THE RECORDS OF "I" COMPANY.

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Photo. by [*G. T. Jones & Co.*

THE LATE LIEUT. BROOKS.

THE

Records of "I" Company.

A BRIEF HISTORY

OF THE

EAST SURREY VOLUNTEERS'

SERVICE IN THE

SOUTH AFRICAN WAR.

BY

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LONDON:
WALBROOK & CO., LIMITED,
13, 14, & 15, WHITEFRIARS STREET, E.C.

1901.

To the Memory

OF OUR

FIVE GALLANT COMRADES

WHO SLEEP UNDER THE VELDT

IN SOLDIERS' GRAVES,

THIS RECORD IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

"Never has a mother had more reason to be proud of her valiant sons than England has to-day. And so we stand, and please God shall continue to stand, a united, world-wide Empire, bound together by ties of blood, of friendship, and an equal love of justice and truth, ready now, henceforth, and for ever to fulfil the glorious destiny of our race."—*Lord Roberts' Speech at Cape Town, Dec. 10, 1900.*

"The service which the South African Force has performed is, I venture to think, unique in the annals of war. . . . For months together, in fierce heat, in biting cold, in pouring rain, you, my comrades, have marched and fought without halt and bivouacked without shelter from the elements. You frequently have had to continue marching with your clothes in rags and your boots without soles. When not engaged in actual battle you have been continually shot at from behind kopjes by invisible enemies to whom every inch of the country was familiar. . . . You have covered with almost incredible speed enormous distances, and that often on very short supplies of food. You have endured the sufferings inevitable in war to sick and wounded men far from the base, without a murmur and even with cheerfulness. You have, in fact, acted up to the highest standard of patriotism. . . . Is it any wonder that I am intensely proud of the Army I have commanded, or that I regard you, my gallant and devoted comrades, with affection as well as with admiration, and that I feel deeply the parting from you ? "—*Lord Roberts' Farewell to the Troops, December, 1900.*

PREFACE.

THE purpose of this work will be accomplished if, in future years, a glance at its pages serves to awaken in the minds of my late comrades of "I" Company the memories of the months we have just spent in our country's service.

I claim for my account no literary merit. It has been my object to write simply a record of incidents which impressed themselves upon my mind or the mind of the comrade who witnessed them.

I must thank my numerous friends in the company—officers, non-commissioned officers, and privates—who have given me valuable assistance. To have attempted a complete account of our share in the campaign from my own recollection would have been impossible; but my comrades filled in, by the aid of their diaries, the missing links in the chain of events, and I trust that at least the more important of our doings have been sufficiently recorded.

This chronicle does not report every minor act, but the things mentioned will recall to memory many others, and I leave it to my late comrades-in-arms to fill in from the storehouse of their minds such details as will complete these word-pictures, which I have only drawn in rough outline.

Possibly some of the paragraphs contained in the following pages will read as though we were, at times, dissatisfied with our undertaking. Such, however, was

not the case—at any rate for longer than ten minutes on any occasion; and then only when some order which appeared to us unnecessary or even absurd was issued, or when one of our men suffered what seemed, to our minds, too severe a punishment for some trifling offence.

Our company officers did all they could for our comfort, and by their leniency kept many a man's sheet free from bad records. Some "crimes," in the military sense, could not be overlooked, but these were few and far between. We were ever ready to do our duty, grumbling or otherwise, and I don't think our officers had much trouble to ensure discipline.

The letters from Major Pearse are the best character our Company can claim, and of such a testimony any Volunteer Company may well be proud.

I trust that you who read the following pages will bear in mind that they were written by a private soldier, and, in consequence, be generous in your judgment. I offer merely a record of facts without exaggeration, and unembellished by fiction. I have endeavoured to express in words what we, of the Company, have personally experienced.

To my comrades I now commend "THE RECORDS OF 'I' COMPANY," trusting they will find them satisfactory, and that the book will at least serve to keep in mind the name of one who has shared with them an act of patriotic duty, and for whose many kindnesses he has the deepest feelings of gratitude.

A. G. GARRISH.

July 22nd, 1901.

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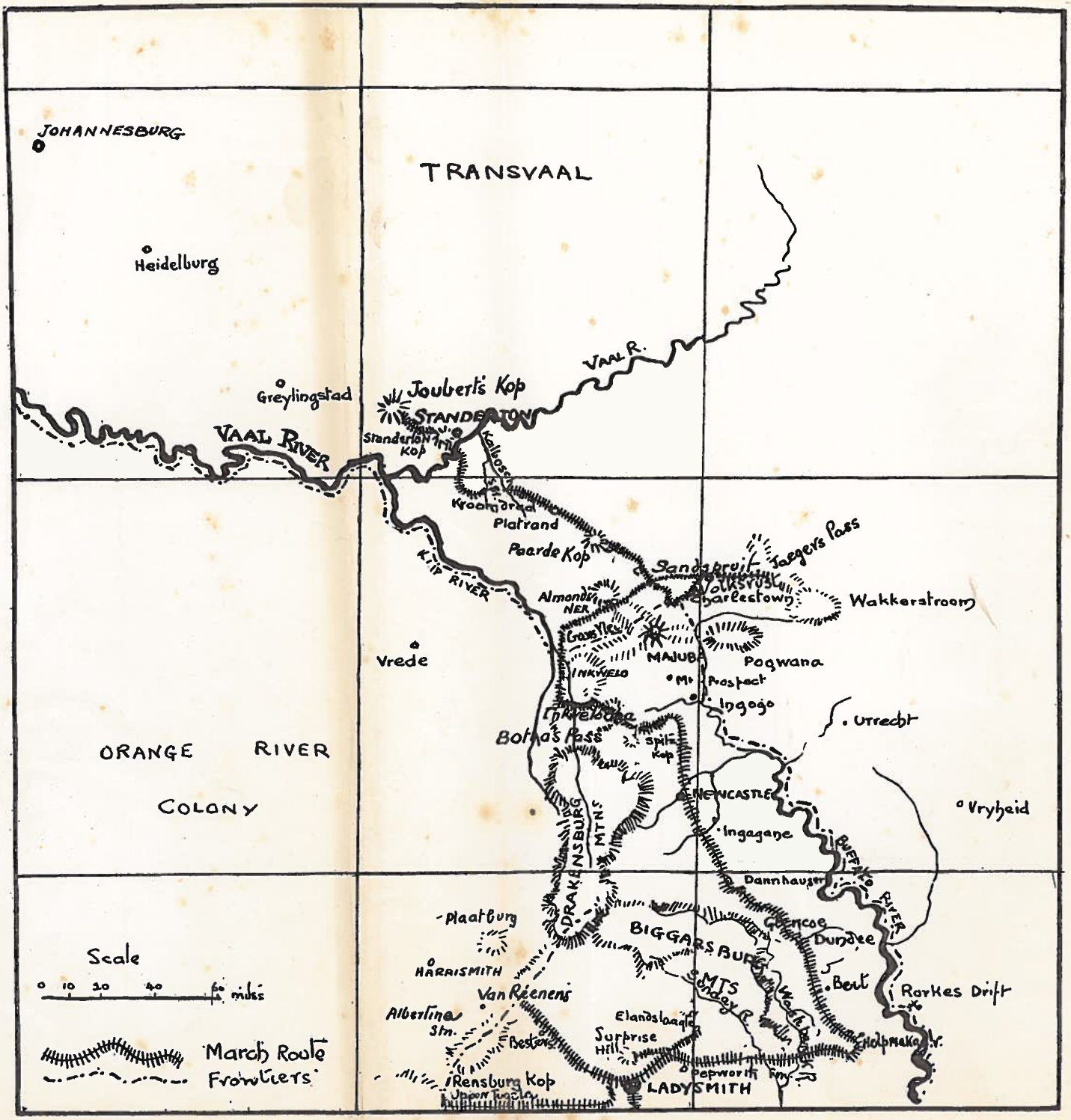


MAP OF THE MARCH ROUTE OF THE COMPANY.

INTRODUCTION.

BEFORE commencing my account of the services of the Company to which I had the honour to belong, I should like to recall to mind the *raison d'être* of the acceptance of the Volunteers by the War Office, to assist in the military operations in South Africa.

No one can forget the audacious ultimatum issued by Presidents Kruger and Steyn, which brought matters between Great Britain and the Republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State to a climax. Forces were despatched in all haste from England and India, and we were quickly threatening the Republics from East, West, and South. For a time all went well, but fortune turned, and the British armies met with reverses on all sides—General Buller at Colenso, Lord Methuen at Modder River, and General Gatacre at Stormberg.

At home this news was received with some consternation. It was immediately recognised that we had no mere farmer hordes to deal with, but an enemy who employed European leaders skilled in all the science of warfare, and who possessed the latest inventions in arms.

The Ministry acted promptly, and for some weeks thousands on thousands of troops were embarked at Southampton and elsewhere for the seat of war, the forces in the field meanwhile holding the enemy in check.

Sir Howard Vincent and other active and enthusiastic Volunteer officers, seized the opportunity of proving to the English public and the world at large that the "Saturday-night Warriors" could do more than play at soldiers, by offering men to go out to the front. The Government decided to accept this offer, and many corps were formed for active service, amongst them being Territorial Companies to serve with the Regular battalions in the field.

The East Surrey Volunteer Service Company was one of these, and as such became for a time part of the 2nd East Surrey Regiment; it was known throughout the operations as "I" Company. With this short explanation I will now commence my account.

The Records of "I" Company.

CHAPTER I.

From Kingston to Durban.

No Volunteer Regiment in the country showed more enthusiasm than did the East Surrey Battalions upon receiving the official invitation to form a Service Company to co-operate with the Regulars in the South African War. Our country needed our help, and we were only too proud to offer it. Names were quickly handed in, and soon each of the four Volunteer Battalions had enough men ready to compose their respective sections. After a medical examination at the Regimental Depôt, Colonel Phillips finally appointed us members of the East Surrey Regiment.

January 22, 1900, saw the muster of the Company at Kingston, where they were quartered for a brief training while being fitted with the necessary khaki for the field. No time was lost, and the men were fully occupied with route marches, bayonet exercise, and acquiring knowledge and practice in all the evolutions necessary to a soldier in active warfare.

The weather was extremely cold, and the drill was interrupted on one or two days by heavy falls of snow. This time, however, was not wasted, the officers and non-commissioned officers taking advantage of it to instruct us in military laws, scouting, &c.

At length the Company was reported complete, and very shortly afterwards we received orders to be ready to embark on the ss. "Tintagel Castle" on the 10th of March.

Dinners were given in honour of the Company by the 3rd Volunteer Battalion East Surrey Regt., and Lord Wandsworth, at which some complimentary speeches were made, and the best wishes expressed for our success.

A short furlough was granted to the men, which we all made the most of, afterwards mustering on March 9. Friends were admitted to the barracks during the day, and several stayed the night, none of us who were leaving for the front thinking of turning in.

Early on Saturday (March 10) we had a good square meal, and then fell in on the parade ground about 4.30 a.m., 116 strong, under the command of Captain Collyer and Lieutenants Longstaff and Brooks.

All being reported correct, we shook hands with those who had gathered in the barrack square, and forming fours, marched out of the depôt. At the gate we were met by a large crowd armed with torches, fireworks, and flags, who cheered again and again, and quickly broke through our ranks to bid a last farewell to those dear to them. The whole march to Kingston Station was in fact one triumphal procession, and, considering the early hour, the number of people who had collected brought clearly to our minds how much those at Kingston appreciated what we were willing to do for our country. There was no rowdyism, but on all sides, from friends and strangers alike, to those in our ranks who belonged to Kingston, and equally to those from other places, a sincere and hearty "God-speed, and a safe return" was wished.

At the station the enthusiasm was at its height, and the valiant efforts of the band were almost drowned in the continuous cheering. The men had hard work to reach the platform, but this was eventually accomplished with the aid of the police. The baggage was quickly packed in the train, and all aboard, we moved out of the station about 5 a.m. The band struck up "God Save the Queen," the crowd cheered louder than ever, and we began our journey for the distant battleground with the liveliest impressions of a hearty send-off a soldier could wish for.

After picking up the Middlesex Service Company at Hounslow, we had a quick run, and arrived at Southampton about 8.30 a.m. During the journey down we had, on previously received orders, carefully packed our equipment in the valise and attached a label thereto, so that on arrival it could, with such things as would not be required on the voyage, be stowed away.

A line was formed, and rifles and bayonets, helmets, valises with equipments, and one of our two kit bags, were rapidly collected and stowed in their respective store-rooms. We were then marched on board with our sea kit-bags and overcoats—the only things left in our possession—and were told off, in dozens, to the messes where we were to make ourselves at home for the next three weeks.

This done, we were free to go on the quay to have the last few words with those who had come down to Southampton to see us off. Other companies arrived in quick succession, and they were dealt with in the same orderly and quiet manner. Shortly after 2 p.m. all had arrived, and every soldier had to take his place at the mess table. The roll was called, we were reported all present, and were then allowed on deck. Here we seized on every available spot from deck to topmast, whence to get the best and longest view of those on the quay.

At 2.45 p.m. the last gangway was run ashore, the ropes were thrown off, and the vessel moved slowly away amidst cheers that only a British assembly can give.

An enthusiastic cornet-player strikes up "Rule Britannia," in which all on board join, losing for a moment the sorrows of parting in their pride at being reckoned fit to fight for that Britannia for which so many noble men had fought before. Then followed the National Anthem, getting fainter as we left the land behind. A last wave of the cap to those who are dear to us before they vanish from our sight—for how long none can tell—and all the bonds that held us are broken, and we are off, with thousands of miles to travel before we shall again set foot in dear old England.

For some time we remained on deck watching the coastline growing fainter and fainter, until it vanished in the dusk of evening. Then we went below to tea.

The weather was superb. A cloudless sky, a smooth sea, and a fair wind behind us, which allowed us to set sail, no doubt thus increasing our speed. Even the Bay, that terror to landsmen, smiled upon us, and afforded us a comparatively smooth run across its usually troubled waters. The catering for the troops was as good as could be wished for—and much better than we expected. In fact, it was practically third class passengers' fare. After the first day or two what little sickness there was disap-

peared, and we all settled down to have as comfortable a time as possible. Musical instruments had been brought on board by members of different companies, and every evening an impromptu concert was organised. The days were spent in sufficient exercise to keep the men fit, and instruction in the duties of a soldier in the field, and in the penalties for the various serious offences. Every man had his hammock and two blankets for the night, the hooks on which to sling them being fixed over the respective messes. These were drawn from the hammock room by the mess orderlies between 6 and 7 p.m., and returned at *réveille*. The extensive washhouses and offices were well looked after by the Engineer detachments on board.

All meals were drawn by the orderlies at the cookhouse door, in tins provided for that purpose. The tables were supplied with plates, glasses, &c., these, when not in use, being kept in a rack fitted up for that purpose. The whole vessel was lighted with electricity, each mess having a powerful lamp. The decks were regularly scrubbed by fatigue parties told off for the duty, and everything was kept as bright and clean as a new pin.

Land was sighted for the first time after leaving England, early on the morning of the 15th March; the snow-capped peak of Teneriffe towering above the bank of clouds that hung round its base; and shortly after noon we came to anchor at Las Palmas. This was the first of foreign lands most of us had ever seen, and we were proportionately interested in it. The town, situated upon the slope of a hill, with the low, white houses plentifully interspersed with palms and other trees, and here and there a dome or spire rising above the common level, with the ships in the harbour, formed an extremely beautiful picture. Behind the port rose a succession of flat-topped hills, higher and higher towards the interior, until their summits were lost in the clouds. Away to the right a sandy isthmus connected an almost detached bank of foliage with the mainland, and along this a tramway was laid.

Of course our view of the town was taken from the deck of the vessel, as no soldiers were allowed ashore. The wreck of the "Denton Grange" was still grounded closer in to land, with one or two traction engines, which

ought to have been doing good service at the Cape, rusting on her deck.

Immediately on our arrival numerous bumboats surrounded the vessel, and a lively trade commenced. Bananas, oranges, and cigars rapidly changed hands, and most of us laid in a stock of fruit to last over the fortnight of salt water that was to follow. The boys who dive for money in these parts also found plenty of patrons.

After a six hours' stay for coaling, the "Tintagel Castle" again weighed anchor, and just as the lights of the town began to twinkle in the distance we steamed away. The weather continued fine, though the heat became rather trying to us novices. Cape Verde was visible for a short time on the eastern horizon on Sunday, the 18th March. As we neared the tropics some of the wonders of the deep presented themselves in the shape of hundreds of flying fish, shoals of benitas, and a shark or two, as well as that beautiful little jellyfish known as the nautilus. A canvas salt-water bath was rigged up by the crew for the benefit of the troops, and many men were glad to take advantage of it morning and evening. Sports were started, and between the intervals of drill frequent contests took place between champions of rival companies, affording a great deal of amusement to the onlookers. Our men held their own well in these trials. Orders were issued that no socks or shoes were to be worn, and in consequence a few of us suffered from blisters, though in the majority of cases this practice hardened the feet for the coming trying marches. Those who wished it were inoculated against enteric by the ship's doctor, Dr. W. McLean, who was assisted by Dr. L. B. Betts. This caused some of the men to feel a bit "seedy" for a few days, but all got through without serious results. Awnings were now spread over the decks, and these afforded plentiful protection from the sun.

On the 21st March the equator was crossed. King Neptune, though rather chary in his visits lately, was good enough to honour us with his presence, and baptized a fair number. He arrived in the evening, but it was too late to perform the ceremony that night, so it was put off to the following afternoon. The sea ruler boarded us in good time, attended by his train in various grotesque costumes, and took his seat before the bath, with

Britannia on his left. His myrmidons then seized everyone pointed out, and hauled them before his throne, where they were lathered with paste, and shaved with a two-foot razor. A plentiful supply of powder in the shape of flour was then administered, after which the victim was ducked three times in the bath. A certificate was then presented to him, showing that he had been baptized a son of Neptune. Just at the end of the ceremony someone discovered Kruger hid in the washhouse, and he was quickly hauled forth and subjected to the ordeal, though he strongly resented the shaving and water.

But the voyage had its shadows as well as its sunlight. On Friday, 23rd, the enjoyment was marred by the death of a private in the Somerset Volunteer Company. He was buried early next morning by a clergyman who was a passenger on board. Nearly all the men were present, although attendance was voluntary, and the service was most impressive, as amongst all that concourse of rough-and-ready men not a murmur interrupted the voice of the minister. The "last post" sounded, the Union Jack was lifted, and the first amongst us to lay down his life for his country found a resting-place in the deep.

But a soldier has no time to think of past sorrows. The routine of life on board quickly dimmed our recollections of this scene, and we were soon as cheerful as ever.

On Sunday, 25th, Captain Collyer read prayers in the morning, after which we were free for the day. A strong headwind sprang up, which caused the vessel to pitch and roll considerably. The ss. "Norman" was sighted, and some signalling took place, but they had no fresh news to tell us. The following five days were spent in the usual manner, the weather being fine.

At daybreak on Saturday, the 31st of March, the long-looked-forward-to land appeared. The decks were promptly crowded, and every man strained his eyes on the yet far-distant coastline. As we drew nearer the rugged peaks that overshadow Cape Town became distinct, and towering prominently in their midst the world-famed Table Mountain. By 9 a.m. we were at anchor in the bay, and every available pair of field-glasses was intently scanning the surroundings. The anchorage was crowded with transports, nearly every vessel of any size bearing on its side,

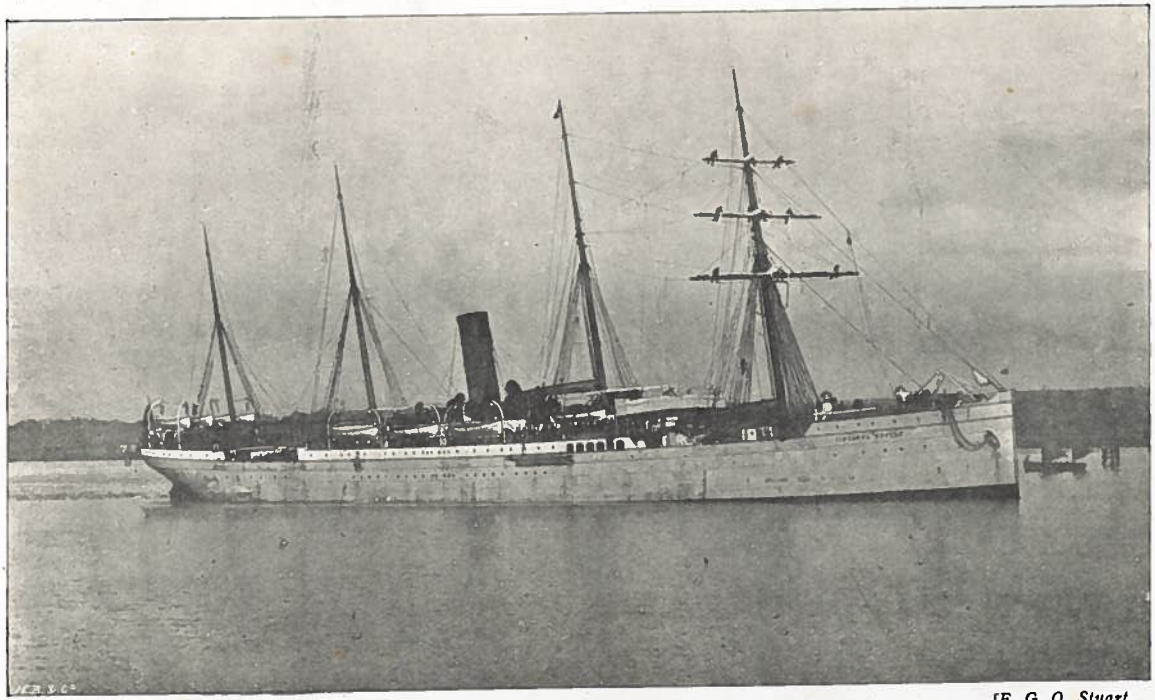


Photo. by] [*F. G. O. Stuart,*

SS. "TINTAGEL CASTLE."

in large figures, the number denoting that she belonged to this branch of the service. Some enthusiastic anglers were to be seen leaning over the side patiently waiting for a simple-minded fish to take their bait.

