen inches of dirty water. On their left, within a few feet, was an endless succession of wagons streaming across; a little further down was a wagon with ten jibbing and obstinate mules, who had got into deep water and heeded not the yells and whip cracks of their two black boys, themselves unwilling to go further into the water than they could help. On the farther side fires were being lit to show the drivers what was land and what was water, and superhuman efforts were being made to keep the wagons moving ahead up the steep, rocky bank so as not to block the road.

Never was there a more weird military scene. Every nigger was yelling like a fiend, and cracking his whip like mad over the flanks of his wretched animals, soldiers were shoving at the wheels of every wagon, Staff officers, cool and collected, were dispersed at intervals directing operations, the worried baggage-master, dancing with rage, was using the most dreadful language on a jutting bank, and the infantry, with their boots slung round their necks and their socks in their pockets, were trying to avoid the sharp stones of the bottom.

So it continued without intermission till about midnight, by which time nearly all had been got across. Our footing in the Transvaal was gained.

# CHAPTER VI

## DOORNKOP

**On the way to Johannesburg – 29th May – 2 p.m. – Attack begins – The advance – Checked by flanking fire from One Tree Hill – Attack of this position – Through veldt fire – Final charge – Boer retreat – Gordons attack simultaneously – Main attack pushed home – Casualties**

On Sunday, the 27th of May, we started at 8.30 a.m., and marched some sixteen miles before camping. Bitterly cold it was that night, and we felt it a good deal the next day, when we started at 6.45 a.m. and trekked 10 miles to a small hill a little south of Cypherfontein; here, during most of the afternoon, we heard shells and pom-poms and other indications of a brisk fight going on towards the north. Away to the south we could see dimly Lord Roberts' troops, who had crossed the Vaal at Vereeniging, higher up than we did, pressing on to the junction of the railways at Elandsfontein. Our business, we now learned, was to push off to the left and make an enveloping movement on the enemy's right, whilst General French delivered his blow in front and Lord

Roberts fell on the Boer left.

We therefore made an early start, and were under way at 6.30, despite the severe cold, and, with the 19th Brigade leading, headed north-west, so as to come up on the left of Johannesburg. We spent the earlier part of the day marching and halting and moving on again, and watching the cavalry on our right, and the shrapnel and pom-pom shells bursting; until about two o'clock we were moved out from behind a hill, upon which was a battery busily engaged in shelling the enemy's guns, one or two of which were in position on some low hills about a mile and a half away. We lay down in the open grass with big intervals between companies. At the same time the City Imperial Volunteers had pushed on to the left of the guns, and the Derbyshire had also gone out in companies in widely extended order. And so we lay and watched and waited.

We were at the end of a long grassy valley, with smooth, rolling hills rising on our left and on our right, these latter separating us from Smith-Dorrien's Brigade; in front of us and blocking the end of the valley the hills swung round from the left and trended off to our right front, leaving a sort of gap in what might be called the right top corner of the picture; this we afterwards found to be the nearest way to Johannesburg. The smooth hills on our right rose gradually and ended in a cluster of rocks, surmounted by a solitary tree – an ideal position, in which we afterwards found that the enemy had a field gun, a Maxim and endless riflemen.

In front of us, the low hills which seemed to close in the valley, and indeed part of the valley itself, had suffered from a grass fire, and only an occasional ant-hill showed up grey against the black soil.

We had moved slightly to our right and had extended a little, and were again lying down in the grass; suddenly the enemy's guns spotted us and sent along a couple of shells, clear of us, luckily, but near enough to the lagging water-cart to make it increase its pace somewhat abruptly.

We had watched the C.I.V.'s pass out of sight along the ridge to the left, and then we had seen the Derbyshire moving along in the same direction. The enemy's gun, right in front of us, up the valley, we could with difficulty locate, but it was carrying on a plucky duel with our battery.

At last we got orders to move: D company led off first, followed by E, both in widely-extended lines, officers and all supernumeraries being in the ranks; and, with intervals of some 80 or 100 yards between the companies, after these followed F and G, and, behind them again, came H, the Volunteers, A, B and C. The Maxim gun went with the leading company, and, under charge of Captain Green, operated on its left. Soon after the companies led off they began to come under the long range fire of the Mausers, and the little spirts of dust were rapidly becoming more numerous as the lines of skirmishers diminished the distance between themselves and the enemy. At last it became necessary to subdue the enemy's eagerness somewhat, and the

leading lines dropped down on the veldt and opened fire on the invisible Boers. After a while the skirmishers rose to their feet and advanced, whereupon the enemy's fire redoubled in intensity: regardless of the bullets, which were falling pretty thickly by now, a few men having been hit, our men pushed on, and, with the supporting lines which came up in rear, rapidly drew nearer to the enemy's position. Soon shots were observed to be coming from a new direction, from our right front, where, a long distance away, was the cluster of rocks and the solitary tree, which we had previously noticed as being a likely position for the enemy's sharpshooters.

After a little while there was no possible doubt upon this question, because, as our leading lines crept forward, the dropping shots from the right front became vastly more numerous, while one or two more casualties occurred. All this time the enemy on our front were keeping up a brisk rattle of musketry, but as our men were fully seven to ten paces apart this shooting had little effect upon them; not so however, the cross fire from our right front, which caught us diagonally, as it were, and caused a few more casualties. The machine-gun had come into action on the left, but was soon spotted by the Boers, who concentrated a pretty heavy fire on the unfortunate Maxim, which, with its big wheels, and the huge shields to the limber boxes sticking up in the air, provided the Boers with a target that they did not often get. Sergeant Funnell was shot in the head almost immediately the gun came into action, Archer

and Hunnisett were knocked over, and only two men left to work the gun, which ceased firing for some minutes until Corporal Weston and two men from the nearest company, D, volunteered to assist. As it was so palpable that the enemy's fire was being concentrated on the gun, Captain Green ordered the detachment to lie down and use their rifles.

The wheel mule, an acquisition of the battalion dating from Bethulie (where the animal, a fine specimen of its kind, was found wandering in an ownerless state), was hit in two places, while the lead mule was so alarmed at this untoward accident to his stable companion, as to be quite petrified with fear and unable to move. When the advance took place he had to be abandoned, and the gun went on with "Bethulie" alone.

The leading companies had by now been reinforced by some of the supporting companies in rear, but had reached a limit from which further advance would not have been possible without very serious loss, so they lay down and blazed at the rocks and clumps of bushes which concealed the enemy. For some little distance now the advance had been carried out over the scene of the grass fire, which was even then still burning away on our right, and the only cover the men had was an occasional ant heap; but even this was but little protection from the stinging flanking fire which was whistling over from the right.

Noticing that the firing line seemed to be checked temporarily, and soon discovering the cause, an officer from the rear succeeded in turning the flank sections of F and G

companies, together with some men of E company, and making a demonstration against our friends on One Tree Hill. These fellows, however, were quite wide awake, and made it hot for this small party, who were attempting to create a diversion in the state of affairs.

Their firing increased in intensity; Corporal Hollington and one or two others were shot, and our men, who were only about 800 yards from the position, soon abandoned the drill-book style of advancing by alternate sections (which only caused the enemy's fire to be doubled and redoubled as they gleefully took aim at the full-length figures of our soldiers), and continued their advance by crawling on their hands and knees through the long grass, and by keeping up a continued dropping fire on the rocks concealing our enemies. Not a single Boer had any of us seen since we started, and, at this stage of the proceedings, none of the enemy were likely to show themselves. Looking back, we could see heads behind us – a long way, certainly, but they showed that the Colonel had observed our flanking movement and had despatched a company to our support.

Emboldened by this, we pressed on, but our crawling progress through the grass was brought to a sudden end by our reaching the edge of a rapidly-advancing grass fire, while before us stretched a waste of burnt ground, with a few, a very few, grey ant heaps showing up. There was only one thing to do, and that was done quickly; springing to their feet, the two or three officers with this little party yelled to their men, who dashed on with shouts

and cheers, through the flickering fire and the smoke, on to the bare ground beyond. They raced on rapidly, the faster runners outpacing the others, until breath began to go and knees to totter; and after a couple of hundred yards or so, we were glad to drop into a schanz, or long trench, which we found suddenly at our feet, and halt there to regain our breath.