We lay off in the bay until 11 a.m. next day, when a quay became vacant, and we ran alongside. Five companies immediately disembarked, and the luggage was landed. Grapes were to be had on the wharf at 6d. a helmet-full; and this we took advantage of.

Cape Town lies directly at the foot of Table Mountain, whose wall-like side rises almost perpendicularly over it to a great height. On the south side, mountains of smaller size extend to the end of the Cape of Good Hope. Away to the north and east the land is comparatively flat at the sea edge, but some high mountain ranges can be seen further inland. The place is built for some distance along the coast, and is of considerable extent. Many large and handsome buildings are visible, rising above the ordinary level.

On Monday, 2nd April, we bade "Good-bye" to the ss. "Tintagel Castle," and landing for the first time on South African soil with our baggage, marched to a distant wharf, and embarked on the Union Steamship Company's liner "Goorkha," bound for Durban with about 700 men on board, and at daybreak next morning sailed out of harbour. This vessel is a fine twin screw steamer, with ample accommodation for passengers and officers on the upper deck. The troops were quartered on the lower deck, which had been well fitted up for our reception. In the "Tintagel Castle" the East Surreys had been messed right forward; here we were right aft. The food, though not so good as that previously supplied to us, was varied and plentiful, the arrangements for drawing it being the same as before.

Hence to Durban we had interesting glimpses of the country in whose interest we had come to fight. On Wednesday, 4th April, we came to anchor at 6.30 a.m. off the town of Aliwal South, or Mossel Bay. The town is prettily situated on a hillside in the western curve of the bay, and moving about the roads we caught our first glimpse of the Cape waggon drawn by sixteen oxen. The inhabitants sent an invitation to land, but time was too short to allow us to accept their hospitality. We

were the first troops who had called there during the war, and I expect they wanted a closer inspection of us. A few came on board, and before we left a welcome and generous present of fruit, biscuits, and cake was sent aboard for us. At 3 p.m. we weighed anchor and steamed off for Port Elizabeth. During the night we ran into a fog, and for some hours were at a standstill, hardly able to see twenty yards off. For a few minutes a large steamer was visible, passing us very closely, but she quickly vanished. Shortly after 11 a.m. the mist cleared off, and we found ourselves just off Algoa Bay. We ran in and came to anchor at 11.30 a.m. on the 5th, amongst the dozen or so of steamers already riding there.

Two dirty niggers had come aboard at Cape Town for Port Elizabeth. So far they had been clothed in the filthiest rags, but as we came to, we were surprised to discover them opening their bundles in an unoccupied horse-box. Off went the rags, and on went clean underclothing, new flannel trousers of a gaudy pattern, coat to match, and a smart felt hat. Then the troops cheered. It was afterwards reported that one of these blacks had three, and the other two, wives at this port.

We discharged a quantity of cargo during the day into lighters, and at 9 p.m. again got under weigh, and arrived at East London at 9.30 the following morning, coming to anchor in the roads. There is no harbour here for large vessels, the only shelter being the small mouth of the river, protected by breakwaters. The buildings lying on the east bank are very scattered, and some of them of considerable size. To the east of the town a large camp was pitched, and on the hills we could see some small bodies of cavalry manœuvring. We landed the Oxford Light Infantry Company here, a tug coming alongside, and the men being lowered into it in a basket, four at a time. The sea was very choppy, causing the tug to pitch heavily, and in consequence there was a little sickness. The Oxfords left the "Goorkha" amidst much cheering on both sides.

We lay here until 9 p.m., and then weighed anchor and sailed for the vessel's final destination. We were close in to the shore, and had a good view of the coast during the day, arriving at Durban at 6 p.m. on Sunday, the 8th of April, our voyage finished. Next morning a tug

with a barge in tow came off, and we all embarked thereon, and ran into port.

Durban possesses no bay in which to shelter the large amount of shipping which collects here. The river-mouth, though of considerable size, is far too shallow for vessels of large tonnage, and all the traffic is done by barges. Breakwaters have been erected to protect the lighter craft and form a small harbour; and here our tug ran alongside, and landed us at 1.30 p.m. We had no opportunity of seeing the town, no man being allowed to leave the ranks; at 2.30 a train of cattle and goods trucks ran on to the quay, and on this we embarked, and with a last glimpse at the sea turned our faces northward to the front.

CHAPTER II.

Pietermaritzburg, Ladysmith, and the Front.

Those who have never left England can form but a faint idea of a railway which runs through wildernesses, with here and there a small tract of cultivation. The flat plains are useless for engineering purposes in countries of drought and flood. So, in Natal, the single narrow line twists and curves, down and up gradients that an English engine would be helpless to ascend, round small ledges cut in the living rock of the hill, and anon plunging into some great rent which the puny hand of man has torn in the colossal mountain-side.

Up above us, for hundreds of feet, tower the kopjes of Natal; below us, in the valleys, the cattle and buildings are almost invisible, so high are we above them. The small ledge along which we are steaming, just broad enough for the single line, is lost to sight round the sharp curve a little further on, only to re-appear on the hillside across the valley. All around Nature is in her greenest robe; the sheep wander on the plain, the Kaffirs at work in the fields stop as we rush past to look at us, the only element of war in so peaceful and happy a scene.

A few hours, and what a change will be before our eyes! The quiet homestead will be replaced by a charred and battered ruin, the kine in the pasture by the slain chargers of the battlefield left to rot upon the ground, and in place of the labourers cultivating Nature's gifts, the stern sentinel, whose every sense is strained to catch the first warning of the coming foe. And one pathetic feature will be added to the scene. What is it we see yonder, hid away under the bushes? It is a little group of long, narrow mounds, with here a rough wooden cross bound with a bit of rope, and there a few large stones, hastily collected, which mark the last resting-places of some of England's heroes.

But to return to ourselves. On the way up to Pietermaritzburg the scenery, viewed from the railway, is remarkably fine. Here and there stand a few kraals, and less frequently a well-built farmhouse, with every sign of prosperity. We felt the cold somewhat in the open trucks as the day waned, but had too much to look at to allow it any thought. At Gilletts, a little station about three hours' run from Durban, we were presented with some hot tea by the ladies of the place—an hospitality which we fully appreciated. Let it be remembered, to the credit of these ladies, that they had done the same for every train-load of troops, except one or two at first, who had passed up-country during the war.

At Inchanga, where we arrived at 6 p.m., a slice of bread and a mouthful of coffee were served out, and this, with the breakfast we had on board, was all the food we received that day. As our stomachs grew empty, I'm afraid some of us already began thinking with regret of the good food we had wasted on the way out.

We ran into Pietermaritzburg station at 9.15 p.m., and quickly unloaded the baggage. There is one large platform here for passenger traffic, and the station is well supplied with the necessary conveniences of travelling, including large refreshment and dining-rooms, book-stall, lavatories, &c. The goods sheds adjoining are also on a very extensive scale.

Having packed our luggage, we were marched into camp, and here supplied with a blanket each, and told off to our tents. As there were but four available, we

averaged decidedly over twenty men to each tent. It was, too, our first sample of what Mother Earth is like in South Africa for a bed. We got hardened to it later on, but the first night we had very little sleep. Next morning we experienced drawing our own rations. A good number of Indians are admitted every day into camp; and from these fresh butter, salads, eggs, and fruits can be obtained at a reasonable figure when you have beaten the dealer down considerably. For a little time the ox and mule teams drawing the waggons were a novel sight, but we soon got used to our new surroundings.

The camp—which occupies a large and healthy site on a hill-side—is composed of lofty wooden huts surrounded by enormous verandahs; but these were all in use as the base hospital. The troops were, in consequence, under canvas. During our first stay here there were a great many men wearing the blue hospital suit, some strolling under the trees, hoping to get back their strength lost in fighting the fever fiend; others, sitting on the banks by the roadside, could show wounds received in the many gallant attempts to accomplish the relief of Ladysmith; while, side by side with these, sat those who had suffered in the heroic defence of that town.

Owing to the crowded condition of the tent, several of us slept in the open for the first time. Soon after dark we gathered up our blanket, overcoat, Balaclava cap, with haversack or helmet for pillow, and sallied forth to find some quiet and secluded spot in which to spend the night. About 1 or 2 a.m. we would awake to find a nice drop of rain—as one of our comrades called it—descending, and that our bedding was already tolerably damp. Seizing our blanket, &c., we promptly made tracks for the nearest verandah, where we spent the rest of the night.

But these minor trials were not to trouble us for long. Greater hardships awaited us, and we quickly learned to look back to our stay at Pietermaritzburg as a happy and comfortable time. Orders were received for us to be ready by Wednesday, April 11, for the front. Our kit-bags, after we had extracted such necessities as we could take with us from them, were sent into store; and this, as after events proved, was the last we were to see of the larger part of our belongings.

At 10 p.m. 100 rounds of ammunition per man were served out; and with our spare shirt and socks rolled in our overcoat, and one or two trifles in our haversack, we fell in, all our baggage, consisting of just what we had about us, ready to take the field. Rain was falling at the time, and continued to do so all night, which, as we travelled in open trucks, greatly added to the general discomfort. The regulars of the battalion we were going to join, who were at the base, bade us an affectionate farewell, and wished us better luck than they had had, as most of them were wounded. We marched to the station, and took our seats in the carriages, where we promptly began to make ourselves as snug as possible for the long and tedious journey before us.

The engine whistles, and off we go into the rain and darkness, leaving behind the last glimpse of peace and plenty. Before us, in the night, lie starvation, cold, and heavy fatigue; but of this we are as yet ignorant.

As morning broke we found ourselves on the famous battle-fields around the Tugela. Here, on our right, we pass the wreck of the armoured train reminiscent of the engagement when Winston Churchill, the war correspondent, so nobly distinguished himself. A little further on, and we see the spot where the heroic son of as great a military leader as England has ever seen finds a resting-place in the ground on which he covered himself with glory—I refer to Lieutenant Roberts's grave. It stands close to the railway track, and beside him lie several more who fought and died in their country's cause on that great day. A little beyond this we run through the small town of Colenso, on over the temporary bridge across the Tugela, and then winding in and out amongst the hills on which the Boer entrenchments still remain, we get some idea of the enormous magnitude of General Buller's task. For miles the stone walls and trenches run along the front of these precipitous hills, and on every vantage point is prepared a place from which some sharp-shooters can fire down upon the attackers. Not a bush or tree but, peering through the branches, you perceive the little half-circle of stones piled up, waist-high, beneath it, from which some sniper could pick off our men on the flat plain across the river. Now and again a few horses lay decaying on the ground; here a few

ragged tents still stand fluttering in the wind, and there the broken waggon cumbers the ground, a now useless wreck.

Presently we whisk round the shoulder of a steep kopje, and from our height up the hillside look down upon the scene of that fruitless attempt our enemy made to flood Ladysmith. Half-way across the river stands this gigantic dam, but it was never completed. Many and many a time the quiet valley we were now running up had resounded in a thousand echoes, as some well-planted shell from our Ladysmith guns, at one fell blow destroyed the labours of many hours. And here the work stands, even as the labourers threw down their tools on the last day of the relief. The bag, half filled, shall never be completed for the purpose for which it was assigned. The same hand shall never again grasp the rusting spade ; but for many years this partly-built wall will stand as a memento of the time when Britain's supremacy was threatened, but in vain.

On through the narrowing ravine, and out again, we dash upon the plain, and on our view bursts the grand amphitheatre where the greatest of modern fights was fought, and the bravest of men stubbornly held out, hoping almost against hope until relief came. There, before us, lies this famous place of which we have heard so much—Ladysmith, the impregnable—while British hearts defended it. The little clusters of graves are getting more frequent now we near the scenes where the heaviest engagements were fought and won. We run into the large station and look about us. Things are not so bad as we thought. There are still some houses in a whole condition ; the station has not suffered either. But here and there can still be seen traces of the Boer shells.

Our stay, however, is but a short one. A fresh engine picks us up, and we are on the move once more. Now, as we run through the town, we get a better view of the damage done. Although some weeks have elapsed since the siege was raised, there are still sufficient signs to show us how terrible it must have been for those—more especially women and children—who were beleaguered here.

Out again beyond the town we speed, and in a short time steam into Elandslaagte station. Here, on our side,

the line at present terminates. We detrain, form up, and march to the East Surrey Regiment's camp, which lies away to the east of the railway about three-quarters of a mile. A cheer from these war-stained veterans greets our arrival, a hearty welcome, and what, as we have had nothing since 5 p.m. the previous day, and it is now 3.30 in the afternoon, we are glad to see, namely, a sample of the bully beef and biscuits and a drink of tea.

Only two days before, the camp had been shelled and forced to retire, and it was now placed under cover of a slight rise in the ground. We pitched our own line of tents, and were soon comfortably quartered. The site of the camp was not so healthy as it might have been. It was close to the spot over which the Lancers charged the day General Yule reached Ladysmith from Dundee, and the ground around was thickly strewn with the remains of scores of horses killed in that victorious engagement. The air, in consequence, was somewhat highly perfumed, and the Lancers' charge was called to our minds every time the breeze came from the north.

On Saturday, 14th, we were employed for some time building sangars (a breastwork of stones) and digging trenches, and in the afternoon were marched to the Sunday River for a bath and washing purposes. One section of the company took their arms with them, as the river was beyond our outpost lines, and these had to keep watch whilst the others bathed, being in their turn relieved. We overstepped the mark as regards time, and there was some anxiety in camp about us, but we arrived safely back about 7 p.m. Next day—Easter Sunday—we took our first turn at outpost duty, mounting guard on the naval guns and elsewhere, and heard the distant booming of Boer cannon. With the aid of the telescope, we got a first glimpse of our enemy, hard at work at their trenches on the Biggarsberg Mountains.

As to our commissariat, we were pleasantly surprised to find that tinned meat was not used in standing camp; also that beer was obtainable at 3d. per pint. Fresh beef was issued daily to the cooks, who stewed it with the allowance of potatoes, compressed vegetable, rice, or onions, making a fairly palatable dinner. Fresh bread was also issued at the rate of 1lb. per man per diem. All water had to be brought into camp in carts drawn by half-

a-dozen mules, and for the first time we experienced a difficulty in procuring a good wash. Canteen prices were extremely heavy, Kop's ale being 9d. per bottle, and biscuits, &c., very expensive luxuries. Coming fresh from the base, we noticed the immense difference between the soldier in the field and in barracks. At Maritzburg we left them smart, shaved, and clean, with well-polished buttons and boots; here, those doing the active service stood about, ragged, bronzed, and bearded men, with the rough glow of strength and health in their weather-beaten faces, and with many an industrious patch upon their threadbare khaki; glad to have sound boots on their feet and clothes on their backs, if possible; but when half the sole was gone, and their uniforms were in rags, by no means discouraged, often enduring long and toilsome marches, with little or no food; these were the true British soldiers. The drawing-room officer would have looked in vain for the smart military step, the glitter, and polish, and cleanliness, but our heroic commander, General Buller, knew that, well or ill, defeat or victory, these men could be depended upon, and formed the flower of his army.

Our company quickly assumed the same vagabond appearance, taking their place and doing their turn of duty with the regular soldiers. Shortly after our arrival an order was issued to the effect that—

"The Volunteer Service Company just arrived will henceforth be known as 'I' Company."

And as such we were designated as long as we were with the battalion.

Here, also, we caught a glimpse of our immediate commander, General Clery, but became far more familiar with his face as we passed him many a later day, watching the troops march into camp after a long tramp; and every one of his men would be in before he thought of rest for himself.

On Easter Monday, 16th April, sports were held during the day, and in the evening an open-air concert took place within reach of the enemy's guns; several of our own men sang. A heavy shower broke up the entertainment rather early, but what there was of it was a great success.

Next morning we began our first march.

CHAPTER III.

In Camp at Surprise Hill.

"Now then, you men, turn out!"
"Hurry up with your blankets!"
"Get that tent down sharp!"

These, and a dozen other now old and familiar shouts, rang in our ears for the first time as we were turned out at 4 a.m. on the 17th April.

Everywhere around us is hurry and bustle. The officer's whistle sounds, down go rows of tents, and within two minutes men are bearing to the waggon our homes, carefully folded and packed in their respective bags. The long rolls of blankets, also, are being hurriedly completed, and speedily borne to the transport told off for them.

All baggage loaded, the breakfast appears and is hastily disposed of. A little way off the Queen's, West Yorks, and Devons can be seen occupied in the same manner. Evidently the whole of the 2nd Brigade is on the move. The "fall in" sounds, and some little confusion occurs as it is yet dark, the faintest rays of the coming day only just making their appearance, and it is no easy task to find our own place in the ranks of the battalion.

At length we are on the march, about 4,000 strong, and with a long string of waggons rumbling behind, making a train of over two miles in length. We pass by the station, cross the railway, and get upon the dusty track that leads in the direction of Ladysmith. On all sides stretch rolling plains of yellow grass, parched and withered by the fierce autumn sun, and bounded by high and boulder-strewn kopjes, at the foot of which nestle several weather-beaten native huts, surrounded by the customary mealie-patch. The heat of the day and the thick dust that flies upward from the tramping feet, persuade some of us to take a pull at the water bottle. We have yet to learn the advantages of abstaining from drink whilst on the march. The puny quart dwindles rapidly away, and we have still many more weary miles before us. The careful ones have remembered this in time, but the others now learn by painful experience to save their water in future.

We were obliged to leave Private Wooden in hospital at Elandslaagte, down with an attack of dysentery.

During this day's march the officer in command tested our training by giving us the flanking to do. This we performed to his satisfaction. We marched about ten miles, and halted on our camping ground at 1 p.m., at a place called Modder Spruit or Pepworth Farm. The waggons were brought up and unloaded, the tents pitched, and, what was more important to us, the cooks were speedily at work, and in a short time turned out a hot stew.

Next morning (18th) we again struck camp at the same hour, and moved off in some sharp showers of rain, which soaked us through and made the roads very heavy for marching. Some artillery joined us at daybreak. By noon we had reached our destination, about two and a half miles north-west of Ladysmith, and pitched close to Surprise Hill, which overlooks the scene of the disaster at Nicholson's Nek.

The camp was situated at the foot of Bell's Kopje, amidst a small wood of thorny bushes, and in a very pretty spot. Away to the right rose the great flat ridge of Umblwana Hill, whence the Boers had planted many a shell into Ladysmith from their Long Tom on its summit. On the left horizon towered Lombard's Kop, while in the south stretched the chain of hills that Buller had to break through to effect the relief. Around us, too, were camped other brigades, waiting for the further move that was to clear Natal of the enemy.

Though so fair a spot, this place proved a regular fever den. There was, to start with, a great scarcity of water, and what we could get was none too pure. The camp supply was obtained, to a great extent, from wells sunk in the bed of a dry stream which ran along the foot of the kopje, on the side of which we were encamped. The nearest place for bathing was the Klip River, a good three miles away, and to this one or two visits were made during our stay here. Orders were issued to the effect that all water was to be boiled before used; but this is easier said than done when a body of 1,000 men has to be dealt with, and no means were provided for the work until after we had been settled some days. Owing to the bad water and oppressive heat, a great amount of illness

made its appearance. Dysentery was most common, and the battalion doctor had his hands full. Every morning the sick parade was largely attended, and usually two or three patients were carried over to the hospital on stretchers. It became a common sight to see a firing party marching off to perform the last acts of respect at a comrade's grave. Fatigue parties, too, were frequently requisitioned for grave-digging, three of the long narrow beds having to be kept in constant readiness even for this comparatively small British force.

On the 21st an attack was expected at Elandslaagte, and our battalion was moved some miles up-country to be at hand if reinforcements were necessary. We were, however, not required, and returned to camp. Next day, Sunday, a brigade church-parade was held, and the four battalions attended. Every man carried with him to "church" his rifle, ammunition, and side-arms, parading in what was known as fighting order. The extent of ground covered prevented all of us getting close enough to hear the service. The rest of the day we were free, and some of us took the opportunity of visiting the summit of Surprise Hill. The Boer laager we found in a filthy state, littered with broken bottles, biscuit and meat tins, broken bedsteads, and a hundred other samples of rubbish which the Boers had never taken the trouble to clear away.

Amongst these lay numerous empty Mauser cartridge cases, and now and then a loaded round. Fragments of shells were also found, and hoarded as curios by the lucky discoverers. We explored the whole hill, and also looked down upon the valley that leads to Nicholson's Nek, and along which, no doubt, the mules of that ill-fated mountain battery stampeded. In the evening we walked over to the ridge that extends to the south of the camp and perceived from its summit the buildings of Ladysmith, half hidden by the thick foliage of the trees with which the town is so profusely planted. Beyond and around it, lay the famous hills ever associated with the memories of the siege.

But darkness comes on apace, and we turn round to retrace our steps to camp, when the scene on which our eyes alight causes us to pause for a moment to admire it. At the foot of the steep hill twinkle a hundred little fires,

sending up a ruddy glare and half revealing in the glow the dusky figures bending over them; while beyond, the tents are dimly visible where the firelight gleams upon the white canvas. The scene is the more charming, as it is not intended for effect. Every one of those bent forms has a most serious business in hand—the preparation of his supper. As this comes to our minds we remember that we ourselves have yet that most important duty to perform, and so leave the admiration of this picturesque sight for those who have already supped.

We hasten in, and finding a man just finished, take possession of the still glowing embers. A few fresh sticks and a continuous blowing soon create a blaze, though possibly our eyes are smarting somewhat from the smoke. The two large stones on either side are fitted to support the mess-tin, and in a short time the water is steaming and bubbling. The cornflour or oatmeal is added, and then comes the final test. Keeping the gruel stirring, blowing the fire, and breaking up the wood all at the same time, in a cloud of smoke, is no easy job; but we stick at it and are soon rewarded by success. We hand over the fire to the next man waiting and retire to the tent to devour our supper, for which we are by this time quite ready.

Next morning brought us some ill tidings. Private Wooden, the man left behind at Elandslaagte, had died of dysentery in Chieveley Hospital. Needless to say, the sorrow in the company was general, and much sympathy was felt for those at home, who had yet to learn of their dear one's death.

Life in camp now settled down to a round of expectation, at first exciting, but soon becoming monotonous. The battalion had been made a mobile one, which, for the sake of the uninitiated, means that it might receive orders at any minute to start on the march. Every day one company had to remain in or about camp within call. Fatigues were ordered, more to keep the men in trim than for any useful purpose, and our captain took the opportunity of giving us a little practice in the attack and taking cover, on the same sort of ground as that on which we should most probably have to fight.

Canteens were established, as also a fruit stall, which

was a great advantage, the bananas and oranges being specially appreciated. The Salvation Army also had a tent here, where the men could write letters and read, a large supply of magazines and papers being frequently received from home by them. The men in charge of this establishment held a very good reputation amongst the older soldiers for the way they had frequently assisted the wounded under fire during the earlier battles of the campaign.

The camp was, moreover, not without its humorous features. If by chance you happened to sit on your little pile of wood during the evening's cooking, the men round seemed to see some point in the joke at which they laughed heartily. You would, in most cases, be liable to feel rather than to see points, as these bushes from which we collected a good quantity of our fuel, bear thorns some two inches long. The flies, too, proved a great aggravation. They simply swarmed in the camp. Open your mouth and as likely as not a dozen or two would promptly enter it, and many a time violent sneezing would announce the fact that one of these pests had taken refuge up somebody's nose.

Another small catastrophe that occurred here was the breaking of a tent-pole owing to the wet. This, however uncomfortable it might have been to have the tent on them, in no way disturbed the men, who remained under it until morning.

On Saturday, 28th April, the company took their turn at outpost duty on the summit of Bell's Kopje. All night long a lurid glow in the distance showed where the Boers had their watch-fires. Rain fell heavily during the dark hours, and our first experience of sleeping on the field was not too comfortable.

The bread ration in camp was now reduced, by order of the doctor, to one-quarter, the rest being made up of biscuit. This was on account of the great amount of dysentery, which increased as our stay in this place grew longer. Additional precautions were taken to ensure the water being boiled, and large tanks were received for that purpose. Most of the water used for cooking was brought from a distance in carts, or in barrels slung across the backs of mules. These animals were led in a long string by some stately Hindoo; the carts

Photo. by] *[G. T. Jones & Co., Kingston*

CAPT. C. L. LONGSTAFF.

Photo. by] *[G. T. Jones & Co., Kingston.*

CAPT. COLLYER.

being driven by Kaffirs. A frequent sight was a mule broken loose coming through the camp at full gallop, followed, at a leisurely stroll, by its master, who had every hope of catching the brute again in the course of a day or two.

When not at work the oxen and mules, numbering some hundreds, were turned out to graze on the surrounding plain. At sunset they were all driven in, and it was a pretty sight to see the cattle form up in line beside their yoke like a well-drilled company. The mules, though hobbled, always gave a great deal of trouble before they were properly secured for the night.

Time went on, and brought us to the evening of the 6th May. The "orders" call had just gone and we were listlessly strolling about, waiting to see if there was anything fresh, when a rumour, which sprang up as these usually do, no one knows whence, was circulated that we had received marching orders.

Presently the orderly-sergeant comes hurrying up. Yes, rumour for once is correct. We move at 7 in the morning. And, what is more, every pound of excess stores is to be sent into Ladysmith, including *all tents*. Everyone is hard at work reducing his kit to the smallest possible amount, the overcoat pockets being all the storage allowed for extra clothing.

Next morning, the 7th May, we fell in sharp to the minute, and off we went with the much-reduced string of waggons bearing our blankets, overcoats, and all the supplies we took with us, and which were to last for some time. We retraced our steps as far as Modder Spruit and camped rather closer to Pepworth Farm than we did on our previous stay. Volunteers were called for to fill the water bottles, and this meant a long tramp, as the nearest drinking water was two and a half miles away. Bully beef and biscuit were now our rations, and we had seen the last of fresh meat and bread for many a week. All cooking we had to do ourselves, and the regular orders when we camped specified where fires were to be made.

The following day, the 8th, we were up at 4 o'clock, but marching orders were countermanded, and we spent our time resting, waiting for other battalions to come up. A second blanket per man was served out, as winter was

coming on, and we should get no shelter from the night dews for a long while.

And so that night we rolled ourselves in our blankets, and with haversack or helmet for pillow, slept on the open plain, to wake in the morning for the first of a long series of hard and trying marches.

CHAPTER IV.

Clearing the Biggarsberg.

No glowing watchfires lighted the British bivouacs through these cold winter nights. The solitary sentry, pacing up and down beside the high stacks of ammunition boxes, could cast his eye over the sleeping hosts and catch no gleam, save where the red lamp showed the head-quarters of the General.

But what a sight it was to survey on a bright moon-light night! Piles of rifles stood in long, regular rows, and round and between the stacks of arms the ground was cumbered with dimly outlined figures, wrapped from head to foot in their blankets, only slight movements now and again denoting that they were living beings. Around the heads of these sleepers was piled the kit—the burden that each had to carry, containing the food, ammunition, cooking utensils, and everything else that a soldier absolutely cannot do without. And there they lay while the white frost or soaking dews fell gently upon them, possibly dreaming of home and of its soft beds.

The first streaks of dawn are just breaking the darkness of the eastern sky, as the shrill notes of the réveille ring out on the clear morning air. In an instant what a change! Men are busy on all sides getting their rolls of blankets and overcoats together, others are buckling up their straps in readiness; away in the rear a small crowd of men are rapidly loading up the waggons for the day's march, whilst on the farther flank a few thin wreaths of smoke show where some are already cooking their break-fast.

Such a scene it was on Wednesday, 9th May, when the 2nd Brigade lay at Pepworth Farm. By six o'clock

the battalions had all fallen in, and we were on the march. As the rear-guard, formed by our battalion, moved off the ground, it was promptly occupied by the brigade which had just come up to join us, and which, after forming up, followed on behind. Lombard's Kop still towered on the western horizon when we halted for the night, over twenty miles east of Ladysmith, at a place called Pieter's Farm. Owing to some mistake, our men, who were on outpost duty during the night, were unable to get their blankets on to the waggons, and in consequence they had to carry them through the day—no welcome task with 50lb weight of kit already.

Next morning, Thursday, the 10th May, at daybreak we were off again. The weather was extremely hot and the road dusty, winding in and out amongst the hills, now and again crossing long stretches of bare rock, which the sun's fierce rays had made intensely hot, and which almost scorched our feet. Through thick forests of bushes and up dry water-courses, we passed, where the pioneers were hard at work making the track passable for the artillery and transport. At length we came in sight of water and lines of tents, and knew the long day's march was drawing to a close. We forded the stream, which proved to be the Sunday River, and camped on the opposite side, after a tramp of about sixteen miles. Those of us who were free hastened down to the bank and were soon splashing in the clear, cool, refreshing wave.

As we marched down the road towards the drift we passed through the camp of the Cavalry Brigade, most of the men of which lined the road, to see what sort of troops they were to serve with. Our bivouac on the further side was a nice position in a wood of small trees, the shade of which we were very glad to lie in after the heat of the march.

At 5.45 a.m. next day (11th) we again set our face to the front, to reach by nightfall the Washbank river. Here again we crossed the drift and pitched on the farther bank. The East Surreys being one of the first battalions in, our company received instructions to go down to the ford to help the waggons across. When we reached this place we found plenty to do. The road was cut through the bank on each side in a steep incline to

the river level, and was covered in some inches of dust. The waggons came at the double down the opposite slope, and splashed and bumped over the rocky bed of the stream, but invariably came to a halt at the ascent of the other bank. Here twenty or thirty of us would gather round and push and heave until the sixteen oxen and in some cases a double team, could get the cumbrous vehicle on the move again.

General Clery was on the bank a little higher up stream watching his transport in. I must notice here one of those little incidents which do so much for a commanding officer's reputation. Seeing our officer, he inquired how long our men had been on this fatigue, and whether we were going to be relieved. The General being informed that we had been at work several hours, he immediately despatched an aide-de-camp with instructions for another company to come out at once and take over the duty. It was a little thing to do, but it is by these small considerations for his men that a general earns the love and respect of every soldier under his command.

We marched back to camp as soon as the other men arrived, thoroughly worn out with this heavy work after the day's march. Although it was only about 7 p.m., we immediately turned in and slept till morning.

And with the morning came the first crack of rifles. We were astir early, and at 5.30 moved out of camp, our company being told off for the skirmishers on the left flank of the advance guard. All day long we were straining our eyes to catch a glimpse of the enemy, as we moved over the plains in a long extended line. But only in the distance we heard every now and then a few straggling shots between our cavalry and the outposts of the Boers. About 3 p.m. we came to a halt at Veermak Kraal. The farmhouse here had just been captured by the South African Light Horse, and two or three men found in it were prisoners. Surrounding the house was a large orange grove with the fruit in fine condition, and it was not long before we had sampled some of it. The military police were put in charge to prevent further "looting," but one or two of our men found no difficulty in persuading them to look another way while they entered and helped themselves.

Behind the farmhouse, about two miles distant, rise the

famous Biggarsberg Mountains, on which the Boers were strongly entrenched. Shortly after we had camped we received orders to get equipped again, and moved out in battle formation, as though with the intention of attacking this strong position. The whole force was extended and approached to within a mile of the foot of the hills. Then orders to retire were received and we returned to our bivouac.

The cavalry picquets were fired at a little as they approached closer to the mountains for duty. All night long we could see lights on the hill tops where our enemies were preparing a warm reception for us on the morrow, no doubt expecting a frontal attack after seeing us advance in the afternoon. But this was not General Buller's plan. The supposed attack was merely to give them this impression, and keep them waiting for us there. When day broke what a surprise they received!

While yet the stars shone above us, and the faint shafts of light were creeping up the eastern horizon, we were quietly awakened, and with as little noise as possible got all our baggage packed. Leaving the strong Boer position on our left we turned our faces up the long valley, thick with mealies, through which the track winds, until in the distance it climbs the sides of the hills and becomes known as the Helpmakaar Pass.

The artillery and cavalry were already some way along this road, moving as quickly and as noiselessly as possible. Long streams of baggage waggons trailed over the plains and along the track, and here and there the compact ranks of the different battalions moved forward at their easy stride. As the day broke the astonished Boers cast their eyes over the plain to discover just our rear guard and a few of the last waggons moving off the ground, so thickly occupied overnight. Away on their left the British artillery were galloping up the winding track towards the summit of the pass.

A few shells were sent by our enemy, but the naval guns only spoke once or twice, and put an end to their firing. At this time an old nigger came panting through our ranks, big beads of perspiration rolling down his face, and over his shoulder a stick from which hung a piece of white rag as limp and dirty as himself. He looked as though he had had rather a hard run for it, and expressed as

much fright in his face as it is possible for a human countenance to display.

Now, as we moved farther up the valley, we could see our artillery on a high ridge at the top of the pass, hard at it with the enemy. Every now and again a shell would burst behind our gunners, but few were close enough to do much damage. Our progress was slow; long and frequent pauses intervening between the short advances. At sunset we came to a halt at the foot of the pass, and made our bivouac on the mountain side. Water was obtained from a stream in the valley below, and soon the little blaze began to shoot up around our mess-tins. Tea was made, and helped to wash down the dry salt beef and lumps of biscuit, and we turned in to rest as much as possible before to-morrow's hard work. So passed Sunday, the 13th May, 1900.

Next morning we were early aroused by the thunder of wheels over the rocky road, and perceived our artillery off at the gallop up the pass, escorted by a large body of South African Light Horse. We were quickly under weigh ourselves, and toiled up the steep ascent in extended order, crossing the large flat tops of the mountain, here and there closing in where the road was cut in the steep cliff side, and where a small body of determined foes could have given us any amount of trouble; again extending to envelop some high peak, and at last gaining sight of the half-dozen houses that form the village of Helpmakaar. Here we again closed in and took the road, leaving Rorke's Drift about six miles to our right, the advance guard being deemed sufficient to search the ground and discover any ambush. The artillery, meanwhile, had galloped from ridge to ridge shelling the now fast retiring Boers, who fired the grass as they retreated, and so hid themselves and hindered us.

In fact, the position right along the Biggarsberg Range was turned, and as rapidly as we advanced the enemy fled. As we passed through Helpmakaar, every house of which was wrecked, we halted for a few minutes to rest. Volunteers were asked for to fill the water bottles at a farmhouse a short distance away. Those of our company who went, got a close inspection of the wanton manner in which the Boers destroyed everything they were unable to take away. As we approached the homestead we

found food and grain scattered over the ground. A little closer were some rough stables, made with the skins that once had covered the floor of the dwelling. Nearer still, we came upon the bedding still smouldering, the bedsteads broken, books and pictures torn and burnt, saddles, chairs, in fact, everything breakable, smashed to pieces and thrown down to rot on the ground. One solitary chicken, evidently overlooked by our enemies, was being hotly pursued by a dozen or so khaki-clad warriors. We filled our bottles and returned to find the battalion had moved on, and so we had an extra seven full waterbottles each to carry the two miles to where our force had halted for the night at the little farm of Beit.

Directly after reaching camp our company was warned for outpost duty, and we had to again resume the march for about two miles on the left flank, where we took up a position in the hills. The left half of the company was detached to search a couple of farmhouses a little lower down the road. The first they found empty, but the second, after they had surrounded it, proved to be tenanted. A Kaffir came out waving a white flag and followed by several women and children, who implored our men not to harm them or their belongings.

Our officer reassured them, and they informed us that the Boers had been there that morning and commandeered the men. They also supplied us with some milk and oranges, after which we returned, leaving a guard there for the night.

At 3 a.m. next morning (the 15th May) we were aroused, and after a hurried breakfast we marched into camp, and by 5.45 were again on the tramp—the longest, hardest, and most trying march we ever experienced. We pressed on for about ten miles when we halted to rest at the foot of a very steep nek, over which the road passed. Here word was sent to refill water-bottles, and every man took a long drink, expecting to get more. But as the party was going down to the stream we were again ordered to advance, the fellows hurriedly returned without the precious liquid, and no more was obtained until we reached camp.

Up the steep hill we climbed, and over the flat table-land, across which the road lay for five miles, when we came to the further ridge of the plateau, to see Dundee

some miles below us in the distance, and our camping ground two miles beyond. This was no encouraging sight for men who were already parched with thirst, hot, and weary with the long and dusty march they had then accomplished.

The officers did their best to keep the men going, but most of us were nearly dead beat. The halts became more frequent for a short time, but the difficulty to get us on the move again soon caused them to be abandoned. The flying dust kicked up by the feet of thousands of men and beasts, cracked our already parched throats, and the merciless sun beat down upon us relentlessly. The smallest mud-pool was a sign for some dozen to rush from the ranks in the hopes of a drink, only to be turned back by some officer who would gallop up and stand his horse in it.

The officers threatened, encouraged, and implored the men to keep on the march. "Only a little further." "Stick to it, men." But words cannot revive a man who is dead beat by fatigue and thirst, and hundreds fell down by the roadside unable to move another step, to be brought in on the ambulance waggons or to limp in on foot late in the night. At length we reached the streets of Dundee, and passed through the station where two of the telegraph staff were already busy getting into connection with Ladysmith. As we marched up the streets, there was more trouble to keep the men away from the water-taps that lined the road. The Kaffirs, however, filled our canteens for us, and they were eagerly snatched at, about a dozen hands being on each as the lucky man took a mouthful and then passed it on. Several of the houses had been wrecked, but a few of the inhabitants assembled along the road to watch our march through the town. Generals Buller and Clery were seen under a large tree at a street corner, discussing the events of the day.

We pressed on, towards the camping ground which was still two miles away, and arrived there late in the afternoon with about half our men, the rest coming in during the evening. We were camped on the ground occupied by General Symons's force, and close to the famous Talana Hill, where the first battle of the campaign was fought. The space was littered with remnants of

General Yule's baggage, left behind at his famous retreat. Mixed with these we found company rolls of the Boer commandoes and other waste left in their rapid flight by our enemy who had occupied this ground a few hours previously.

We piled arms and threw ourselves down, too weary, for a long time, to make even the usual tea. At length we managed to summon sufficient energy for this duty, and soon the little fires begin to twinkle in the dusk of evening, and the hot fragrant liquid quickly removed the last traces of the thirst of the march. Immediately we had finished our meal we rolled ourselves in our blankets and slept the sound sleep of utter exhaustion.

And as we lay there on the open veldt, far away in our distant homes, the latest papers containing the news of the "REOCCUPATION OF DUNDEE" were being eagerly read.

CHAPTER V.

FROM DUNDEE TO INKWELOANE HEIGHTS.

WEDNESDAY, 16th May, was, for us a time of rest. After the heavy march of the previous day, it was deemed advisable to allow the men to recoup. We seized the opportunity of a plentiful water supply to have a bath, the first since we left the Washbank River six days before.

From our encampment the town of Dundee presented an extremely pretty sight. It is built somewhat more compactly than the majority of towns in Natal, though well interspersed with trees, a red tiled church tower rising from their midst. The roads, though unpaved, are broad, and the houses all stand in a fairly large plot of well-planted ground. We had no time or permission to examine this or any other of the towns through which we passed, only snatching a few glimpses as we marched down the chief streets.

The large collieries established here were not then being worked. The water supply is very good, and is laid on to the camping ground as well as to the town. A broad stream also runs close at hand and in this we bathed.

The popular idea of a victorious army entering a recaptured town was ludicrously inappropriate to the actual facts of the entry of General Buller's force into Dundee on the 15th May.

No banners flying, no drums beating, but a ragged mob of men; they were bearded, and begrimed with the dust of a weary journey, some scarce capable of dragging one foot after the other, many falling exhausted by the wayside, unable to proceed another step; all unwashed for many a day, and uniforms in tatters. In the faces of many disease showed its ravages in hollow cheek and sunken eye, and most had the hungry look that several days of short rations brings into a soldier's face.

But they were, for all that, a victorious army, and the day's rest made another lot of men of them. The soldier neyer misses an opportunity, and when, on the 17th May, we fell in to resume our march for Newcastle many a patch covered the rents, the beards had disappeared, the hair was trimmed, and all looked fresh and clean.

At 7 a.m. we moved off the ground, and at an easy pace covered the distance of fifteen miles to Dannhauser, arriving early in the afternoon. We had gathered a small number of Boer prisoners along the line of march and these the quarter-guard of our battalion took charge of. The road was fairly level, as we had now left the hilly country behind us for a while.

Every building along the line of march we found destroyed in some way—usually burnt. Now were issued, for one day only, what is known as Preserved Rations, consisting of meat and vegetables, and which, when heated, form a very good stew. These, after the long spell of bully beef we had had, were very acceptable and made a grand dinner for half-starved soldiers. There was a plentiful, though muddy, supply of water at Dannhauser, but by this time we had got over discriminating between kinds of liquid, being glad if we could get enough to quench our thirst. It was obtainable from the reservoir belonging to the railway.

Next morning, being advance guard of the division, our regiment was on the march at 3.45 a.m., tolerably early according to European ideas, and after covering seven miles halted for an hour for breakfast. We then pushed on for some miles further to Ingagane, a small place on

a tributary of the Buffalo River, over which were built both a road and a railway bridge. The latter had been recently blown up by the retreating Boers and was a complete wreck, one end of each of the three spans resting in the river.

A halt was made for two hours for dinner. During our rest, and when several of us were asleep, owing to the carelessness of some person or persons unknown, the grass caught fire close to where our rifles and equipments were stacked, and, fanned by a strong breeze, quickly enveloped them. The men did all they could to save their belongings and stamp out the flames, but a large amount of damage had been done before they had accomplished this. Some boxes of ammunition were very pluckily extinguished just in the nick of time, but the cartridges in the destroyed pouches began exploding, and Major Benson and several men were wounded in striving to put the fire out, the officer being hit in the hand. Several of our men lost all their belongings in the conflagration, their haversacks being destroyed, and many resumed the march minus a helmet, rifle, waterproof sheet, or other portion of their outfit.

After a short stay we again moved on, and ere long perceived Newcastle in the distance. Owing to the frequent halts and the long rest for dinner this march was not so fatiguing as shorter and faster ones had been, and at 5 p.m. a tramp of twenty-one miles ended. The advance party of Buller's army, formed by the East Surrey Volunteer Service Co., marched through Newcastle, being greatly cheered by the twenty odd white inhabitants who still occupied the place.

These had, with commendable energy (considering the Boers had only left the town about six hours before) rigged up a couple of Venetian masts in the square, and nearly all wore red, white, and blue favours. But even these tokens of loyalty did not save them from the suspicions of General Buller's intelligence department, and most of them were arrested.

We crossed the bridge to the north bank of the Incandu River, and ascended a small slope that leads to the higher ground beyond. Here we camped in grass waist high, close to a farm-house, the barn of which was promptly stripped of all removable wood for cooking purposes.

Newcastle stretches for some distance along the south side of the river, and rising among the houses we perceived the tower of the Town Hall, from which the Union Jack was already flying. At the lower end of the town is the traffic bridge, and some little distance down the river stood the remains of the railway bridge on which the Boers had been experimenting, most likely with dynamite. As we passed through the place we noticed that a great number of the houses had been wrecked.

For a day or two we were on short rations, but a convoy arrived early and the full allowance was issued. Needless to say we took advantage of the proximity of the river to have frequent baths and washing days, and regained, in some degree, a state of cleanliness.

A church parade was held on the 20th, at which all the battalions attended. Next day the cooks got to work, and we rejoiced in a hot dinner, the first for a fortnight, and a very welcome change from the lump of corned beef or "bully beef" we had been having. For the next few days we rested, simply cleaning arms and camping ground, and having the rest of the day to ourselves.