We still kept up our fire, and the enemy's began to slacken, and at last almost ceased; there was no time to waste if we wanted to see a Boer, so we jumped out of the schanz and dashed on as fast as our heavy equipment and cumbrous roll of blanket would permit us towards the rocks, now silent as the grave.

Bearing off a little to the left to some slightly rising ground, we found ourselves alone; but what a sight was in front of us!

The ground dipped and rose again in a gentle slope of grassy fields with a rocky patch on the summit, about 1,100 or 1,200 yards away; and these grassy fields, about twenty or thirty acres in extent, were alive with fugitives moving rapidly towards the rear. Among them (and this is a curious circumstance which puzzled us not a little at the time and afterwards) were a number of mounted men, dashing furiously amongst the runaways. The sight of these riders careering wildly among a crowd of flying Boers stayed our volleys for some moments, while we overhauled the scene with our glasses. Could these mounted men be our cavalry suddenly appearing from the right flank, where we had left them?

No, they could surely not have travelled the distance in the



time, so we formed up what men we had at hand and poured several volleys at 1,200 yards into the retreating enemy. After ten or a dozen volleys had been fired, a Highlander appeared among the rocks on our right, and, holding up his hand, shouted to us to stop firing. Wondering at this, reluctantly we complied, and the enemy quickly dwindled away; we had serious thoughts of following them rapidly, but, seeing how few men of ours were actually on the spot, and in view of the possibility that the Boers would hold the rocky patch on the summit, we decided against it, and proceeded to overhaul the rocks on our right, which but a short time before had been teeming with riflemen.

In a cunningly-selected nook was the spot where the enemy's gun had been at work; all round the ground was strewn with empty shell boxes, fifteen or twenty of them, and the grass was thick with the little cardboard boxes in which Mauser ammunition is issued. Several large tins still had a quantity of rusk biscuit remaining in them, but these soon disappeared into our fellows' haversacks; a few blankets were lying about, and the usual camp litter and rubbish showed that a party of some strength had had their head-quarters on that spot since the day before. Two or three dead horses were in the vicinity, and a couple of wounded ones were put out of their agony; while several others browsing on the short grass were quickly collared.

Ensconced among the rocks were two or three Boers, shot dead behind their cover by the bullets of our little flanking attack, as was proved conclusively by the attitudes of the bodies. All

around, scattered in the most ingenious clefts among the rocks, were heaps and heaps of cartridge cases, Mauser, Lee-Metford, Steyr, and Martini, showing exactly the well-chosen positions of their former owners, and convincing us that thousands of our bullets might splash and splatter on the rocks close by without disturbing the occupants, until the fixing of the bayonets and the unrestrained advance of British soldiers caused that cold feeling down the back which no Boer could afford to disregard.

In a most ingeniously selected corner between several big rocks, improved by the addition of a few stones into a bullet-proof sangar, had been the enemy's Maxim, luckily for us not laid in our direction, but pumping forth lead against the attack of the Gordons, which, unknown to us, had been carried out on the other side of the ridge separating the two regiments. Apparently the dashing 800 yards' charge of the Gordons, in which they suffered such severe loss, had been taking place about the same time as our advance from the schanz, across the burnt grass; but whether it was our appearance so close to them, or the sight of the Gordons, so gallantly pushing on, which caused the enemy to retreat in such a hurry, none but the Boers themselves can decisively say.

Anyhow, we claim for the Royal Sussex the honour of being the first to reach One Tree Hill. When we originally rushed up to this spot, some few minutes were wasted in searching with glasses the crowd of flying Boers, one or two more minutes before men could be hastily gathered together on the knee

ready to fire, and about a dozen volleys had been hurriedly got off before the Highlander, to whose appearance I have before alluded, came out from among the rocks and waved to us to stop firing.

Dusk was closing in, so we reformed the companies which had taken part in this attack on One Tree Hill; they were principally the flank sections of E, F, and G, with a few men of D and some of the rear company, C, who were following in our support; and we moved off to join the remainder of the battalion.