During our stay here the following order was issued :—

"*The General Officer Commanding Field Force in Natal congratulates all officers, non-commissioned officers, and men of the force upon the result of their ten days' work. The 3rd Mounted Brigade and 2nd and 5th Divisions have driven over Laing's Nek from carefully prepared positions on the Biggarsberg Mountains, including that which the enemy have christened the Gibraltar of South Africa, a force of over 7,000 men, only being checked at Laing's Nek itself by a fresh commando sent from the Transvaal Force in the Free State. The result, which reflects greatest credit on the troops, has been obtained by continuous hard work, long marches, and steep mountain climbing, far more trying and wearisome than the most severe fighting.*

"*By Order* "R. S. L. MILES, *Col.*
"*Chief of Staff.*"

Such was the official recognition of the work we had performed.

I have no space to recount the various incidents that occurred at Newcastle, but must hasten to the harder task which yet lay before us.

The booming of cannon falls upon our ears as we toil up the long winding road that climbs the Ingogo heights. We had that morning pushed on from Newcastle, leaving several men in hospital there, and were now nearly to the summit of this range of hills, famous for the lives that were lost on them in the previous wars. A few yards further, and before us in the distance appears the Boer stronghold and boast—Majuba.

Majuba! What memories does that name bring to our minds as we gaze across the rugged landscape to this proud peak? But yet another recollection was to be added ere many days were passed, when this tower of hope to our enemies had succumbed before the skilful manœuvring of our General.

Around us on all sides stretch the bivouacs of Buller's forces, gathered to accomplish the feat that was to complete his success. A little to the north the Naval guns are steadily searching the Boer positions with their lyddite, and we watch for the little puff of smoke and the cloud of dust that marks the spot where the missile falls.

Away on Pungwana, the eastern guardian tower of Laing's Nek, a solitary Boer cannon speaks out now and again, aimed at the cavalry encamped some distance in front of the infantry position.

Our resting place was a few yards west of the monument which marks the spot where the heroes of '81 fell.

Those who have followed the events of the war closely will know that Sir Redvers Buller granted an armistice to the Boers here to decide on terms of surrender. For two or three days the flag of truce was continually to be seen passing between our camp and a small farmhouse nestling under the shadow of Majuba, where the meetings of the two commanders took place. Firing ceased also, and for a space was a lull, but after it the storm broke only the more furiously.

Though we were at rest as regards fighting, the hardships of our life had in no degree abated. The heavy frosts and intense cold at night not infrequently made sleep an impossibility, and the rising sun was eagerly looked

forward to, to bring some warmth to our half-starved bodies. For even here we were on short rations. At Newcastle it was reported that stores had arrived in abundance, but there seemed some difficulty in getting them over the remaining fifteen miles to our camp at Ingogo.

This state of things, however, did not last long, and we were astonished on the 2nd June to welcome the almost forgotten form of *loaves of bread* (the first we had seen for nearly a month).

The armistice came to an end at 10 a.m. on the 4th June. Just before that time we moved our camp to where a slight ridge gave us cover from the enemy's fire. Promptly to the minute a Boer cannon spoke out, answered instantly by our 4·7 Naval guns. All day the artillery duel lasted, our men firing from the crest behind which we were encamped. At dusk the bombardment ceased, only to be renewed at daybreak with fresh energy.

And so we went on from day to day waiting for orders to join in the fight, and spending our time watching our shells burst over the Boer trenches. Our patience was rewarded, and on the 8th of June we moved out to the attack. Again the flanking movement was resorted to. We marched some miles to the west of Majuba, leaving the enemy's main position on our right, and halted to form up on the rocky stretch of ground at the foot of Spitz Kop about 11 a.m.

Let me here describe the position of the ground and of the opposing forces.

The British position extended from the heights of Spitz Kop, on the left, to the camp of the 4th Brigade, facing Laing's Neck, a distance of about three or four miles. Right in front of us rose the heights of Inkweloane and Inkwelo, occupied by our enemy. Between us and our adversaries lay two deep ravines, divided by a long rocky ridge. A swift torrent flowed through each of these valleys, finally uniting to form the Ingogo River. Westward of the two peaks lay Botha's Pass, the object of our day's advance.

Our pause was but a short one. The battalions were forming for the attack, and already the leading companies were sweeping forward over the hillside to plunge into

the first ravine that separated us from the Boer entrenchments on Inkweloane. A little to our left the 6th and 7th Field Batteries and 13th Howitzer Battery and Naval guns had taken up an excellent position on Spitz Kop, and were hurling their missiles into the enemy's trenches round Botha's Pass.

The Devons and West Yorks led the Brigade in this day's fight. As we commenced our advance they were already wading across the stream that rushed through the bottom of the deep valley beneath us. We quickly descended the steep rock-strewn side, sliding or tripping over the many slabs of stone that lay half hidden in the long rank grass. At length we, too, have reached the bottom of this first deep natural trench that guards the enemy's stronghold. Far above us in the rear our guns are loudly roaring out their messages of death, while our leading battalions are already nearing the summit of the rocky slope to which our faces are turned.

We plunge through the swift torrent, snatching, if possible, a hasty drink, and up we go with rapid advances and frequent rests until we reach the crest, and now perceive yet another valley to be crossed ere we can attain the goal.

No time is left us to think. Down we go again, and ere many minutes have passed are forcing our way through the tangled weeds that grow in the stony river bed at the bottom of this second ravine.

And what an ascent rises before us!

Right overhead towers the precipitous mountain side, upon whose rugged surface the huge boulders are poised as though arrested for an instant in their downward flight. Here and there the frowning cliff all but overhangs, and hidden in the long weeds lie the loose fragments of stone which the unwary foot rests on but to be betrayed. Up this sharp ascent our leading companies have already passed and some are, even now, scrambling to the summit.

We press on, resting every few minutes to regain our breath, and on again until the steep incline gradually decreases, and we are on the gentle slope of the mountain top lying in the grass. Here we had our first experience of being under rifle fire.

One of our fellows remarked on the birds singing and another growled at his neighbour for making a whistling

noise. Then it dawned upon us that we were under bullets.

A few yards in front a couple of British Maxims are pouring their leaden hail into the now fast flying foes.

Presently, with much heaving and shouting, a fifteen-pounder is dragged by forty mules on to the crest above us, and adds its roar to the general din. The officers hasten forward to send a parting shot after the Boers, but receive worse than they could give. Our enemies had located the position to a nicety, and presently a large shell strikes the earth and explodes barely twenty yards before us, followed by a hail of smaller missiles from a pom-pom.

This causes us to move a few yards further down the slope, the fifteen-pounder meanwhile staunchly returning the enemy's fire.

The Boers were now rapidly falling back on their main position, leaving in our hands the almost inaccessible heights of Inkweloane and Botha's Pass. Indeed, to a casual observer the feat that the British Army had performed that day would have seemed all but an impossibility. But General Buller knew his ground as well as his men knew their leader, and, ordered to the assault, up his veterans went, and, ere they knew it, the enemy had turned and fled.

But even yet our trials were not at an end. By this time the day was rapidly drawing to a close. At 5.30 the firing had ceased and we took up our bivouacs for the night. "I" company was told off for outpost duty, and occupied the ridge from which the Maxims had been firing in the afternoon.

The position we were in made it impossible for us to procure our blankets and overcoats. It was only with much difficulty that rations were brought up to us. In consequence we spent a night that few of us can ever forget.

High up on the mountain top we rested, where the thick mist hung round us in heavy clouds, soaking the exposed part of our thin and well-worn khaki ere many minutes had passed, and even penetrating under the waterproof sheet about our shoulders—the only protection we possessed. Intermittent and sharp showers of rain added to our discomfort, while the heavy frost, increasing

in intenseness as the night aged, benumbed our limbs beyond the hope of recovering any warmth before the sun shone again.

Being within touch of the enemy, no fires were permitted, so even tea was unobtainable. In the morning, before starting from camp, fresh meat had been served out, and now, seeing no hope of getting it cooked, we devoured it raw. Some did, indeed, descend to where the battalion was encamped, and made an attempt at frying the ration, but this was in most cases a failure.

And so we spent the night, either on sentry-go or lying on the soaking earth under the scanty sheet, which every now and again the gusts of wind would whisk off us, dispelling any little warmth we might have obtained. Every man waited eagerly for the morrow, when his misery would be at an end.

At length day broke and the long line of shivering sentries and the wretched pickets were recalled. Some hot coffee soon made its appearance, thanks to the energy of one or two of our comrades, and nothing could have been more heartily welcome.

We received orders to advance shortly after daybreak, and this we did, occupying a ridge about two miles nearer the enemy's flank. The remainder of our battalion came up during the day. Our men were greatly cheered by the appearance of the waggons, and ere long overcoats and blankets were distributed.

During the afternoon a large flock of sheep was driven in by some of the East Surreys, who also brought with them a prisoner. He said he was only looking after his animals, but as he had, when captured, arms and ammunition in his possession, he was sent on to the headquarters, together with his flock. It was with hungry eyes we saw this fresh mutton depart in peace, for had we had our will, many a one among them would have been stewing in the pot that night.

CHAPTER VI.

The Battle of Almond's Nek.

The first step was gained, and Botha's Pass was already resounding to the rumble of the gun-carriages

and waggons as they pressed on to the second event. The flanking move of Laing's Nek was, in shape, a complete semi-circle drawn from Ingogo heights in the south, to Volksrust in the north, and the British force was opposed at two points in this line of march. The first obstacle was now successfully overcome, and we were hastening on to what proved to be the crowning victory.

We again spent the night on Inkweloane heights, and at 4.30 next morning, 10th June, we moved forward and descended to the veldt of the Orange Free State. A grand march it was that day, over vast rolling plains that stretched as far as the eye could reach, broken, here and there, by small kopjes. The baggage train plodded sturdily along beside us in a dozen long columns, and here and there the different batteries of artillery rattled over the turf. Shortly after noon we passed a large farmhouse flying some score of white flags, but which when investigated, proved to hold four armed Boers hiding under one of the beds !

A little later the first roar of cannon sounds over the plain, and we knew we had again come in touch with our foes. It proved to be a mere trifle, however, the Boers retreating before the advance of our cavalry ere the main body arrived on the scene. The plain at the foot of the kopje from which they had been driven, and which formed one of a range, being connected with the others by a grassy nek, was made our camping ground for the night after a tramp of some sixteen miles.

Next morning we were early astir, as we expected developments, and after a hasty meal, got equipped and waited impatiently for the coming move.

Ere long the 11th Brigade is advancing up the grassy nek to the right of the kopje, under whose rugged side we are resting ; and company by company stand out for an instant upon the sky line, and then disappear from view. Another long and anxious wait ensues, and then we, too, receive orders and move through the pass. As we cross the summit, a view of unparalleled magnificence opens before our eyes. A long undulating plain stretches to a low ridge of hills on which we now see the 11th Brigade resting. Further in the distance is visible a rugged mountain range shooting out to the north west from the group of which Majuba forms one of the chief

THE BATTLE OF ALMOND'S NEK.

features. Almost in the centre of this rocky barrier is a small pass, through which we see the dusty track winding.

We press on into the plain beneath us and in line of companies sweep over the green sward. Artillery comes rumbling by, hastening to the front, to commence its work of destruction on the pass we have perceived in the distance, the object of our day's work.

At length we reach the low ridge of kopjes, and halt under their shelter for the other battalions to come up. As we lay on the grass we noticed that the scene on the plain we had just crossed had altered immensely. An hour earlier a desolate stretch lay before us. Now, foot, horse, and cannon come pouring over in long streams. Here the solid squares of battalions moving in column, and there the guns of the field artillery hurry forward, while behind and between come the long trains of creaking and rumbling waggons drawn by their patient oxen. The nek overlooking Gan-Vlei is disgorging, like a huge horn of plenty, the varied units of an army in apparently hopeless confusion, but each, in reality, occupying its appointed place.

Business, however, looms ahead, and the soldier has no time to contemplate the picturesque. The tin of boot grease—the only suitable material left to us—is passed hastily round, each man taking sufficient to make the bolt of his rifle work easily. There is the hard rubbing, wiping down, and rapid clicking of locks that announces the fact that the men are making ready their arms for the service that may shortly be expected of them. This all-important duty done, we turn our attention to a mouthful of bully beef. It is past noon, and none knows when another opportunity will occur, for already the air is resounding with the thunder of heavy armament.

Leaving the men waiting for the coming fray, I will give a short description of the battlefield. The object of attack was Almond's Nek. This pass is of the usual kind found in South Africa ; a stretch of about a mile of grassy down, up which the rough track winds until it reaches the summit. At each side, however, the difficulties of the position lay. To the left, a precipitous mountain, well wooded round its base and for some distance up the slope facing us, rose to a considerable height. The side of this peak, overlooking the pass,

formed a cliff of inaccessible steepness. In fact, in parts the beetling brows overhung the base. In front of this difficult position rose two smaller kopjes, that from the distance appeared to nestle beneath the gigantic mass towering behind, but which on closer inspection proved to stand away considerably, forming a natural shelter, where large numbers of our enemies might be concealed. At the right extremity of the nek rose a conical or sugar-loaf shaped kopje, the sides of which were strewn with numberless boulders, giving our adversaries unlimited advantages of cover. This rocky peak was connected by a narrow saddle with the long range of cliff-like heights, extending back to the Drakensbergs, and which formed a vast segment round our right flank.

The British force was disposed in the following manner: The Queen's and East Surreys formed the front line of the 2nd Brigade, supported by the West Yorks and Devons. These fought on the left, taking the wooded cliff and the nek itself. Opposed to the conical hill and the range of rugged steeps behind it, were the Dorsets and Middlesex leading the 10th Brigade. The right flank of the British force was protected by Lords Dundonald and Gough's horse while on the left were Brocklehurst and his cavalry, fully aware that a large party of Boers was hovering on the outer wing.

Our rest soon comes to an end, and we move a few yards further, taking up a position with the Queen's on our left, the Devons and West Yorks being behind.

"All officers to the front."

There is a rapid gathering, a hasty discussion, and back they hurry again; in turn passing on their instructions to the section leaders. In a few minutes the first company moves off, extending into a long line as it nears the ridge of the plateau, where it quickly vanishes beyond the skyline.

The second company advances, and now we are the next line to move.

"Advance!" "Extend to five paces interval!" and we sweep steadily forward, lengthening out into one long line of solitary figures. We reach the edge of the plateau and perceive before us the other companies already far down the slope, and moving rapidly to where a long, low range of hills breaks the plain between us and the object of the attack about 2,500 yards from the nek. Upon this

position the artillery have already parked, and are now sending forth one continuous roar, howitzers, 12 and 15-pounders, 4·7 Naval guns, pom-poms, and Maxims joining in the terrific din. As soon as the leading company passes the batteries they open fire, adding their little stream of lead to the heavier messengers of death.

On we press, and soon we also are in advance of the guns, whose missiles fly shrieking overhead to break with a terrific roar, upon the hills to the right of the pass, upon which is centred the main stream of our bombardment. As we lie in the long dry grass, in the intervals between the sharp short advances, we can see the terrific effects of these lyddite shells; for where they strike a colossal column of dirt and rock flies upwards and outwards into the air to a great height, possibly mingling in its debris some human remains. The little white puff that marks the exploded shrapnel exhibits at this distance no fearful symptoms of its power, but woe to those who lie beneath its leaden hail!

The enemy have opened fire with a pom-pom from the conical hill before us, but their shells are flying overhead, being aimed at our batteries. A 3-inch gun and two pom-poms somewhere to the left of the nek are also dropping their ugly missiles round the "handy men."

We now perceive a deep and broad watercourse running round the foot of the steep conical hill, and across the front of the pass. The leading company is already scrambling through this when the Boer rifle fire opens in one terrific hail, striking up the dust in clouds along the sandy banks of the stream-bed. By this time also a heavy rifle and pom-pom cross fire is being poured into the donga from the cliff on the farther side of the nek, up which we could now see the Queen's advancing in rapid rushes.

The first and second companies of the East Surreys are already through this death trap (for the Boers have the range of the donga to a nicety), and the former have already fixed bayonets as they come to the slope of the hill. Our company's turn is come. We spring to our feet in the long grass, where we have for the last few minutes been lying perdu, and, with a rush, reach the banks of this natural moat. There is no time to think of the bullets whistling round us as we drop over the

edge and splash across the muddy bottom half a dozen feet below.

We reach the farther bank, but this provides no cover from the cross fire from the enemy's position on the left. A hand stretched down, a leg-up, and we are scrambling over the ledge on to the sandy strip where the bullets from the conical hill are splashing up the dust in a hundred little spurts. We double over this exposed part and passing through the second line fall in the grass a little way up the slope of the kopje, fairly winded by the short but exciting dash.

"Hallo! What's this?" Only a little burnt patch round an anthill a few feet square in the yellow turf. But we have heard of these things before, and give it a good yard or two on each side, and as we lie there we hear the bullets singing round this little mound far too numerously and closely for anyone to be comfortable under its shelter. It is only one of the score of range marks that our enemy has made.

The first line is by this time scrambling up the hillside from rock to ledge. We press on behind them and are about half way up the steep slope, when a cheer above causes us to look up, and we perceive the Dorsets' bayonets glittering on the summit of the kop.

The Boers, however, had not waited for us, for, as we had lain on the ground earlier in the day, pending the next advance, we had seen little parties of them gallop hastily down the slope to disappear on the farther side. We could also, with the aid of our field glasses, see the men, who still braved the dangers of the field, hard at work with the pom-pom, and every instant a blue flash would announce to us that a Mauser had discharged its leaden messenger in our direction.

Now that the British had reached the summit, the few of our enemies remaining there threw down their arms; but the work was not completed. The saddle connecting the steeper cliffs behind was swiftly swept by the Dorsets, to-day making their regiment a name in this campaign, and here they were joined by the Middlesex, who had forced their way up the steeper and higher climb. Between them they soon swept away all opposition.

But surely our artillery are cutting it rather fine! The shells are still, even now, screeching round the crests of

these natural ramparts. What, for a moment, we take for a white flag is waved above us on the kopje's slope; but the broad blue band across its centre quickly undeceives us. It is one of our own signallers waving instructions to the artillery to cease fire, and presently the thunders that have resounded all the afternoon behind us gradually fade away.

Directly it was seen that the Boers were deserting their magnificent position, Major Benson, the commanding officer of the East Surreys, detached the left half of his first three and the whole of his other companies, and pressed on over the green slopes of the pass, hoping to be able to pour a few volleys into our retreating foes. The right half-companies, who had mounted the hillside, now swung round to the left, and hastened on after the others. The nature of the ground prevented us from attaining our object, and such of our enemies as escaped the attentions of the blue-jackets were spared a further dressing down. The sailors, however, did not allow many parties to go away uninjured, and our own company witnessed more than one example of the exactness of the 4·7 fire, as some flying groups were enveloped for an instant in the terrible cloud of earth which announced, ere the report reached us, the explosion of a lyddite shell, and when this cleared away the party also had disappeared.

By this time, however, night had closed in, a fine, clear, moonlight night, and we returned to the summit of the nek and there bivouacked upon the hard-earned field. The roll was immediately called and the full loss of our regiment ascertained. It amounted to 4 men killed and 14 wounded, including one officer; 1 man of the latter afterwards died of his injuries. The Dorsets, on our right, had a far heavier list of casualties.

We had seen, as we lay on the kopje's slope, the stricken men being carried on stretchers or helped by comrades off the field. And a ghastly spectacle they presented. But they were gone by in an instant and forgotten in the excitement of our rapid advances. The officer, Lieut. Stafford, belonging to the leading company, was shot through both cheeks, after crossing the donga. He turned to the rear, but had not gone far before he collapsed. "I" Company stretcher-bearers hastened for-

ward, and, lifting him on the stretcher, carried him over the donga and about a mile to the field hospital, the bullets meanwhile whistling thickly round them.

As we stood about in the cool evening air waiting for the waggons to come up with our blankets, the sight around could not fail to attract our attention. On all sides the long dry grass had been fired by our shells and the retreating Boers, and in the semi-darkness of the night the spectacle of all these long lines, zig-zags, circles, and squares of flame enveloping the steep mountain sides was one of unparalleled grandeur, and quite lit up the surrounding district. To some, however, these fires proved a most fearful torture, as several of our wounded enemies, left by their comrades on the field, perished in the flames ere they could be rescued. A large amount of stores was found on the mountain top abandoned by the Boers in their hasty flight.

At length the shouts, whistling, and cracking of whips of the Kaffirs driving the creaking and rumbling transport fall upon our ears, and soon the half dozen waggons bearing our bedding came groaning up the steep slope of the nek. Immediately the men told off gather round them, and ere long the blankets and overcoats are distributed and we lay down beside our rifles; and before many minutes have passed the whole camp, save the few solitary sentries, is wrapped in sleep.

The second obstacle was overcome, and the long stretch of trenches and battlements that lined the sides of those frowning peaks, Majuba and Pongwana, on each side, and extended across the high nek in the centre, had no longer any terrors for us, and ere another day had passed the Boers were scurrying from their stronghold in all haste, fearing lest the little army of men who had stormed Inkweloane and Almond's Nek should also cut off their retreat.

Next day (12th) we pressed on, but without any opposition or firing, save a few shells the Naval guns dropped into some small parties of the enemy in the distance, causing them rapidly to disperse. We halted for the night at a place known as Joubert's Farm, and here one of the men of the East Surreys was caught red-handed washing his face, a thing we had not done since we left Ingogo, and for which he was severely punished. From this

incident a small idea can be formed of the scarcity of the water.

We had again degenerated into a most filthy condition. The charred dust of the grass fires, over which we had marched for miles, had flown upwards in clouds and blackened our heads, mingling with the perspiration which bedewed our faces during the day, and which the bitter frost of night cracked and dried until the exposed parts were coated with a hard horny covering, which took months of washing to wear away. Our clothing, too, shoddy to a great extent, was rapidly opening in splits and rents; and beards adorned the cheeks and chin of nearly every man.

Next morning the forward move was continued, and at 10.15 the East Surrey Regiment, again forming the advance guard, was marching through the streets of Volksrust, the first Boer town occupied by the British Army operating from Natal.

Some amusement was occasioned as the head of our battalion was marching down one of the roads, by an old lady, who came trotting out with a piece of string, and securely tied up the little garden gate about two feet high, after which, with a sigh of relief, she retreated into her corrugated iron castle, quite sure that the whole British Army would be unable to storm it!

We crossed the market square and, turning south, took the road that leads across the border to Charlestown. We left Volksrust well occupied, and clean, with all the buildings intact, but directly we crossed the line which marks the boundary of the two territories, the work of devastation was visible everywhere. The vast railway sheds and station and nearly every house of our border town had been torn to pieces, and lay in piles of ruins.

As we marched along the main road and noted the destruction, wanton and unmeaning, the thoughts of every man turned to the place we had left hardly four miles away, smiling as though enjoying the best of peace and prosperity. Had we but had our way, that town would have borne witness that the British soldier can also destroy, and we would have given the Boers a lesson in looting that they would have remembered for many a day.

As it was, the Boers in Volksrust were allowed to go on enjoying the spoils of Charlestown and a dozen other

of the Natal towns, and the British Army took every precaution to see that they were well protected and well fed, even though its own soldiers might be starving.

We marched a little distance south of the ruined Charlestown, and bivouacked on the plain a mile or two north of Laing's Nek, the now useless stronghold which the Boers had boasted of and fortified so much; work that a skilful General and a few brave troops had rendered a mere waste of time.

CHAPTER VII.

Charlestown to Standerton.

Looking back at the events of the past few days it seemed to us little short of miraculous that a Company of men, nearly a hundred strong, could have come through these two warm corners without a single casualty. True, a bullet passed through the mess tin of one of our fellows, and another man dug out a shot that buried itself in the earth within a foot of him, and many others of us could recall some marvellously near shaves which, of course, were bound to have happened in such heavy showers of lead. We were, however, very glad of our lucky escapes, for I am sure none of us wished to see gaps in our ranks which had once been filled with the faces of old and tried comrades.

Now that the work was successfully finished, several congratulatory messages were read to us, praising the skilful manoeuvring and wise generalship that had brought about so great a feat as the clearing of Laing's Nek with a practically minimum loss.

For the next three days we rested at Charlestown, after the severe strain of the past week. Water, though by no means plentiful, was in a sufficient quantity to allow a fair amount of washing to be done, and in consequence we again struggled back to the borders of cleanliness. The weather, however, was our worst enemy. At night the sharp air almost froze the sentry on his beat, and half the camp would lie unable to sleep, or walk up and down trying to obtain sufficient warmth to allow them an hour or two's rest ere the intense cold

again awoke them. In the morning the thick white frost covering everything and everyone would make a picture of winter seldom seen on a Christmas Day at home.

Frequent soaking mists, too, added greatly to the disadvantages of open-air life, and when these were not stealing round us, searching every nook and corner, the cold cutting winds seldom allowed us to dispense with our overcoats, even when the noon-day sun was shining with all his strength.

June 14th was a day of bad tidings for our company, for it brought the news that Lieutenant Brooks and Private Cropper, both left at Newcastle sick, had died.

From Private Wilder, officer's servant, who attended the Lieutenant during his illness, and also was present at his funeral, I learnt that Mr. Brooks was left at Newcastle on 27th May, ill with fever. Dysentery and internal hæmorrhage followed, causing death on the 9th June, at 4.30 a.m. He was buried at Newcastle. No officer could have been more sincerely regretted than Mr. Brooks, who was, with all ranks, a general favourite, and his memory will always have an honoured place in our hearts.

Private Cropper, too, a comrade who had braved the dangers and endured the hardships of many a long day's march, was gone; leaving a vacancy in our rapidly-thinning ranks that even our return to dear old England could not refill, as it would do in the cases of men who had been invalided home. Mourned he was by all, but with the knowledge that he had been deemed worthy of the greatest of all deaths—for his Queen and Country.

> And how can man die better
> Than facing fearful odds,
> For the ashes of his fathers
> And the temples of his gods ?

But our misfortunes were not yet at an end. Captain Collyer was obliged to go into hospital on the same day, after a tough fight to keep at his duty. The night after the storming of Inkweloane had proved too much, even for his strong constitution, and only through sheer determination and pluck did he keep the command of the company during the march, and pilot us safely through Almond's Nek. Now that the excitement and dash of action was gone, the fever soon got the upper hand, and

the company was more sorry than surprised when it saw the stretcher-bearers carrying him over to the field hospital.

Private Wilder, who had just rejoined the company after performing the last tribute to Lieutenant Brooks, again supplies me with the following particulars:—Captain Collyer was sent on to Ingogo Hospital, thence to Newcastle on June 20th, where he so far recovered that he was able to start for home on July 12th, on which date he reached Pietermaritzburg. Two days later he finished the journey to Durban, and on the 17th sailed on board the "Orcana" for England.

The command now devolved on Lieutenant Longstaff, the only officer we had left, and who proved himself, when we were again on the march, as capable a leader as our men could wish to serve under.

Our stay at Charlestown came to rather an abrupt end on the 15th, Saturday afternoon, a time usually looked upon at home as a holiday, but in the field every day and every hour, night or day, was the same to us, never knowing when we should be wanted, but always ready when the bugle sounded the "Assembly."

So on this Saturday afternoon, at about 3.15, we were sitting about on our folded blankets, writing, patching, or reading the letters that had arrived with a convoy three days before, when the call for orders sounded. This is a rather unusual time for the call to be heard, and we wonder if anything is "in the wind."

Certainly there is. We can see that in the Orderly-Sergeant's face a quarter of a mile away as he comes hurrying up, note-book in hand.

"We move at 4 o'clock."

"Where to?"

"Don't know."

There is now no hurry and confusion in the movements of the company. They have learnt, as the veterans of the regiment did long before, that quiet and orderly work is much the best; and so blankets are rolled and on the waggon, tea is brought up and disposed of, and we are equipped and ready to fall in at five minutes before the hour. Forty minutes for a battalion of some 800 men to pack up their bedding, load the waggons, strike the one or two tents used by the officers, have a meal, fill in the waste-

pits, &c., and be on parade, ready to go on the march and make their bivouac many miles away, sounds quick work to those at home, where two or three hours are necessary to clean up, and a day or two to pack their belongings. But we soon got used to quick moves in the field, and many a time the first notes of the "Revéille" have broken the silence at 3 a.m., and the battalion, after all this work and also cooking its own breakfast, has been on the march at 3.45.

So now at 4 o'clock we are moving off our resting-ground for the last three days and tramping the dusty road towards Volksrust. It was thought, at first, we were making but a short march, as it was already late in the brief winter day, but we were quickly undeceived.

We passed through Volksrust, and at the other side of this well-built and pleasant town, came up with a large convoy bound for Wakkerstroom, which we were to escort as far as Jaeger's Pass, some eight miles along the road. We had already marched a good five miles and the night was rapidly closing in.

We moved off, plodding along in the growing darkness at the side of the tremendous train of waggons we were protecting, carrying supplies to General Hildyard's column.

For some time we headed for a grass fire that burnt to the eastward, but soon swung round to where a similar line of flame glowed on the steep hillside away to the north. The heavy gloom of a cloudy and moonless night concealed every object from our vision until we were close upon it. The sandy water-courses and the hummocks showed like level ground until we had fallen into or over them. The leading men, of course, suffered most; but by their experience we all profited, and the word was continually being passed to the rear to beware of a hole, rut, anthill, or one of a thousand other pitfalls that lay concealed by the darkness along our track that night.

We toiled patiently on, in the cold and gloom, up the steep mountain road that twisted and wound in and out among the rocky kopjes, and about 8.30 p.m. made a halt almost on the summit of the pass we had come to occupy. Here a long rest turned the heat of the march

into a most objectionable cooling. A little higher up the track the large grass fire which had been our guiding light all the evening was burning on the right of the road, and round this the officers had gathered, while the men looked on and froze.

After waiting a considerable time, we moved higher up, coming to a halt almost on the summit of the mountain. The battalion bivouacked on a small plateau, well under cover. "I" Company's turn had again arrived for outpost. We hunted round the crest of the hill to find some sheltered spot from the wind, and at last camped down for the night on a slope, so steep that we were obliged to keep our feet against one of the many boulders covering it to prevent us making an undesirable journey to the bottom. In the morning most of us found we had left our bedding some yards higher up the hill-side, whilst a small party was dispatched to collect the various articles, chiefly helmets, that had completed their downward journey, and now lay in numbers at the base of the slope.

The next forty-eight hours were most unenjoyable, as rain poured down almost continuously all the time. Though uncomfortable in itself, the downpour had one good result. The tents arrived, and were issued, and on Monday, June 18, we were once more under the shelter of our canvas homes, after sleeping and living for six weeks entirely in the open—a life of sufficient fresh air to warrant us against ever succumbing to consumption.

Our stay here, however, was but a short one. Next morning we marched back to Joubert's Farm, a small collection of houses a few miles outside Volksrust, where we had halted for the night the day before we entered that town.

We found a vast force assembled, and took our place again with the 2nd Brigade. Tents had been served out everywhere, and the encampment made a vastly different picture, with its hundreds of little pyramids of white canvas gleaming in the sunlight, from what it appeared on the march, when the long stacks of rifles and blanket-covered forms denoted the resting battalions.

Next morning this huge army commenced its move up country, following the railway. The first parties started about 7.30, and shortly after them the transport went

rumbling by in three long streams. The East Surreys were detailed as baggage guard, and took their places in Companies beside these huge columns, moving off in succession as required. We watched the snake-like lines of creaking waggons creep out of camp across the plains and disappear in the far distance, the companies guarding them being stretched out like long feelers on each side. Still, the unending procession continued to rumble on, and even when we took our place beside this huge convoy, we left behind us a vast number of waggons and troops yet to start.

The advance guard was already nearing its destination at Zandspruit, ten miles away, ere the last of the baggage train left the camp at Joubert's Farm. As we moved along we now and then reached the crest of some small ridge, and saw extending before and behind us the three ever-moving trains, while in some places smaller columns that had been crowded out of the main line toiled alongside making six and eight streams abreast.

We arrived at our destination about 4 p.m., and shortly afterwards went on outpost duty for the night. Owing to the darkness, and not having too good an idea of the position, one of the patrols visiting us from the next piquet went astray, and it was some six hours ere he relieved the anxiety of his post commander by putting in an appearance.

Next morning, the 21st, we continued the march, arriving at Paardekop, eleven miles further along the road. At 2.30 a.m. next day réveille sounded for our Regiment, as we were to be the advance guard, and at 3.45 we started off in the moonlight, for as yet no signs of morning were visible, and for some distance we experienced many unpleasant jolts and stumbles.

At last, however, the day appeared, and brought with it the most beautiful combination of mist and mountain that one could ever look upon. Our track lay along the summit of a long range of hills, and as the morning light grew stronger it revealed in the clear frosty air a chain of large rugged mountains towering on our left. To all appearances they seemed scarce a mile away, so distinctly could every peak and crevice be seen. And between them and the road on which we stood floated a filmy sea of pure white mist that flowed from beneath

our feet, until it seemed to break in clouds of foam around these stern pinnacles of rock.

Presently the sun rose, flashing a thousand rosy tints upon this magnificent picture, until the mist gradually rolled away under its genial warmth, and revealed a vast smiling fertile plain, dotted with farms and kraals nestling under the little clumps of trees that settlers plant around their homesteads.

The rocky range became more indistinct in the warmer atmosphere, and gradually fading into distance formed a most harmonious background to the scene of cultivation below us.

The view must, indeed, have been a grand one if soldiers who had marched for some hours with an empty stomach could pause in their cooking operations to admire it. We had halted an hour for breakfast at the roadside, and so had time to contemplate the grandeur of nature's picture while munching our hard biscuit. We pushed on as soon as this meal was finished, halting for two hours for dinner, and at 4.30 p.m. arrived at Katbosch Spruit after covering a distance of twenty-three miles.

The following day (23rd) we were allowed to rest, more for the sake of the cattle than the men. On Sunday, 24th June, we again struck tents and set out for Standerton, eleven miles away. This place had already a historic name, earned by the gallant defence made by the handful of British troops, who defended it against the Boer insurrection of '81. When the town fell in that war the British flag that had floated over it so gallantly, had been hauled down and buried.

Now, after nearly twenty years of darkness in the grave, the same old Union Jack that had cheered the hearts of that little band of heroes whose tombs are still marked by a monument in the town, again floated in the breeze from the highest masthead.

What a sight, too, was now spread before it. Instead of a handful of hard-pressed warriors sternly holding their own, a mighty host of khaki-clad soldiers was pouring into the town. Far as the eye could reach this great array extended, and already around the little place, on all sides, vast cities of canvas were springing into existence, amid long lines of waggons.

Far into the night "Kruger's Brug" (bridge) resounded to the rumble of British transport and the steady tramp of British feet, as the army continued to march into Standerton, to commence what we sincerely hope is a permanent occupation.

The few inhabitants kept well out of sight, and as we passed through the place to our camp at the foot of Standerton Kop we saw very little of them. The traffic bridge, built only a few years ago, here crosses the Vaal, and is a beautifully graceful one of three spans, built on high slender pillars. The railway bridge, built on much the same pattern, but far stronger, had been destroyed, the middle span being broken in twain.

Tents were soon pitched, and we settled down to rest for a day or a year, whichever the case might be. It proved a stay of a little over two months, but of that we knew nothing that night, as we prepared for sleep on what had most likely been the battlefield of the earlier struggle.

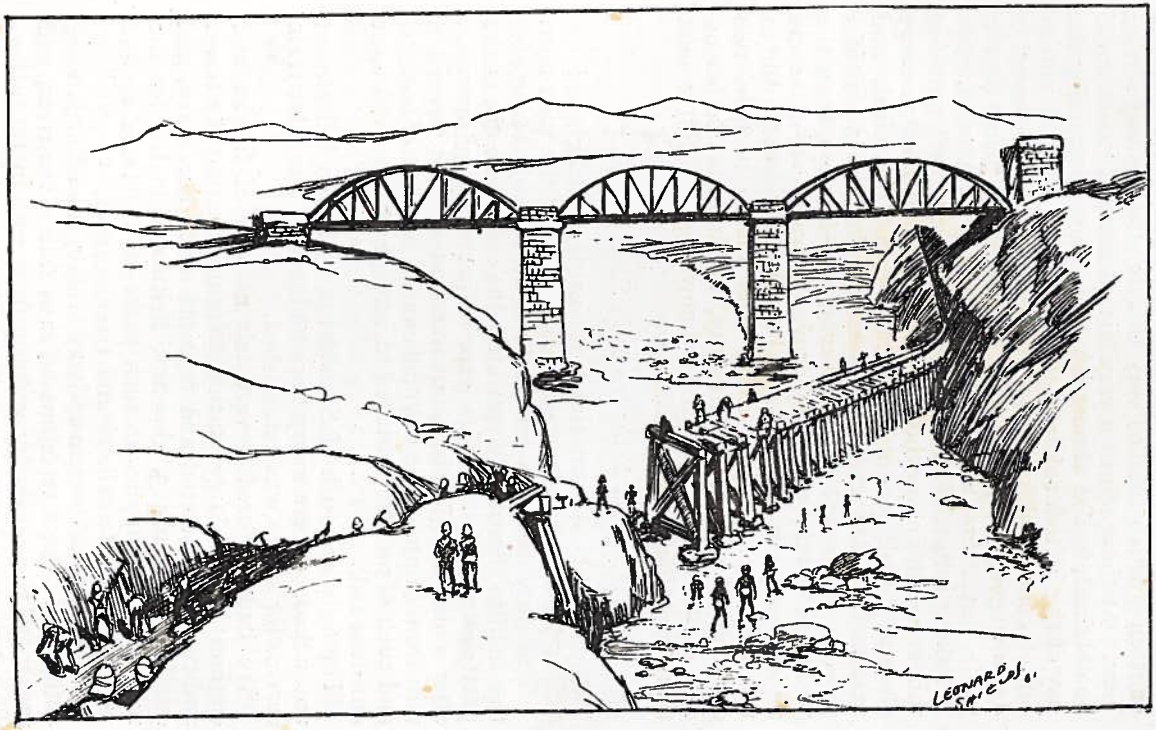
CHAPTER VIII.

Under Standerton Kop.

One of the first parades ordered after our arrival at Standerton was for washing purposes. We paraded, each company having its own time, and marched down to the Vaal River a little way below the ruined railway bridge. Here we were allowed one hour to do all our washing and have a bath, after which we fell in and returned again to camp.

This was a great advantage, as all of us were in sad need of a good cleaning. Not a minute of the time was lost; those who, because of the lack of a shirt, could not wash it, assisted others in their labour. One or two more ambitious, went so far as to wash their khaki, but these were looked upon as more or less insane.

Now that we were in standing camp, the cooks again resumed their duties, and all cooking for breakfast, dinner, and tea was done by them. In the evening, however, the many little fires still glowed in the darkness, where men were preparing something hot for supper to keep out the night chills.



RAILWAY WORK AT STANDERTON

Another advantage soon showed itself in the shape of canteens, which arrived very shortly after we had settled here. At these stores a very fair quantity of extras could be obtained, but at almost fabulous prices considering the pay of the British soldier. For instance, a pot of jam or tin of condensed milk cost ninepence, three-fifths of a day's wages. Kop's ale was at the same price after a while, but at first a shilling a bottle was demanded.

Taking into consideration that the ordinary Tommy of this army, the man who had endured and overcome every obstacle, had fought, starved, worked, watched, and marched by day and night, was getting for his faithful services the usual 1s. 3d. per diem—far less than the "niggers" were paid who drove the waggons—it seems a pity that such prices should have been allowed. Add to this the veteran's joy when, after giving perhaps two days' pay for some little dainty, he finds inside (as on one or two occasions to my knowledge he did) a neat ticket on which was inscribed:

"*A present to the troops in South Africa.*"

A present! At ten times its value in England!

But let it rest. It is with us a thing of the past now.

The duty now was extremely light, the object being for the men to thoroughly rest after the arduous work of the past seven weeks. Tents were inspected every morning, after which we were free, but were not allowed beyond a mile from camp. The town, of course, was out of bounds, and such of us who ventured in, except on duty, did so at our own risk.

The railway south of Standerton had been left almost untouched, and ere many days had passed a regular train service for stores was established.

We had captured a very fair number of trucks and engines at the large station here on entering the town, and these were tested and repaired where necessary, and on Tuesday, July 3, the first British train left for the north, taking supplies to such parts of our force as had pressed on to Heidelberg and Greylingstad.

Owing to the broken railway bridge, the officials were obliged to make a terminus on each side of the river, and transport the goods by waggon from one to the other. This was found very inconvenient, and engineers were

requisitioned to build a branch line over the stream. The troops were set to work, our own company taking its turn with the rest, and in less than a fortnight a train was run round the new cutting and over the river on a wooden trestle bridge. During these operations one of our men found a new Martini rifle concealed in the ash-heap of the pumping shed whence water was supplied to the station tanks.

Guards were plentifully established round the town, and all the roads had a post at which the passes of everyone travelling along them were examined.

A corporal of "I" Company is reported to have stopped a staff officer on one of these road guards, and demanded his pass.

"Do you think me a suspicious character?" asked the officer.

"Well," replied the corporal, dubiously, "you never know."

Among other guards, we had to provide for the gaol, railway sidings, and traffic bridge.

Our first railway siding guard the right-half company will not forget, as it was the occasion (thanks to Lieut. Longstaff) of our first taste of bread, which, except the half-pound at Ingogo, we had not sampled since May 7, and it was now July 4. Some kind fellow offered to get us a further supply at 1s. a loaf, which we gladly accepted. Plenty of money was forthcoming, and he left us in the pleasant anticipation of a feed, which never came off, as this good gentleman forgot to return. Every time a party went round the town after that, one of its chief duties was to keep a look-out for this man, and administer summary justice to him. Luckily for him, he was never seen again.

Two captured Kaffirs were the result of our watch, and these were handed over to the guard at the gaol, where both civil culprits and prisoners of war were lodged. One of the much-sought-after jobs was carrying the rations round to the different posts in the morning, the opportunity being used to further explore the town.

Standerton is a fairly large place, with a few buildings above the ordinary type, chiefly the Dutch church, gaol, and railway station. A large market square occupies the centre of the town. The roads are broad, but only in a

few places have they been prepared, the majority of the streets consisting of the space between the opposite houses being left in its natural state.

Several large shops are established here, and, as far as we could see, a fairly thriving business had sprung up, though of course at this time comparatively little was doing.

Outposts were established round the camp at a considerable distance. Standerton Kop was really the stronghold of the place, and here the Naval guns were established in gun-pits, while all round the hill sangers were constructed and nightly manned. This was not considered sufficient, and a chain of posts was stretched across the plain so as to completely surround the town and camp. "I" Company had the pleasure of raising one of these covers. We paraded for outpost with burdens equal to those of pack-mules. In addition to our ordinary equipment and rifle were added our blankets and overcoats, and, as the "final straw," a pick or shovel. With this little collection we marched about two miles out, took off our things, and went to work at about 3 p.m., eventually finishing the trench in the dark.

Another night a little excitement was caused by the arrival of an officer about 10 p.m. with a mule bearing an extra supply of ammunition, and the information that an attack was expected at dawn. We were also to double our sentries, and half the post to be always awake. At 4 a.m. the whole picquet was aroused, and sat enveloped in their blankets and with fixed bayonets till broad daylight, when we retired to camp, the Boers having failed to put in an appearance. This was not the only time, while here, that we enjoyed a false alarm.

A regular church parade was now held every Sunday, at which all who were off duty attended. On one occasion those who cared to volunteer were permitted to attend a Church of England service held in the Town Hall. We who went were well repaid by an extremely nice service, as well as the unparalleled novelty of being under a roof, sitting on a seat, and hearing an organ, three things we had not done since we left the base.