We found that they had been at first checked by the cross fire from One Tree Hill, and by a considerable fire directed on them from the front, but had held their own, pouring in a constant fire, until the pressure on the right weakened somewhat the intensity of the Boer musketry, and enabled our men to continue their advance over the bare, level, burnt up ground.

The advance became quicker and quicker, the men came up with a livelier step and at last could be restrained no longer, and, with cheers and yells, which were taken up by the supports in rear, they dashed up the slope.

Here, amongst the rocks on the summit, they found the usual signs of recent occupation, cartridge cases and so on, and traces of the gun, which had evidently been removed some time earlier, besides a number of loose ponies, whose owners had apparently been unable to ride or unwilling to waste time in mounting.

The companies then formed up and joined hands with those

who had been engaged on the right; the rolls were called,<sup>5</sup> and we moved off to find the Brigade, eventually discovering that our camp was to be just beyond One Tree Hill and practically on the field of action. Here in the dark we sat and waited for our baggage: no water, no wood was procurable, and we had eaten nothing except a scrap of biscuit since six o'clock that morning. Those who had husbanded their water during the day now scored, and, with what bits of wood they had secured from the Boer shell cases, and had since carried on their backs, soon had their canteens boiling.

Later, the baggage arrived, and the water carts, the contents of the latter being divided among the companies; and the men soon settled down, tired out and hungry, and dropped off to sleep among the piled arms.

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<sup>5</sup> Our casualties were as follows: —

# CHAPTER VII

## PRETORIA

### **Johannesburg – Pretoria – An abortive conference – The entry and march past – The people – The town – Irene – Botha again fails to appear**

A few miles march on the 30th May cleared us from the scene of the battle of the day before and brought us into one of the mining suburbs of Johannesburg, Florida, where we camped in the midst of mining shafts and engine houses. Some few of the pumps were going, clearing out the water, but the majority of the mines were shut down and in charge of the Kaffir Mines Police; no damage had been done to any of them that we could see.

On the 31st of May the following Divisional Order was published: —

The G.O.C. has much pleasure in publishing the following extract from a letter just received from Lord Roberts: —

"I am delighted at your successes and grieved beyond measure at your poor fellows being without proper rations; a trainful shall go on to you to-day. I expect to get the notice that Johannesburg surrenders this morning, and we shall then march into the town. I wish your column, which has done so much to gain possession

of it, could be with us."

Two days we rested after our heavy day's work on the 29th, but we changed our camp to a new spot, more to the north and closer to the town. This was Bramfontein, and we were allowed to go into the town and inspect it, and make such purchases as we could.

Lord Roberts wired to the War Office on the 30th of May as follows: —

"The brunt of the fighting yesterday fell on Ian Hamilton's column. I had sent him, as already mentioned, to work round to the west of Johannesburg in support of French's cavalry, which was directed to go to the north, near the road leading to Pretoria. I have not heard from French yet, but Hamilton, in a report which has just reached me, states that about one o'clock in the afternoon he found his way blocked by the enemy strongly posted on some kopjes and ridges three miles south of the Rand. They had two heavy guns, some held guns and Pom-poms.

"Hamilton at once attacked. The right was led by the Gordons, who after capturing one extremity of the ridge, wheeled round and worked along it until after dark, clearing it of the enemy, who fought most obstinately. The City Imperial Volunteers led on the other flank and would not be denied, but the chief share in the action, as in the casualties, fell to the Gordons, whose gallant advance excited the admiration of all.

"Hamilton speaks in high terms of praise of the manner in which Bruce Hamilton and Spens of the Shropshire Light

Infantry handled the men under Smith-Dorrien's direction."

Johannesburg is a fine town, a long way superior to Pretoria or Bloemfontein: it owes its sudden rise and wonderful growth to its situation on the Witwatersrand and to the enormous development of the mining industries within the last few years.

No doubt when all the shops are open and the streets filled with the usual well-dressed crowd, it must make a fine appearance. When we first entered the town it looked quite desolate, with the magnificent plate glass windows boarded up and the doors covered with corrugated iron, evidently in anticipation of severe rioting and looting. Johannesburg has a most magnificent town railway station at the Park, with waiting rooms and offices, all of ornamental brick, mahogany and plate glass, fitted up in the most gorgeous style with silk curtains, marble floors and decorated ceilings. This is where the millionaires condescend to embark on the train, when they think of honouring one or other of the South African cities with their presence. The contrast between the elaborate Park station and the hovels that serve for stations at Elandsfontein and Bramfontein, is too absurd for words.

On Sunday, the 2nd of June, we were off again at seven o'clock; and the next day found us still heading off towards the north-west of Pretoria, apparently with the intention of circling round, and descending on the capital from the north or north-west. However, while we were on the march, our direction was changed, and we came back on our tracks, having received orders

to march straight on Pretoria. When this order was passed by the mounted officers, there was a certain amount of excitement, naturally, as Pretoria was our goal and destination. The band struck up a march and there was a scene of much enthusiasm, one regiment in particular cheering madly, and some individuals producing Union Jacks, which they flourished with all their might.

So on we went, and about three o'clock reached the shelter of the hills outside Pretoria. The 19th Brigade went up the hills a little way, and the rest of us lay down and waited to see if we were wanted. Some of the men fell out and wandered away to the reverse flank, but quickly came running back, as bullets were dropping over the hills, apparently fired at long range and considerable elevation. Indeed, a couple of the City Imperial Volunteers were hit by these spent bullets. Later, the Brigade camped close by, and in the dark, to our astonishment, we found, alongside of us, some of the Sussex Yeomanry; and then we heard of the unfortunate accident to the Duke of Norfolk, which precluded his taking any further part in active operations, and which, unfortunately, prevented our seeing him either.

The 5th of June was the great day of the campaign, culminating in the withdrawal of the enemy and the entry of the victorious troops into his capital.

Very early in the morning, De Lisle's Mounted Infantry had pushed on into the town from the position gained by them the previous evening, and, meeting with no opposition, had



demanded its surrender, but were received by Commandant Botha with a request for an armistice and a conference. This was of course agreed to by Lord Roberts, and nine o'clock was the hour fixed for the meeting. Towards that hour, therefore, all the troops who had marched with the 19th and 21st Brigades under General Ian Hamilton, were entering the pass which wound through the hills into the valley of Pretoria. This pass was quite two miles in length, and the surrounding country was composed of a succession of low, broken hills, which, if they had been held by a determined enemy, would have given us considerable trouble to capture. It has always been a marvel why the Boers did not defend Pretoria, surrounded, as it is, by a network of hills, topped by several strong forts built, I suppose, for that purpose; but probably the fact was that they would have been unable to get their big guns dragged up and mounted in sufficient time to oppose our advance, and therefore thought it wise not to risk them. Undoubtedly, Lord Roberts' rapid advance, or rather his dash from Bloemfontein to Pretoria, will be recorded in history as one of the remarkable military achievements of the century; and the breathless rapidity with which his movements were planned and executed had possibly paralysed the Boer commanders, and influenced their decision to sacrifice Pretoria, and to fall back to the east on the railway, as this would leave open a convenient line of retreat and an easy means of departure, whenever necessary, for Mr. Kruger and the foreign mercenaries, through Komati Poort and Delagoa Bay.

About nine o'clock, the hills opened out, and a mass of buildings could be seen in the dim distance: this was Pretoria, and, forming up on a low hill, a mile or two closer in, we were enabled to have a long look at the town about which we had heard so much of late years.

Between us and the town, and among a multitude of iron-roofed houses, was the famous race-course where so many of our unfortunate prisoners had been confined: we could just distinguish with our glasses the big enclosure with its high fence of corrugated iron, but it was too dim and misty at that hour of the morning for us to make out much more.

Nine o'clock came but no Commandant Botha, and no signs of him, or of anyone else. We were all ready for a durbar or a conference, formed up in three sides of a hollow square, and everyone who could raise a kodak had produced it and pushed himself up into a prominent position, ready to take snapshots of the celebrities. And so we waited for an hour, speculating idly as to the cause of the commandant's non-appearance, and inclining to the belief that he was merely bluffing, to gain time to get his guns away; whether he was or not we have never heard, but it was a very suspicious circumstance that he played a similar game on another occasion, and caused us to wait two days, which would have been valuable time to us had we been able to advance.