On Tuesday, July 10, the draft to the Company arrived in camp, and was accorded a very hearty welcome. These men had been accepted on April 24 for service,

medically examined on the 25th, and finally attested on the following day, when they were also measured for their uniforms.

After this date they were allowed to remain at their homes until everything was ready. On May 14 they assembled at the Regimental Depot at Kingston, and were then supplied with their full outfit for the field.

The rest of the week was spent in marking clothes, inspections, and all other necessary duties. Saturday, 19th, saw them on their way to join the Company. After a good breakfast at 6 a.m., they marched to Surbiton Station and entrained for Southampton, arriving there at 11 o'clock, when they immediately embarked on board the "Avondale Castle," sailing at 2 p.m.

The voyage out was spent very similarly to that of our Company. A concert was held in aid of the Absent-Minded Beggar Fund, and £10 10s. was subscribed amongst the troops.

Las Palmas was reached on the 24th May, the Queen's Birthday, and this fact was brought home to our men by twenty-one guns being fired by a British warship at anchor in the bay.

Leaving this beautiful place at 6.20 p.m. the same day, good progress was made, and the equator was reached on the 1st June. This being pretty well the hottest day possible, the officer in charge seized the opportunity to have "a full marching order" parade at 2 p.m. I believe a similar thing was done on a corresponding day on board the "Tintagel Castle," but I suppose it is only a little bit of red tape.

Sports were instituted and the draft won the volley-firing contest. This occurred on the 8th June, when we also were having a firing contest with the Boers, each other being the targets and the heights of Inkweloane the prize. Concerts were frequently organised, and by all accounts the draft had quite as enjoyable a voyage as the company.

At midnight on June 9 the "Avondale Castle" came to anchor in Table Bay, but the men were not landed until the 12th, when they changed their quarters to Green Point Camp. An opportunity was afforded them for seeing Cape Town, as they did not embark again until the 15th June.

On this day they boarded the "Britannic," sailing for Durban at 7.30 a.m. the following morning. Port Elizabeth was their only place of call on the way round, and they reached this town on the 18th, leaving at 10 p.m. next day. Their voyage came to an end at 1.30 p.m. on the 21st, when they anchored in the roads off Durban and landed, entraining almost immediately for Pietermaritzburg, where they arrived at midnight. Their stay here lasted till the 27th, when they set out to join the company, leaving all spare kit behind them. Newcastle was reached at midday on the 28th. The following morning they enjoyed their first day's tramp to Ingogo, where they arrived at 8 p.m., and spent a wet night in the open. Next day they again pressed forward to Mount Prospect, endured another wretched night, and the following morning resumed the tramp over Laing's Nek, reaching Charlestown at 1.30 p.m., and camping there for the night.

Most of them seized the opportunity, denied to us, of inspecting the place and examining the destruction done by the Boers. In the morning of the 2nd July, the draft moved their quarters to Volksrust, and here spent a few days waiting until a convoy they were to escort was ready.

On the 7th they again resumed the march, and spent the following three nights at Zandspruit, Paardekop, and Platrand, and on the 10th marched into Standerton, where they were joyfully received by the company. From this date their doings became identical with our own, and they were soon as efficient and trustworthy soldiers as the oldest men amongst us.

These new men received a shock almost as soon as they arrived. On the night of the 11th we had all turned in, and most were asleep, when the sound of hurrying footsteps became audible to those who had not yet reached dreamland. This was followed by the violent banging of the tents and loud demands to turn out immediately. Though we ourselves had not been disturbed we were, of course, anxious to know what was "in the wind," and a comrade, more energetic than the rest, donned the remnants of his unmentionables and sallied forth to ascertain the reason of all this unseemly hubbub.

He returned after a short while with the information that three companies were under immediate marching orders, and were getting equipped with all speed. Also that a messenger had been sent round to the different posts with instructions for them in the event of an attack.

This was enough for the more experienced of us, who promptly turned over and got to sleep lest, ere long, we should ourselves be wanted. The companies returned about 11 next morning, after a march of over fourteen miles, without having come into touch with the enemy. Shortly afterwards we were sent on a similar, though more successful, surprise expedition. But I must not anticipate.

On 16th July, the Brigade Sports were held. General Buller and several Staff officers were present. It was a pleasant sight to see the face of our veteran leader wreathed in smiles as he watched the various contests, paying most attention to the boxing. The great event of the day was the obstacle race, and this proved a most severe trial for those who entered. There were beside these fixed contests, periodical inter-Company matches of football and cricket, held by the Battalion, leading to a most friendly rivalry between the different companies. "I" Company was fortunate enough to hold its own, though not always gaining the palm.

The weather, which on our arrival had been very cold during the night, now showed signs of improvement. In place of frosts, heavy mists hung over the camp during the mornings, and these very frequently detained the picquets at their posts long after the usual time of withdrawal. But this was a trifling affliction, for once the fog cleared away, a fine warm day almost invariably followed. Now and again heavy sand and dust storms swept through the camp, covering everything with grit, and finding the weak parts of the tent ropes, upon which a heavy strain was imposed by the terrific gales that swept these earth-clouds along.

The greatest of the benefits of a standing camp was attained on July 27, when a pint of beer was served out to us, for which we paid the modest sum of fourpence. It was a colonial brew, and purely a chemical mixture, but it had a distant resemblance to the beer of good old

England, and was very much enjoyed. Of course the issue was limited to the above quantity per diem, but there was no great difficulty in obtaining the services of a teetotaler should more be desired.

CHAPTER IX.

JOUBERT'S KOP, AND AFTER.

THE bugle sounded the single note that closes the day for the soldier, and one by one the lights vanished, and the tents became wrapped in darkness.

Far away in the chain of outposts a scout has just galloped in through the night, bearing important tidings, and owing to this man the whole camp becomes, ere three hours have slipped away, more active than the day has seen it.

Eleven o'clock had scarcely passed when the unusual sound of voices was heard in our lines, and shortly afterwards a heavy banging on the canvas awoke the sleeping inmates of the tent.

The opening is quickly unfastened and the Colour Sergeant enters and informs us that we shall be aroused at 3.15, and parade at 4 a.m. next day in marching order.

He departs to inform the rest, and in his footsteps come the orderly-men with rations of bully-beef, biscuits, tea and coffee, which we promptly stow away in our haversacks. We then dress ourselves, and when all preparations for the morrow have been completed, we lie down to snatch an hour or two's repose.

Scarce does it seem that we have closed our eyes ere the non-commissioned officer is again banging away at the tent, telling us to prepare for the day's work before us. We "fall in" in the darkness with three other Companies of the battalion who are detailed for the same expedition, and march to the station where we discover similar contingents from the West Yorks and Queen's awaiting us. All embark on a long train of goods trucks, and we steam for some six miles up the line.

At last we pull up upon a high embankment, and immediately we swarm over the side and down the slope, falling in at the foot, and leaving our overcoats, which we

had worn so far, in the trucks under the charge of one or two men.

"All present," and off we go, with the train behind us standing out darkly on the summit of the bank against the first streaks of light breaking the eastern sky. We press on along a rough track for some two miles, and are then joined by the artillery and cavalry, who had started about two hours earlier, and marched out.

We form up in fighting order, and advance towards an exact duplicate of Standerton Kop—a long, flat-topped hill, with steep boulder-strewn sides—under the name of Joubert's Kop, which breaks the monotonous level of the velt some three miles off.

The West Yorks lead the way, with the Queen's on their left flank, the East Surreys forming the reserve, and following behind the first-named regiment. We press onward in extended order for some time, when we learn that the Boers, who had occupied this really formidable, though isolated mountain, had retreated, and taken cover on a chain of lower kopjes a few miles further off.

We swing round slightly to the right, and pass the position where we had expected resistance, coming in sight of the now occupied range in the distance. Still the steady tramp continues through the long grass and mealie fields, and through the fences of barbed wire that enclose them, and which we do not spare if they hinder us in the slightest; until we come to a halt under cover, about a mile and a half from the object of our attack.

The thunder of wheels breaks the quiet of nature as the artillery comes galloping up to the crest of the slight ridge, behind which the East Surreys have halted, and takes up a position on our left.

The same moment that we receive orders to continue the advance, the first report of the field gun echoes across the plain. The long screeching of the shell follows, and we watch impatiently for the explosion on the hills in front. Presently the spurt of earth flies up right on the summit, and we know there are some old hands behind the cannon.

The West Yorks are already pressing hard across the plain, and we plunge through the long grass in their trail.

But ere the first line of the infantry had reached the foot of the slope, or a dozen shells had searched the

enemy's covers, the Boers were seen in full flight. The South African Light Horse, who had been well to the front all the time, started in hot pursuit, and we saw them from our position in the plain, sweep up the hill side like a whirlwind and disappear over the crest.

The work of the infantry was done without even a single shot being fired, and we received orders to close and halt for dinner. The bully-beef, which had been warming in our mess-tin under the hot African sun all the morning, is brought forth, blackened and dry even beyond its customary distastefulness. In most cases it is thrown away, and potted meat or some other canteen dainty, for which we have paid heavily, is produced and devoured with much relish.

Dinner over, our faces are turned homewards. We have already come a good nine miles since we left the railway, so we can reckon that between fifteen and sixteen lie between us and our camp.

A trying march it proved, too, owing to the two or three weeks' idleness we had enjoyed after our arrival at Standerton. The heat was great, but what troubled us most was that our feet had got out of condition, and such a long march caused a great deal of soreness. The short rests we were allowed here and there along the road were worse than useless, as the pain was almost unbearable when we again resumed the tramp, and several preferred to move up and down rather than lie on the dusty roadside during these pauses. But, for all that, there was little falling out, and our fellows plodded on manfully until we were met by some mule waggons sent out by General Buller to give us a lift into camp.

The worst cases got up first, but on the arrival of more conveyances we all mounted and rode in. This part of the journey was by no means the smoothest. The Kaffirs whipped up their ten-mule teams and off went the heavy springless waggons, over the ant-heaps and boulders, providing us with enough to do to keep our seats, and fairly shaking out of us what little energy we had left.

We arrived at last and limped to our tents, truly thankful to be able to remove our boots and putties and ease our feet. A short rest soon dispersed all the fatigue of the march, and we were as well as ever by next morn-

ing. There were, however, one or two exceptions, amongst them being Sergeant Woodward, who had arrived in charge of the draft.

He was detained at the hospital, where we were informed that he had contracted enteric fever. He was sent down country, and as soon as he had recovered sufficiently, embarked for England.

We were now joined by Lieut. Maclean, whom we had left sick at Newcastle. He was then a sergeant, but had since received his commission and returned as second in command of the company.

On August 4th the company was sent down country about five miles to occupy a post on the railway at a small locality known as Erdzac. We had to entrench the camp the day after our arrival, and a part of the guard's duty was to patrol the line to meet a party from the next post, and to examine all culverts and bridges. This had to be done twice each night, and proved, to the men engaged, no very pleasant job—walking along the railway track in the darkness looking for Boers bent on mischief.

Our stay here did not last long, and on August 8th we struck camp and marched back to Standerton.

Escorts were now wanted for the goods trains running up country, and for this pleasant duty several of our men were warned. By this means most of us got an opportunity of seeing the famous cities of Pretoria and Johannesburg, a chance we had been longing for ever since we entered the Transvaal.

Some of these parties went even beyond the capital, one getting as far as Krugersdorp. They, indeed, went a little further than this place, but were obliged to return as the Boers had destroyed the line. These journeys, however, were not to be lightly undertaken, as it meant sleeping four or five nights on the trucks.

One of the escorts arrived at Pretoria after about forty-eight hours' travelling, and, in consequence, had obtained a minimum amount of rest. They were told by the Station Officer to go to the "Birdcage," the place formerly utilised for the confinement of British officers, who were prisoners of war, but now occupied as a "*Rest Camp.*"

They arrived there fairly tired out. Whilst the non-

commissioned officer was making inquiries, the majority of the men—with the adaptability of soldiers—lay down, wrapped themselves up, and went to sleep on the square.

At this opportune moment a General rode into the camp and passed close to the tired men. Those who were not yet asleep stood at attention, but several slumbered on, heeding not the dignity of this colossal bundle of red tape.

For this heinous offence the whole party were ordered an hour's extra drill!

What, may we ask, is the military definition of a Rest Camp?

An unpleasant duty we were called upon to perform whilst at Standerton impressed upon us the utter loneliness of a soldier's burial. Bugler Reilly, of the Scottish Rifles, a married man, died in the hospital of enteric fever. Not a friend or comrade was there in the place, who belonged to his Regiment, so, at his death, a fatigue party was requisitioned to render the last tributes. A detachment was sent from our company, consisting of twelve armed men and eight bearers. We marched over to the hospital, and the armed party lined the path from the ambulance waggon to the gate. Four of the bearers then entered, and returned with the stretcher on which lay the body, covered with the Union Jack.

It was placed on the waggon and we marched to the cemetery on the farther side of the town, with arms reversed. Here a long wait occurred, owing to the priest having to come some distance up country. He arrived, however, after some time, and the service, according to the Roman Catholic rite, was proceeding, when it was discovered that no ropes had been provided for lowering the body.

One of the men, however, removed his putties, and with these the duty was performed. The guard presented arms, the bugler sounded the last post, and we marched away, leaving behind, in what is most likely a nameless grave, the remains of one who had no friend to mourn him, save those who were far away. But a soldier is always a comrade too, and these last duties to a departed brother-in-arms were performed by us with the utmost reverence; and, no doubt, those of our company who died in hospital in South Africa received a similar

respectful attention from the comrades of other corps upon whom the sad duty fell.

Field-ovens now arrived and were fixed up by the cooks. The day of our first baked meat dinner (for up to the present we had had stews) deserves to be recorded. It occurred on the 21st August, and was thoroughly enjoyed, though one or two of the men nearly lost their mental balance at the long unprecedented sight, when the orderly man arrived with the dish.

Owing to the enthusiasm and industry of a private in "B" Company, whose name, unfortunately, I have not obtained, we had the privilege of enjoying an open-air concert. The programme was very varied, and, one of the waggons being used for a stage, all had a good chance of hearing and seeing. The officers were present, and the whole affair proved a rattling success.

Our stay at Standerton at length came to an end. After waiting two days on account of heavy rain, as it showed few signs of abating, we struck tents on the 29th August in the wet, packed up, and marched down to the station, where a train awaited us. We embarked and ran down the line to Platrand, a small wayside station, but with an hotel and one or two iron buildings in addition, making, in this country, a really respectably large town.

Here we found the 11th Brigade encamped. Our company, with the two regular companies who had come with us, detrained and pitched tents a little way outside the station. We turned in early, and were in no hurry to rise the following morning. When we did so a great surprise was in store for us.

Instead of the rows of tents and lines of horses we had seen overnight, the last few waggons were just rolling off the camping ground, and we were left alone. The whole thickly-populated canvas city had vanished with the morning sun, leaving scarce an indication that it had ever occupied the vast expanse of ground around the station.

We shifted our tents, taking positions at the corner of what resembled a large triangle. Each company guarded a side. We took charge of the road that here runs close to the railway, and along which we had passed on our way to Standerton. Water was rather scarce, and all used for

drinking purposes had to be brought by rail; but one or two muddy pools provided us with sufficient to keep fairly clean. The days were spent in guard duties and filling in the trenches and rifle-pits which had been dug by the 11th Brigade, and which were now useless with our small force, and might possibly provide cover for the enemy.

Our stay passed without any incident worthy of note occurring, and on September 8 we received orders to move down to Volksrust. The next morning we struck tents, but did not entrain until late in the afternoon, arriving at our destination at 6.30 p.m., and pitching for the night.

The following day we marched out to a fortified position on what is known as Green Hill, a place of great strength, and commanding the plain around for a considerable distance. We encamped on a platform cut in the hillside about thirty feet from the summit, and well protected from the slopes most likely to be attacked. Sergeant Cox was left with his section to hold some defences in the plain nearer the town. Our stay here was very brief. No sooner had we succeeded in fixing up the field oven and tapping the beer than we received orders to move, and on the morning of the 14th we packed up and marched to Zandspruit. There we found two other Companies encamped, one of the Queen's and one of the Rifle Brigade, and a staff of officers who, we concluded, were practising for their home guards, such was their devotion to red tape. Every smallest trifle had to be done in this or that way, else it was not right. One, for instance, was that the orderly officer must see the dinners before the guard received them. This meant, usually, a good twenty minutes for the dinners to cool while waiting for the inspection. The East Surreys didn't see the point of this important duty, and ne'er a one of our men's dinners did the orderly officer see, curse how he might, unless it was the leavings the niggers were eating outside.

While here a large amount of horses, cattle, and sheep were driven in by the scouts and the 5th Dragoon Guards who were scouring the neighbourhood. A good number of Boers, too, gave themselves up, and a very pretty picture was formed by a party of nine of them, all mounted, coming down the road to our station under the

white flag. They were sent on to Volksrust and dealt with there.

Guards were supplied from our camp to two bridges on the railway between Zandspruit and Volksrust, the duty lasting for a week. It was a real pleasure to get on one of these posts to be free from the red tape of the camp. The guard was composed of twelve men, with a non-commissioned officer in charge; all rations were sent down the line on a trolley daily.

CHAPTER X.

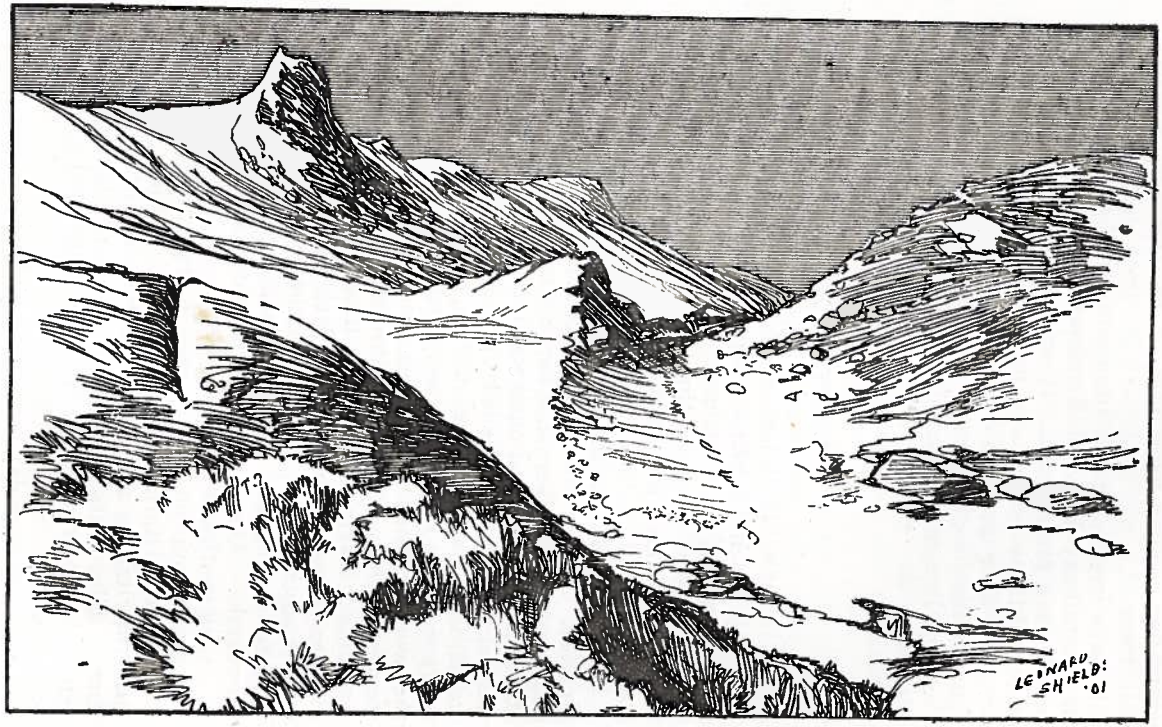
A Disappointment.—Life at Van Reenen's.

Our joy can be better imagined than described when orders arrived for us to leave this hot-bed of officialism. This alone would, at any time, have brought forth cheers, but the fact that we were homeward bound completed our happiness.

Late on Sunday night the orders arrived, and on Monday, October 8th, we embarked on the mail train and arrived at Volksrust, where we camped for the night at the headquarters of our battalion. In the morning we were early astir and loaded up the waggons, after which we fell in. Major Pearce, now in command of the East Surreys, made a short but very complimentary speech on the work we had performed, and wished us a speedy journey home. We then marched to the station and entrained, leaving Volksrust by the mail at 11 a.m. We ran through the Laing's Nek tunnel and over the familiar scene where we had watched the Boers from the heights of Ingogo, and after some time pulled up at Newcastle. Our stay here is short and soon we are steaming southward with all speed.

After a run of twenty-one hours through some of the most historic places in South Africa, we reach Pietermaritzburg at 8 a.m., and forming up, march into camp. The tents arrive and are soon pitched, and we settle down for what we imagine to be our last few days on Natal soil.

The following day we went down to the stores to draw our kitbags. Here a disgusting condition of



VIEW OF VAN REENEN'S.

affairs was discovered. Instead of the well-filled bags we had left, containing useful and necessary articles (chiefly private property) of clothing for our homeward voyage, we found our bags. Some, indeed, appeared full, but the owner was quickly undeceived when he pulled out half a dozen Militia tunics. Out of the whole company not ten received their bags back intact. All the rest had been ransacked by unscrupulous thieves, who, afraid to go to the front, remained at the base to despoil those men who were doing the real work of their country in the field.

It is a decided disgrace that the British Army cannot look after its soldiers' belongings. Hundreds of men were kept at Pietermaritzburg doing guards and other duties more or less unnecessary. Yet not one man could be spared to look after the few necessaries the fighters possessed, but were unable to take with them to the front.

The quartermaster of the regiment had come down with us to see after our refitting, and we were, in consequence, all supplied with a new khaki uniform fit for landing in England. Other articles were procured for those in need of them, and our ammunition was collected.

But our rejoicings were premature. On the evening of the 14th rumours were very strong that we were returning up-country. Of course such statements were laughed at at first, but the next day brought with it definite orders to return kitbags to stores, and draw the ammunition again. Our company was not the only one treated thus, some having travelled as far as Durban ere they received orders to return.

Tuesday evening (15th), at 8.30 p.m., we fell in and marched to Pietermaritzburg Station, where we entrained together with the Durham Light Infantry, Dorsets, and Queen's Volunteer Companies, for Ladysmith.

The accommodation was inadequate, and as a result ten men were compressed into each compartment. For ordinary passengers this is full, but taking into consideration the fact that each man had his kit as well, the packing was very tight. We made the best of it, however, two getting into the racks, three on the floor, and the rest disposing themselves to the best advantage on the seats. A good deal of refreshment of the liquid order had

been procured for this momentous occasion, and in consequence a lively night ensued, the singing being kept up into the small hours.

Shortly after daybreak the train pulled up at Ladysmith Station, and we equipped ourselves expecting orders to disembark here. We were vastly surprised when we received directions to get our messtins, and were marched round to the back of the refreshment-room, where each man received a slice of bread of the "doorstep" order, and a small amount of coffee. We then trooped back to our carriages to consume our dainty breakfast, and during this operation word was sent round that we were bound for Van Reenen's Pass.

The train journey was well worth making, up the branch of the railway towards Harrismith. The line climbs up the Drakensberg range at Van Reenen's very similarly to the way it ascends the mountain side at Laing's Nek, and winds round the narrow ledges cut in the steep slopes at such a height that to look below almost makes you giddy, while overhead the frowning cliffs and riskily poised boulders appear to threaten the narrow shelf along which the train glides.

The view, too, extends over many miles of country in all directions, and entrances the eye with its ever-changing variety.

At length we swing round the highest of the narrow mountain ledges, and come in sight of a smooth plain over which we rattle to pull up at Van Reenen's Station. We instantly detrain, and after loading waggons, set out for the camp we have passed at the foot of the rough roadway that here climbs over the narrow nek between two colossal peaks.

The town was the terminus of the Natal and of the Orange Free State Railways, but now I presume the traffic will be run right through. The white inhabitants of this important locality numbered at our arrival about a dozen in all. This is, of course, without the military force guarding the pass. The buildings consist of two stores, an hotel and the station erections, though I was later informed that, *on paper*, a great many imposing edifices have been erected. But these are at present invisible to the human eye.

Our arrival in the camp released several details, who

immediately left for the station, whence we had the pleasure of seeing them depart for their respective regiments later the same day. Our tents were pitched under the side of a large round hill that stood out like a great fortress, guarding the pass behind. Indeed it was a position of immense strength now that we were in possession of it, and before we left this place we added countless yards to the long narrow trenches which furrow its green sides.

We were destined to stay here for many a long month, and to know the scenes of this neighbourhood as well as we did those of dear old England. We arrived at Van Reenen's on October 17th, and the last of us left it on May 9th after a stay of all but seven months.

It was, however, as healthy a spot as one could wish to have to spend an African summer in, being 5,500 feet above sea level. The air was crisp and bracing, and, though the thick wet mists troubled us somewhat, it was better than having to stand the intense heat of the lower lands, where fever was rampant. The views, too, were magnificent, and the beautiful scenery in the ravines which wound their way among the feet of the mountains was almost unsurpassable.

These time-worn watercourses, which in some places plunged hundreds of feet below the base of the mountain, were covered, up their rocky sides, with dense shrubbery and trees, amidst which rose colossal boulders, grey and moss-grown with the ages that had passed since the torrent that now flows beneath them, first wore away the earth around their sides and exposed them to the assaults of the elements.

But leave the grandeur of this scene and plunge through the thickets until the bed of the stream is reached. Here you will find a gentle rivulet splashing over the multitude of boulders that attempt to bar its passage at every turn, and filling the air with its murmur, which mingles with the hum of the insects. The verdant trees meet overhead, whilst creepers hang from the boughs in airy festoons, and through this screen the fierce sun rays filter, adding final touches to the waterfall in a thousand rainbow hues. In the shadow on the banks the maiden-hair and a thousand other ferns flourish in lavish profusion, together with flowers of every colour,

while birds of gorgeous tints flit about this romantic paradise.

Approach this retreat, however, after a heavy rainfall, and you find the purling stream changed into a raging torrent of sandy water, which sweeps over many of the boulders that before barred its passage, but now quiver and rock under its tempestuous rush, while branch and trunk are swept wildly past.

But enough of the poetic beauty of this charming spot! We were here for a hard, practical purpose. Our mornings were spent, when not on guard, in working on the defences of the place, and many an hour of our labour was wasted on fortifications that the commandant afterwards found he had had put up in the wrong place. We then had the pleasure of destroying the results of our handiwork and beginning afresh elsewhere. Our men did every kind of defence work, fixing up the wire entanglements, digging trenches, building sangars and gun-pits, and anything else necessary.

On November 7 General Hildyard came up to inspect the defences of Van Reenen's. After he had been round the position he came to see our company. We were away from the rest of the occupying force, guarding an advanced part of the works. This officer had been in command of our brigade on our first arrival, but had afterwards received Divisional command. After asking Lieutenant Longstaff about the health of the men, he addressed the company in a few well-chosen words.

He expressed his regret at our disappointment at being sent up to the front again when we were expecting a homeward move, but he added that the war was not over, and it was no use sending men home and having to send more out. The job had got to be finished, but he hoped it would not be long ere we were on our way to reap the reward we so richly deserved.

The General added that we belonged to a regiment with a name, a favourite of his, which had done some hard work out here. He was greatly pleased with us while he was our immediate commander, and since he had been removed he had heard a very favourable report of our doings. This kindly speech was much appreciated by the Company.

Owing to the energy and generosity of our officers who supplied the requisites, we were able to enjoy a variety of sports in our spare time. Football and cricket were the chief games, and in these we had many a tough contest with the other companies and the artillery. The teams were chosen from the best of players among us, and I am glad to say our men managed to more than hold their own.

One of the most noticeable features of the routine here was the system of "false alarms." They were, indeed, false alarms. About a week before the intended surprise came off we were informed of the day allotted for this important test. Two days before, we would hear of the hour when the bugle would sound, so when the time actually did arrive the men were ready dressed, and all but occupying their alarm positions!

The commanding officer would then ride round twirling his fly-whisk in his gloved hand, and secretly congratulate himself on the smartness of his force. I'm afraid if a real alarm had sounded, he would have received a very unpleasant surprise in the amount of time required by the men to occupy their respective posts; but, fortunately, we were only turned out once, and then the Boers never came.

One of these false alarms did us a good turn. The bugle sounded, the tents were struck, the artillery galloped out, and the infantry doubled to their respective positions in the usual smart and orderly manner. Then an inspecting officer made his rounds. Inch by inch, during the long months we had been here, we had been lengthening out our deep-ploughed trenches, and now they extended here, there, and everywhere. Miles of them had grown under our industrious hands, yet never a man had been added to our scanty party occupying this important position. On the other hand, invalids had been constantly sent down country, and six men had been detached to learn and take charge of the Maxim gun, which there had been no proper complement to work. The consequence was that, on this great occasion of the exhibition of our chief's genius, it was found that each man had roughly about two hundred yards of trenches to defend!

The guards, too, were so thickly dotted round us that

no man had more than one night off duty at a time; a state of things that tried us to the utmost. Those who came off guard at daybreak were compelled to do the three hours' fatigue ordered for each morning. On what I might term "feast days," *i.e.*, the anniversary of any fight that had occurred out here, or on some other occult occasion, it was usually deemed likely that the Boers would seize the opportunity to attack us, and double guards were posted in consequence. This meant that some of us enjoyed two or three nights out of bed in succession, and I remember on one of these trying times, those who were lucky enough to get a night's rest stood to arms at 3.30 a.m., as usual, when we found that out of the company of about sixty strong, eight rank and file had occupied the camp during the dark hours, and these, together with the cooks and officers' servants (five men), were all who could reinforce, if necessary, those on guard.

The conclusion eventually arrived at was that our position was a great deal larger than was at all necessary. In consequence a fresh plan of fortifications was drawn up, and we received orders to destroy all gunpits and trenches that would afford cover to the enemy. This we found somewhat easier work than the construction of them.

While on this advanced post our fellows had several opportunities of increasing and varying their diet by annexing sundry calves and sheep belonging to the large herds and flocks of commandeered stock driven through the pass on their way down country. Herds numbering six and seven thousand, and flocks of sheep and goats to the extent of twelve thousand and over, frequently passed through the camp.

As these great masses of animals passed our line of tents, which was pitched by the roadside, three or four men would charge into the midst of them, heedless of the curses and entreaties of the half dozen niggers in charge, and, seizing on calf or goat, haul it, wriggling and kicking, into the camp, where it was promptly secured while its captors went in pursuit of fresh prey.

After one of these herds had passed through, too, sundry strays were always found wandering about the neighbourhood, and these also were driven in for our use.

It was no easy job to secure them, and the fresh meat enjoyed did not always fully repay the trouble we were put to in obtaining it.

Bloyd's Farm, an extensively cultivated expanse of ground, part of which was occupied by a large orchard, was frequently visited by our men, who returned heavily laden with apples, raspberries, peaches, &c., which would otherwise have been left to rot, as the Boers had destroyed the dwelling and nobody occupied the place. The farm was, of course, out of bounds for us, but bounds exist not where ripe fruit is in the question, and we were quite willing to take our chance of being caught.

There was, however, a dark side to our picture. Shortly after our arrival we heard that an old comrade, Private Levens, had passed away at Pietermaritzburg Hospital, and ere many days had passed Private C. Wood was also reported dead from enteric fever. Both these men were old and well-known comrades, and greatly liked and respected by the Company, and it was, indeed, a great shock when we heard of their sad end, after braving successfully the many hardships of those severe marches. Every man, I can truly say, regretted the loss of these old companions who did their duty in the field with us like true soldiers and men.

The general health of the company, however, greatly improved owing to the salubrious atmosphere, the ample and pure water supply, and sufficient exercise; and though several were in hospital at different times with light complaints (some with the unromantic disease of "itch"), they soon rejoined us and resumed their duties.

CHAPTER XI.

From Christmas to June.

Christmas Day arrived at last to find us still doing duty at Van Reenen's Pass. The officers did everything in their power to make this festival as pleasant a one as such a day could be away from home.

Sports were organised, and held on the level stretch by the camp. They proved, in spite of the summer heat, a great success, several of the prizes being very closely

competed for. Our men managed to capture one or two awards; but we had some dangerous opponents in the detachment of Natal Carbineers, who were here for scouting purposes.

Lieutenant Longstaff obtained sufficient green peas and new potatoes to go round the company, and also the necessary materials for puddings; and these, with the roast beef and beer, made for us an excellent dinner.

The evening was devoted to a smoking concert in the engine-cleaning sheds at the station. The place was profusely decorated with shrubbery and flags, and presented a really civilised appearance in this desert locality. Some very good songs were sung by different members of the garrison, and duly appreciated; and so ended a very enjoyable day.

The sports were continued on Boxing Day, when, in addition to our own, several competitions were arranged for the natives and Hindoos. The Kaffirs were set at their favourite pastime of eating, and the Indians exhibited some excellent wrestling.

The new year was waited up for by such men as were on duty, but those of us who had the night in could not spare our chance of rest to keep awake for this time-honoured purpose.

We were not altogether forgotten by people at home, and our officer received, and had read to us, several letters wishing the company the compliments of the season. These kindly words were greatly appreciated by us, so many miles away. Those who have spent a Christmas out of England, especially on such an errand as ours, will best understand our feelings on receiving such tokens of remembrance.

On Wednesday, the 9th January, the monotony of our garrison life was broken. Three Boers had been captured the day before, digging in what appeared to be a filled-in trench. The scouts prodded with a stick and discovered a hard substance a few inches below the surface. They immediately sent into camp and reported their find, and all night a cavalry patrol kept watch over the place. At 7.45 a.m. a force of men, fully armed and supported by the artillery, marched out to the spot, followed by two waggons with the necessary excavating implements.

A small party was detached and sent in advance,

DISCOVERY OF BURIED AMMUNITION.

extending out some little distance beyond us, and then we got to work. In a very few minutes the first box had been unearthed and lifted out. An examination of the contents showed that we had alighted upon buried ammunition. The men needed no encouragement, and in a marvellously short space of time twenty-eight boxes, containing about 25,000 rounds, had been exhumed and loaded on the transport.

We examined carefully the surrounding plain for some distance, but failed to discover further signs of hidden stores. The spot where we had been digging had the appearance of a long trench hastily filled in. Beside it lay the fragrant remains of a horse, evidently killed there for a mark. We left the ground as we found it, save that we took the ammunition away, and possibly some more brother Boers may come hunting there one of these times, in which case we wish them joy.

Soon after this day the construction of block-houses was commenced by civilian engineers, who arrived with a large gang of niggers from Ladysmith. The first completed was one protecting the station, and as soon as it was ready for occupation, the whole of our advanced position was abandoned and a much smaller radius was occupied. Here several other block-houses were commenced, but some time elapsed before they were completed.

We had now gradually glided into the rainy season. Very heavy thunderstorms became frequent, accompanied by deluges of rain and large hailstones. The lightning was fearfully vivid, and left one dazzled for some moments ere he could again perceive the objects around him. Showers fell daily, usually about sunset. Owing to the extent of our view, we could see the storm clouds hovering round the summits of Platberg, Nelson's Kop, Rensburg Kop, and other mountains at some distance, long before the first drops fell on our tents. Now and again continued falls of rain occurred, lasting several days, and growing longer as the season advanced. Towards the finish we endured the longest downpour we had known, rain falling almost incessantly for sixteen days.

January 24th brought us the news of the Queen's death. It was, for a time, disbelieved, but the rumour was confirmed, much to our regret. We had our duty to do,

however, to King Edward VII., and little notice was taken of this national loss until the papers brought it home to us more clearly a month later.

By the end of January we had occupied our fresh positions round the foot of the pass. Our new camp had now to be entrenched, and we were kept constantly employed in this work. Wire entanglements, too, were fixed up round the entire length of the occupied area.

For some reason unknown to us the commanding officer deemed it politic to prohibit any man leaving this enclosed position without a pass. After a while a further order was issued preventing soldiers from one block-house entering the entanglement which surrounded another without permission, and no man was to leave his camp after "retreat"—6 p.m. Such edicts were far too deep for us ordinary privates to understand, but we found it a trifle trying to be so tied down.

Sangar building on the edge of a ravine is risky work. The large boulders which have to be rolled into position on the slope sometimes break away, and no human power can stop them as they go bounding down the steep cliff. This is a very nice entertainment in the ordinary way, but some of us got a shock that decidedly damped our ardour in pursuit of the sport.

A large heavy rock was being shifted into a position on a very steep slant where we were building a breastwork. We were easing it down very successfully, when a little too much pressure was brought to bear. Those in front had just time to get clear when the large mass went bumping and grinding down the slope, increasing in speed at every bounce. Near the bottom it cannoned a large projecting boulder, and sprang outwards, clearing the bushes overhanging the small mountain stream that flowed along the bed of the ravine, and landing on the farther bank. Just as we were congratulating ourselves that no one was hurt, a couple of heads appeared amongst the branches, politely desiring to know "What's a-coming off?"

The stone had only just cleared our fellows as they bent at their washing, and had landed within arm's length on the other side. This was deemed too dangerous a game to play at, and very few boulders had the chance to break away after that.

On March 2 the line of blockhouses defending Van Reenen's Pass was occupied. The larger part of the East Surrey Company, with a field gun, was now withdrawn. The remaining men, composed chiefly of the first section, occupied the blockhouse at the extreme left of the line, but some were afterwards drafted to another fort.

The rest of our company left Van Reenen's at 8.45 a.m. on the morning of the 2nd for Besters, a small locality on the railway above Ladysmith, where we were due to arrive shortly after noon. It was discovered, however, at our first halt to water horses, that the wrong road had been taken, and in consequence we were some miles out of our way. The officer, nevertheless, decided to keep to the present track, and we resumed the tramp. Soon after midday we again came to a halt to eat our dinner. The rations having been sent down by train, and in consequence there being nothing to eat, this can be reckoned as a lost opportunity.

One or two of our men employed the time in making a passage across a spruit, some ten yards wide and nearly knee-deep, which lay directly in our road. When we restarted, these endeavours to keep dry-footed were proved to be useless, for round a corner a little further on, a much wider and deeper part of the stream confronted us, and through this we were obliged to wade.

An hour or so afterwards the officer in charge decided that our men were not in a fit condition to keep up with the artillery, and he ordered the latter to go on in advance, following, shortly afterwards, himself, and leaving Colour-Sergeant Cox to get the company in as soon as possible.

Needless to say the halts now became more frequent, but we managed to keep the artillery in sight, and eventually reached Besters at 7 p.m., tired, footsore, and hungry. Owing to the mistake in the roads the march had been lengthened out to close on twenty-six miles, a distance long enough to try troops in the pink of condition, and doubly hard to us after weeks without any marching exercise.

Tents were pitched and tea appeared at half-past seven, dinner arriving an hour later. This disposed of, we all gladly turned in. Next day the tramp was continued, a couple of hours being done before breakfast.

Now we had the pleasure of marching through bog-land most of the time, which necessitated four men being left behind to help the Scotch cart containing our baggage, whenever it stuck.

An extremely trying day this proved owing to the bad ground. Twice we forded the Klip River, and at 2 p.m. arrived at Tin-Town fairly done up. Here we went into huts. The rest was extended till the following afternoon, the 4th March, and then only a short distance was covered, the company pitching camp at Lancers' Nek, five miles outside Ladysmith.

The roads for one day greatly improved, and the march to Dewdrop, a distance of twelve miles, was easily accomplished. The bivouac was made close to Clydesdale Farm, a place famous for the fact that a Boer hospital was established there during the siege of Ladysmith. We passed the foot of Spion Kop, too, noticing the two monuments that preserve the memory of our gallant men who fell on this fatal hill, standing out plainly on its summit.

Rain came on during the night and continued far into the next morning, spoiling the roads for marching purposes. The convoy was frequently in trouble, and only reached the halting place an hour after the company. Next day the last march was made to the Upper Tugela, the place we were to garrison for a short time. The transport was again often in difficulties owing to the bad weather, and one of the waggons we were obliged to abandon, the contents being distributed amongst the rest. Our destination was reached at 12.30 p.m., and we pitched camp for a permanent residence. This place is a very fine one, as it contains a court-house, prison, police quarters, hotel, bakery, post-office, and several other buildings. The Tugela was scarcely 300 yards from the camp, and its waters tempted some to bathe therein. The stream was very swift, and our fellows had their work cut out to swim against the current. Bathing was, in consequence, forbidden until the river went down, as it was considered dangerous.

The duties were very light for a time, no drift guard being necessary while the wet season continued, and only a quarter guard was found. On the 16th March a new wooden bridge across the Tugela was opened in place of

one destroyed by the Boers. The ceremony was performed by the magistrate, the structure being named "Hely-Hutchinson," in honour of the late Governor of Natal.

After the opening function and a lunch in the store, the day was spent in sports, the surrounding inhabitants assembling to witness them. The usual military contests of tent-pegging, V.C. Race, &c., took place, intermixed with competitions for the ladies and children. In foot contests our men acquitted themselves admirably, but the 5th Dragoon Guards carried off most of the mounted events. The last and most exciting trial of the day was the tug-of-war between the military and civilians. The Army, we were glad to see, came off successfully, after a very tough struggle. Refreshments were provided on the ground, and those present agree that this was one of the most enjoyable days the company spent in South Africa.

Blockhouses were erected here, and were occupied on 20th April, our men being somewhat split up between the various garrisons. Matches were constantly being arranged and fought out between the different details in camp, causing for the time great interest. The chief one proved to be a shooting contest between the Upper Tugela Rifle Association and our company, in which we were successful. The distances were 500, 600, and 700 yards, our men winning easily by 45 points.

All these local events, however, were put into the shade by a telegram ordering the company to proceed, as soon as relieved, to Ladysmith. A farewell concert was held in one of the blockhouses with great success. On the 7th May the relief party arrived, and the next morning we packed up and marched out, arriving two days later at Tin-Town to find orders awaiting us to entrain the same night for Durban, a command we were nothing loth to obey.

The men left at Van Reenen's under Lieutenant Maclean had come down by the mail train the day before, after numerous farewell concerts, and joined the company at Ladysmith on their way to the coast. At 11.30 a.m. on 11th May, our train drew up at Pietermaritzburg Station. The advance party of Van Reenen's men had all the kits ready on the platform, and these were with

all speed loaded on board. A slice of bread and butter and some coffee were served out, and we were soon rattling for the last time through Natal scenery. At 4.30 in the afternoon we pulled up on the quay at Durban. The kit-bags were distributed to their respective owners, this time with their full contents, and we embarked on a tug that lay alongside the wharf waiting for us. We immediately left the harbour and steamed out to the transport "Custodian" lying in the roads.

By 8.30 p.m. all were on board, and the first throbs of the engines brought with them the joyful conviction that we were at last under weigh for dear old England, after an absence of fourteen months.

I cannot spend much space in describing our return voyage, as little was done on board. After the morning inspection we were free for the day, and found it almost hard work to discover something to occupy our time. The food and accommodation were excellent, and we were worried with as few fatigues as possible. With us were the Dorset, Middlesex, South Lancashire, and Devon Volunteer Companies, together with a few details, numbering in all about 500 men, under the command of Lieut.-Colonel Burrows, of the Royal Artillery.

The second day out some very rough weather was encountered, which considerably obstructed our progress, and caused a good deal of illness. Several waves broke on the deck, one of them catching Lance-Corporal Cooper as he was ascending the hatchway, knocking him down, severely spraining and bruising his ankles and shins, and leaving him under medical charge for the rest of the voyage.

On Thursday, 16th, we signalled the Cape of Good Hope as we passed, and ere nightfall the last of Cape Colony had vanished below the horizon.