Eventually the troops moved on, and camped to the west of the town and just outside the notorious race-course, where merely a few sick prisoners were now left, the majority having

been moved some time previously to Waterval; while the officers had been confined in the Model School and other places in the town. On our approach, these officers, over a hundred in number, had succeeded in bouncing the few of their guards who still remained, and had effected their escape. They came and reported themselves to Lord Roberts, who afterwards inspected them on parade and congratulated them on obtaining their freedom.

The Brigade paraded in the early afternoon and formed up to march through the streets of the capital; the Derbyshire were leading, as it was their turn, and, headed by their band, they moved off in column of route; we followed, what was left of our band showing the way, and after us came the Camerons and then the C.I.V.

The streets were crammed with troops, as the Mounted Infantry and their baggage were passing along with us, and moving to their camp on the other side of the town; but when we approached the centre of the city they branched off to the left. The Guards' Brigade had preceded us and had left a number of men to keep the ground clear, as we entered on to the square. There, facing the Union Jack, floating (never again to be removed) proudly on the Town Hall, sat Lord Roberts on his charger, surrounded by the officers of his staff; while on the other side of the square, stood a dense, sullen mass of people – a few British subjects, but mostly foreigners who had business interests in Pretoria, with many women and children. What impressed us most was their silence: many of the women

were in tears, and most of the men glared at us with anything but friendly glances. And so we passed on, saluting Lord Roberts, and meeting General Kelly's friendly glance, and marched away down the principal street, named Kerk or Church Street.

In a prominent position behind Lord Roberts, and surrounded by a mass of scaffolding, was a pedestal, where work had been carried on to erect a statue of the President of the Transvaal Republic. That pedestal, destined to remain unfilled, stood there, a monument of disappointed ambition.

Down Church Street we went for half a mile, swung off to the right, and returned by a parallel road to our camping ground, passing the Electric Lighting Company's tall chimney, where the enterprising mechanics had, with much danger and trouble, hoisted the British flag at the summit, and stood at their gate cheering us as we went by; one of the few marks of enthusiasm with which we were greeted.

The square in the centre of the town contains the most important buildings, the Town Hall and the Raadzaal being large and lofty modern erections; a large hotel, three banks and several minor buildings complete the list. In Church Street are numerous splendid shops, which then showed signs of trouble, most of them being blocked up with corrugated iron, which, in compliment to the troops, as heralding the approach of safety, the owners were commencing to remove as we went by. The rest of the town, which is well laid out, with broad streets running at right angles and planted with trees, consists of smaller shops and native

stores, or of private residences – many of the latter built in the Indian style, with broad verandahs and large compounds, well planted and laid out. Further out to the west of the town are the suburban residences of the wealthier townspeople, in great contrast to the humble-looking dwelling of the President, which we passed on our way before we entered the square. Mrs. Kruger was still residing in the, to her, now lonely house, upon which an officer's guard had been mounted to ensure proper respect being paid to the old lady. Cleanliness was not a great point of the housekeeping, as may be understood from the fact that the sergeant of the guard was compelled to go and buy a bottle of Keating's Powder and some other disinfectant, the whole of which he had to sprinkle in the room allotted to the men as a guardroom, before it could be lived in.

We only stayed a day and a half in Pretoria, as on the 6th of June we were sent by half battalions to Irene, about 12 miles off, the first party moving at three o'clock in the afternoon and the others some hours later. The road winds for the first few miles, through a pass in the hills, in and out among dusty rocks, and then opens out on to the usual interminable veldt. Irene cannot be seen until the traveller is close upon it, as it lies in a fold of the ground; but it is not much worth seeing, anyhow, consisting merely of the railway station buildings, and some cement works. There is, however, a very successful irrigation farm in the neighbourhood.

Captain Maguire joined us here from England, looking very cheery, and full of keenness and eagerness to see some of the

show before it was all over.