The heat in the tropics was terrific, but with the aid of the canvas baths, two of which were rigged on deck, we managed to survive, and on the 29th May the first glimpse of land again appeared on the sky-line. By 4 o'clock the same afternoon the anchor was dropped in the Bay of St. Vincent, and we stood on the decks gazing at one of the bleakest and most barren spots that, I should think, can anywhere be found. Scarce a sign of vegetation had been visible as we steamed along the

rugged coast of this huge rocky island, whose sides rise abruptly from the waves that foam around their base.

We ran up a narrow channel, and suddenly came in sight of the almost land-locked harbour. In the centre of the entrance to this haven, a colossal peak towers like a giant guarding the passage, and on its summit stands one of the guiding stars of the mariner—a lighthouse.

The town itself is built on a level stretch in the centre of the curving shore. Behind and on either side rise mountains, whose peaks are wrapped in the white folds of the clouds.

Our stay, for coaling, lasted until daybreak next morning. The vessel having come from South Africa, was put in quarantine, owing to the plague then raging there, and in consequence our officers were robbed of this opportunity of going ashore. At the first streaks of dawn we steamed away. For hours we had an ever-varying panorama of rock, sea, and cloud as we passed on our homeward journey. Three islands in all were sighted.

On Saturday, 1st June, a concert was arranged by some of the energetic spirits, and a farce was written for the occasion. The Dorset Company's Minstrel Troupe started the performance with jokes and songs. The success of the day followed, in the production of the play. Two female parts were made up, and acted so well that it was difficult to believe there were no ladies on board the "Custodian."

The following Thursday, Ushant lighthouse flashed in sight at 8 p.m., and at daybreak next morning, when we mounted to the deck, the shores of England stretched away, before and behind, for many a mile on our port side.

All the morning we watched the coast as we steamed up Channel, feasting our eyes on the old familiar scenes. Dinner was served, and we were forced to leave the deck for a few minutes, but were soon back again. By this time we have reached the Solent; the pilot comes aboard, and we run up between the shores, watching every point of the beautiful and varied landscape. All our baggage has been ready since breakfast, and is piled on deck, as we are hoping for the order to get equipped for disembarking the same night.

At 3.45 p.m. we were alongside the quay, but disappointment awaited our hopes of landing at once, as we had arrived nearly twenty-four hours before our time.

The Dorset Company, however, were immediately ordered ashore and entrained for home. The rest of us, not troubling to draw the bedding for one night, lay down on the deck or mess tables, and with kit-bags for pillows, slept away the few hours that had yet to pass ere we could set foot on land.

CHAPTER XII.

Our Welcome Home: Some Reflections.

Everything comes to him who waits, and the morning arrived in due course. At 8.30 we marched off the vessel and entrained for Surbiton, and soon we were rolling along through the fields and woods of England, admiring every glimpse of the scenery with a relish that a long absence from its beauties can alone bestow.

At eleven o'clock the train pulled up at our destination, and we struggled on to a platform thronged with people, and made our way amidst cheers and handshakes to the yard in front of the station, which was surrounded by a vast crowd. A glance round showed us that our home-coming welcome was to be even heartier than our send-off.

Everywhere flags were flying in the bright morning air, and every inch around the open space was occupied by enthusiastic individuals bent on shouting themselves hoarse. The company fell in, and, forming fours, marched off, headed by the bands of the 3rd Volunteer Battalion East Surrey Regiment, for Kingston. No sooner had we started than our ranks were completely broken by friends and relations, who rushed in amongst us to embrace their own special khaki-clad property.

We accomplished the journey in twos and threes, extended over a long stretch of road, and accompanied by a tremendous and continuously cheering crowd. Those who had no friends to meet them directed anxious mothers, sweethearts, and relations to the objects of their search. Some of these found a difficulty in

recognising, in the bronzed face and broad figure, the dear one who had left them fifteen months before.

We arrived eventually in Kingston Market Place, and here our men were sorted out by the police from amongst the multitudes of relatives who clustered round them, and we again formed up in front of Clattern House in open order. While this move was being performed tremendous cheers, mingled with the clashing of the church bells, resounded again and again. Silence was at length established, and the Mayor addressed to us a hearty and enthusiastic speech of welcome, thanking us, in the name of the people of Kingston, for the service we had done our country.

Captain Longstaff replied very appropriately, and we then marched to the Parish Church, accompanied by the Mayor and Corporation. A short thanksgiving service for our safe return was held, in which we and the large number of interested persons admitted heartily joined. A short address was delivered, followed by our grand old National Anthem, which finished the service.

After divesting ourselves of our equipment in the vestry yard, we proceeded to the Griffin Hotel, where a cold collation awaited us. A large number of local celebrities attended, including the ex-Mayor, who had organised our grand send-off, and one face we were particularly glad to see, that of our old friend Captain Collyer.

The beef was a vast improvement on the worn-out trek-ox we had so frequently indulged in when fresh meat had been obtainable in the field, and we made large inroads into the beer and other provisions which had been so kindly supplied. After the cravings of Nature were satisfied, several speeches were made, all running on the same topic, and sufficiently flattering to persuade the humblest amongst us that he was a hero. It was the spirit in which everything was done that was most gratifying. Every word and act had in it a heartiness that placed beyond doubt the genuine pleasure our friends felt in our return, and their appreciation of our services.

Captain Collyer and Lieutenant Maclean were both called on for a speech, whilst to Captain Longstaff fell the duty of replying, for the Company, to the Mayor, the member of Parliament, and several other civil celebrities;

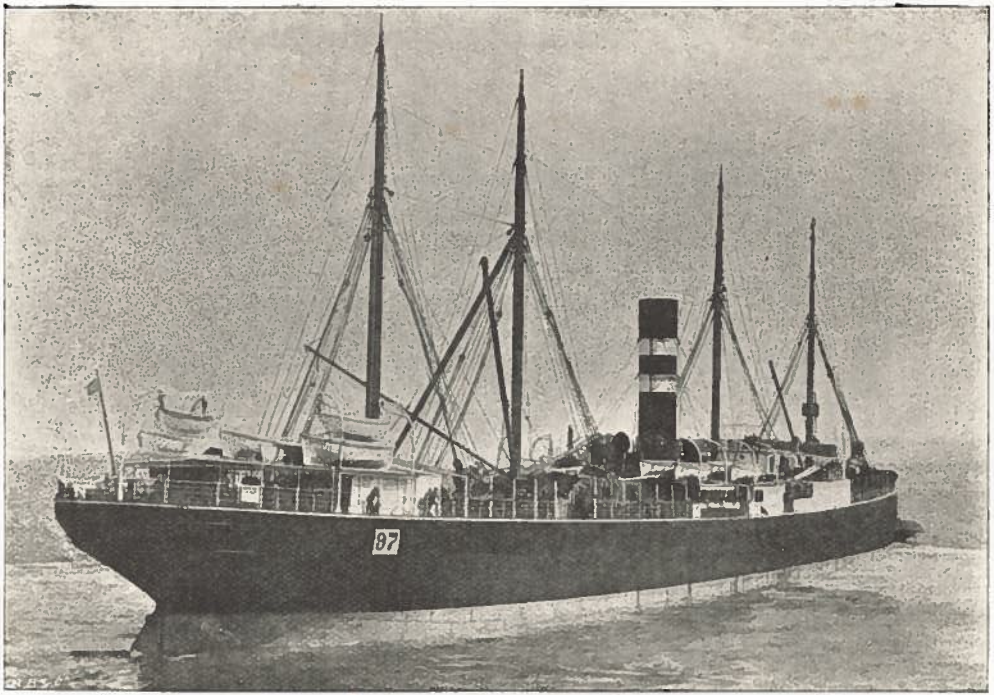


Photo. by] *[F. G. O. Stuart.*

SS. "CUSTODIAN."

a task he hardly seemed to glory in, but which he performed with great credit.

This part of our welcome came to an end eventually, and we again equipped ourselves and were soon tramping along the old familiar roads to the depôt, where we arrived shortly before four o'clock. Here everything was in readiness for us, and without an instant's unnecessary delay, we handed in our various articles and received a furlough for a week. By six o'clock every man had left for his home.

During the following fortnight we assembled in half companies at Kingston, and were settled up with and received our discharges.

Our term of voluntary military service was at an end. Even as it had begun so had it finished, in a blaze of enthusiastic patriotism that we, who served, will long remember as one of the heartiest and most sincere welcomes that we have or can ever receive. The Kingston and Surbiton people know the secret of how to throw their whole heart into a public ceremony, and they did it both at our departure and return, and we feel grateful to them for it. No half and half performance was it, but one that was in every way sincerely meant by the givers, and we, the receivers, felt it deeply.

I have been unable to recount fully all that occurred on this eventful Saturday, the 8th of June; the day that a year before saw us scaling the heights of Inkweloane. Some of the scenes are not to be recorded. They are too sacred to find an adequate expression in words. Each man has his own remembrances of that day, so let him recount them as he thinks fit.

Everything but our clothing, helmets, kit-bags, haversacks, and mess-tins was given in at the depôt, and when we left for home we had practically seen the last of military service.

. . . . . .

I have now but a few remarks to make on certain subjects of interest, and then my account will close. Firstly, I must give extracts from two letters, one written home by Colonel Pearse, of the East Surreys, when we were under orders for England in October, 1900, and the other some time later.

The former, addressed to Colonel Phillips, commanding the 31st Regimental District, and referring to our company, says :—

"*Its conduct during its six months' duty out here has been excellent. Officers, non-commissioned officers, and men have, one and all, shown a most soldierlike spirit. They have always been anxious to take their full share of the work, and from the beginning I was able to feel perfect confidence in them and put them in responsible positions.*

"*When they took part in the operations in Northern Natal, and in the action at Almond's Nek (Major Benson tells me), their conduct could not have been improved on.*

"*The officers are all thoroughly efficient and hardworking.*

"*We are all heartily sorry at poor Brooks's death.*

"*In conclusion may I say that, thanks to a good Colour-Sergeant, good equipment, and last, but not least, very careful training at the Depôt, I don't believe there is a better Volunteer Company in South Africa than ours?*"

Later, from a private letter, is taken the following short reference :—

"*I am sorry to say it is months since I saw the Volunteer Company. They are separated from the Battalion, which is a great pity, but I hear nothing but good of them.*"

It might be recalled to mind, as a proof of the usefulness of the Volunteers generally in this tedious war, that it was officially stated in the House, when a question was asked about their being relieved, that Lord Kitchener could not spare them.

Such a statement carries its own weight, and I think the foregoing letters can stand without any comment of mine.

I have also fortunately received in time for inclusion in this brief history, a farewell letter to the Company from Lieutenant-Colonel Pearse, which I give here in full :—

"*2nd EAST SURREY REGIMENT,*

"*Mobile Column*, 18/6/1901.

"*The Volunteer Service Company having been detached from headquarters, and the 2nd Battalion East Surrey Regiment having been employed on a Mobile Column, Lieutenant-Colonel Pearse was not informed of the departure from South*

Africa of the Volunteer Service Company, nor had he an opportunity of bidding them farewell. Lieutenant-Colonel Pearse has great pleasure in placing on record his testimony to the good conduct, soldier-like spirit, and efficiency of the Company, which was in every respect a credit to the East Surrey Regiment.

"*Although it was not the good fortune of the Company to take part in the larger engagements of the war, they were present at the successful action of Almond's Nek, where their conduct was all that could be desired, and they have to lament the death of an officer and four private soldiers who died of enteric fever. In the name of the 2nd Battalion, Lieutenant-Colonel Pearse bids the Volunteer Company a hearty farewell, and wishes them all good fortune in England.*

"H. W. PEARSE, *Lieutenant-Colonel,*
"*Commanding 2nd East Surrey Regiment.*"

. . . . . .

Now to say a word or two about certain details of our service. To start with, as far as I can gather, and have myself experienced, the treatment in the hospitals of the Natal force was everything that could be desired. The only difficulty was to get admitted. On our arrival in the field the amount of sickness was terrible, and only the very worst cases were detained for medical treatment. Most of the men were given a few pills or tabloids and excused duty, having to take care of themselves. This, of course, was a very bad state of things, but a certain number of beds had to be kept permanently open for the wounded who might be sent in at any moment, and in consequence the sick suffered.

After our arrival at Standerton hospital accommodation was greatly increased, and those ill were all admitted and properly attended to until their recovery was complete.

At Van Reenen's Pass one of the Indian Hospitals was encamped. A chat with some of the Hindoo attendants one day elicited the fact that it was this staff that had been left at Dundee by General Yule. The same Hindoo who administered our medicine had, after the victorious fight at Talana, assisted in dressing the mortal wound of General Penn-Symons.

Again, as regards the African natives' loyalty to the British, I ought to mention one incident. The blacks

belonging to the Commissariat had a feast of some sort on, and they were howling and singing far into the night, when our officer sent the N.C.O. of the quarter-guard with a man to stop the noise.

These two went over to where the shelter, which consisted of a railway tarpaulin stretched over two waggons, the ends hanging round the sides to the ground, stood. On reaching it, failing to discover any doorway, they banged at the outside to attract attention. The noise inside instantly ceased, and faint whisperings could be heard in which the word "Dutchman" was frequently repeated. The corporal walked round the shelter again in the hope of finding an entrance, when, as he turned a corner, he was confronted by half a dozen niggers dressed in native fashion and armed with their knob-kerries and assegais, fully determined to exterminate the "Dutchmen" (or Boers), who were disturbing their musical evening. The private had run into a similar party on the other side of the shelter.

No pleasant experience was it to be surprised by excited and armed Kaffirs on a dark night. Our men, however, were recognised before any harm was done, and with many promises to keep quiet the blacks crawled back into their rough tent.

The Kaffirs must not all be put down as mere savages. The common idea of them is, in the majority of cases, quite correct. The African native is a dull, ignorant, half-civilised animal, to whose mind kindness is weakness or fear, and brutality strength. The Boers, as a rule, were much severer than the British in their treatment of the Kaffirs, but our men generally found a brusque speech and a frowning brow sufficient to awe the blacks into the utmost servility.

This type comprised by far the larger class, but amongst our coloured scouts we had men of intellect and education. The two chiefs of scouts were highly cultivated, and spoke English fluently, and with a large choice of words. A sentry of ours received a surprise from one of them when they were passing through the outpost lines one day. He had demanded, in somewhat indifferent Kaffir, to examine their permits, when the scout remarked, in cultivated English,

"I suppose you want to see my pass."

After that, the sentry used his native tongue.

These two blacks were quite at home on almost all subjects, and it was a pleasure to have them pass our posts, for the sake of a few minutes' conversation with them. One thing, which the less-civilised natives very frequently do, they never did, namely, attempt to put themselves on a par with an Englishman. We promptly stopped this, whenever it occurred, by a half-dozen rough words, which would immediately bring the offender into submission and secure us the title of "Chief."

As regards the Boers, we had very little to do with them, except the small number of prisoners whom we had to guard now and again for a short time before they were sent down country. The impressions of them left on my mind are by no means flattering ones. The men are mostly big, hulking fellows, with a large growth of beard, and a generally shabby and dirty appearance. The towns are all filthy, and the farm dwellings are in much the same state. As regards the surprise felt at the Boers commandeering boys of fourteen to fight, I might mention a fact that will in some way explain this circumstance.

In one of our rambles we called at a Dutch farm-house, more for curiosity's sake than anything else. The structure was divided into two rooms, very poorly furnished, and was built of clay and stones. From the cement, skin-covered floor of the dwelling the rafters, on which were fixed the corrugated iron roof, could be seen, and from them hung several bunches of tobacco leaves drying for the use of the sons of the family. These boys, one aged fourteen and the other sixteen, walked about with the airs of men of thirty, and *both smoked pipes*. They were in all respects looked upon as full-grown men, and as such, no doubt, the Government of the country also considered them.

Again referring to one of the alleged atrocities perpetrated by the British Army in South Africa, I might mention a small occurrence that happened to a friend. He had been on the march for some weeks, and suffered the usual hardships in consequence, when his party was left to garrison a small town. As they were in standing camp, tents were issued to them, which they were glad to receive after their long spell of sleeping in the open, and

on account of the increasing coldness of the nights. Next day, however, a party of Boer prisoners were brought in, and my friend and his comrades were turned out of their tents so that the prisoners might have shelter. If, as some papers declare, our captured foes are ill-treated, how much worse must it be for the British soldier!

Tommy does, indeed, have a hard time of it on active service, as all of our company know. Not only has he to bear the hardships of long marches, hard fighting, sleeping in the open, and short rations, but he has also to keep himself in submission to the numberless officers set over him. The British private soldier has very much to bear in silence, but for all that he does it for his country's sake, and does it, to a certain extent, cheerfully too. The filth and rags, bad boots and clothing, and worse food, are things which it is impossible for people at home to fully realise.

These trials we have ourselves seen, and felt, and learnt the misery of. Now that our service is completed we can look back at the past, not regretting that we took on a task of great risk, and full of unknown difficulties, dangers, and miseries, but resting thankful that we have been guided safely through it to render service to our Sovereign and country.

Our adventures are far pleasanter to talk about, reclining in an easy chair, with pipe and glass at hand, than was the actual performance of them. But unless they had been done we should not half so much appreciate the luxuries of home, whither we have at last returned, and where most of us mean to remain.

FINIS.

ROLL OF THE COMPANY.

MEMBERS WHO RETURNED AT THE COMPLETION OF THE COMPANY'S SERVICE:

Captain C. L. Longstaff (promoted from Lieutenant)
Lieut. W. E. Maclean (promoted from Sergeant)
Colour Sergt. J. Cox (promoted from Sergeant)
Sergt. W. Colley
" J. G. Dumbrill (promoted from Corporal)
" C. Morrison (promoted from Corporal)
" T. D. Towers (promoted from Lance-Corporal)
" T. W. Tullidge (promoted from Lance-Corporal)
Corpl. W. Gilks
" F. R. Fenwick
" A. C. Newberry (promoted from Lance-Corporal)

Lance-Corpl. W. R. Cadman
" " W. H. Cooper
" " A. D. Hamilton
" " J. Lumley
" " A. Lunn
" " H. Martin
" " J. A Parrott
" " H. J. Wingfield
} Promoted from Privates

Bugler S. W. Redmonds

Pte. W. F. Arnold
" E. V. Baylis
" E. W. Beal
" A. G. Beard
" F. C. L. Benedict
" W. Bridgman
" T. H. Bright
" S. Browning
" E. G. Butler
" S. H. Chandler
" A. H. Cook
" G. Crump
" A. Currie
" J. Dorrington
" A. Driver
" J. L. Dubois
" E. A. Edwards
" T. J. Emms
" W. P. Everton

Pte. H. P. Field
" J. A. R. Fotheringham
" W. Fuller
" A. G. Garrish
" A. C. Godsmark
" G. Gregor
" W. J. Hawkins
" A. E. Hoey
" W. Holden
" J. Hollick
" W. E. Holloway
" J. Huntingford
" L. E. James
" J. Mander
" A. J. Mason
" J. W. Meadows
" T. Melson
" H. T. T. Micklewright
" J. Moore

Pte. W. D. Moreton
„ S. A. Mudie
„ A. H. Nibbs
„ J. Norton
„ A. Pearce
„ H. A. Pearman
„ A. Pepper
„ W. Raggett
„ J. Rea
„ W. N. Rees
„ R. O. Rogers
„ W. F. Salmon
Pte. H. Sanders
„ P. Saunders
„ W. J. Simms
„ H. W Spence
„ J. Thorpe
„ A. Warland
„ E. Weller
„ R. T. Were
„ W. G. Wilder
„ E. T. Williams
„ R. W. Wright

DRAFT.

Corpl. T. Bishop (promoted from Lance-Corporal)
„ J. E. Davis (promoted from Private)

Pte. A. Barker
„ E. J. Beauchamp
„ R. Clarke
„ F. Coleman
„ E. E. Death
„ J. Jarlett
„ A. O'Donnell
Pte. E. Penfold
„ F. Smith
„ D. Southern
„ J. Taylor
„ C. Toogood
„ G. T. Weller
„ W. E. Williams

DISCHARGED IN SOUTH AFRICA.

Sergt. A. J. Emes
„ R. W. Clarke
Pte. L. Aubourg (joined Johannesburg Police)
„ P. Fossey (joined Vol. Mounted Infantry)
„ C. Gough, „ W. S. Newman (joined Johannesburg Police)

DRAFT.—Nil.

INVALIDED HOME.

With Date.

Captain Collyer, 17th July, 1900
Col.-Sergt. A. McGee, 31st January, 1901
Corpl. T. Hammond, 28th August, 1900
Bugler G. W. Lackford, 16th January, 1901
„ F. Newland, 5th September, 1900
Pte. F. A. Barker, 11th October, 1900
„ S. G. Burton, 14th January, 1901
„ A. J. Cannard, 8th August, 1900
„ A. Coleman, 22nd July, 1900
„ W. E. Daniels, 8th November, 1900
„ A. Ede, 5th March, 1901
„ J. Fidler, 17th September, 1900

Pte. J. O. Fowler, 28th May, 1900
„ S. G. Hales, 8th December, 1900
„ H. N. Hammon, 16th July, 1900
„ G. W. Harman, 26th October, 1900
„ G. E. Harrison, 16th July, 1900
„ A. E. Otway, 9th May, 1901
„ C. R. Sims, date unknown
„ H. J. Somers, date unknown
„ F. J. Stredwick, 4th April, 1901
„ J. E. Vinson, 1st July, 1900
„ J. Willison, 6th August, 1900
„ H. H. Windley, 1st July, 1900

DRAFT.

Sergt. F. N. Woodward, 19th September, 900

DIED IN SOUTH AFRICA.

Lieutenant Brooks, 6th June, 1900
Pte. C. Cropper, 5th June, 1900
„ F. G. Levens, 14th November, 1900
„ C. Wood, 10th December, 1900
„ F. B. Wooden, 24th April, 1900.

DRAFT.—Nil.