Lord Roberts issued a special Army Order in Pretoria which may be of some interest; it ran as follows: —

### **Extract from Army Orders, 7th June, 1900**

"In congratulating the British Army in South Africa on the occupation of Johannesburg and Pretoria, the one being the principal town and the other the capital of the Transvaal, and also on the relief of Mafeking after an heroic defence of over 200 days, the F.M.C. in chief desires to place on record his high appreciation of the gallantry and endurance displayed by the troops, both those who have taken part in the advance across the Vaal River, and those who have been employed on the less arduous duty of protecting the line of communication through the Orange River Colony. After the force reached Bloemfontein on the 13th March it was necessary to halt there for a certain period. Through railway communication with Cape Colony had to be restored before supplies and necessaries of all kinds could be got from the base. The rapid advance from the Modder River, and the want of forage *en route*, had told heavily on the horses of the Cavalry, Artillery and Mounted Infantry, and the transport mules and oxen, and to replace these casualties a considerable number of animals had to be provided. Throughout the six weeks the Army halted at Bloemfontein, the enemy showed considerable activity especially in the south-eastern portion of the Orange River Colony; but by

the beginning of May, everything was in readiness for a further advance into the enemy's country, and on the 2nd of that month active operations again commenced. On the 12th May, Kroonstad, where Mr. Steyn had established the so-called Government of the Orange Free State, was entered. On the 17th May Mafeking was relieved. On the 31st May Johannesburg was occupied, and on the 5th June the British flag waved over Pretoria. During these thirty-five days the main body of the force marched 300 miles, including fifteen days' halt, and engaged the enemy on six different occasions. The column under Lieut. – Gen. Ian Hamilton marched 400 miles in forty-five days, including ten days' halt. It was engaged with the enemy twenty-eight times.

"The flying column under Colonel B. Mahon, which relieved Mafeking, marched at the rate of 15 miles a day for fourteen consecutive days, and successfully accomplished its object, despite the determined opposition offered by the enemy. During the recent operations, the sudden variations in temperature between the warm sun in the daytime, and the bitter cold at night, have been peculiarly trying to the troops, and owing to the necessity for rapid movement, the soldiers have frequently had to bivouac after long and trying marches without firewood and with scanty rations.

"The cheerful spirit with which difficulties have been overcome and hardships disregarded, are deserving of the highest praise, and in thanking all ranks for their successful efforts to attain the objects in view, Lord Roberts is proud to think that the soldiers under his command have worthily upheld the traditions of Her Majesty's Army, in fighting,

in marching, and in the admirable discipline which has been maintained through a period of no ordinary trial and difficulty."

We moved off, after a day's halt, in a north easterly direction, but halted on the 9th and 10th of June, when it was said that Botha, the Boer Commander in Chief, was arranging a Conference, which, however, seemingly fell through.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> As to these abortive conferences, it was subsequently learnt from Boers on Gen. Ben Viljoen's staff that after the fall of Pretoria Botha urgently advised President Kruger to make peace on any terms he could, on the ground that the farms of the Transvaal had not yet suffered from the war, the issue of which was no longer doubtful. Kruger was persuaded, and the conference arranged; but at the critical moment De Wet brought President Steyn up to Waterval, and they insisted that the war, by which the Free State had already suffered so much, should be continued. – Ed.



# **CHAPTER VIII**

## **DIAMOND HILL, FIRST DAY**

### **The attack begins – Description of ground – Capture of Boer advanced position – Night-fall**

On Monday, the 11th of June, began two days' heavy fighting; the operations were on a large scale against a strong and well-found enemy, posted, as we saw afterwards, in a position almost impregnable, along a front of six or eight miles, with his line of retreat open.

On the first day, the 11th of June, we were the leading battalion of the column, the Camerons being on baggage and rear guard and the Derbyshire and C.I.V's. with us. We marched at six o'clock and moved off towards the west; after trekking for a few miles we halted for some time under cover of a rise in the ground, from which we could see that the mounted troops were pretty heavily engaged in our front, over a considerable area. Away to our right front there was a plateau of great extent with a kopje of some size rising out of it; this kopje was being shelled with much spirit by the enemy, and on looking through our glasses we could see a fairly large party of mounted troops, either cavalry or mounted infantry, who were ensconced under

cover of the kopje. To all appearance they were hung up in a state of compulsory inaction, as they could neither leave its cover nor take any offensive steps. They appeared to be quite safe, however, as regards shell fire, for the shrapnel seemed to burst beyond them or on the far side of the hill each time.

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