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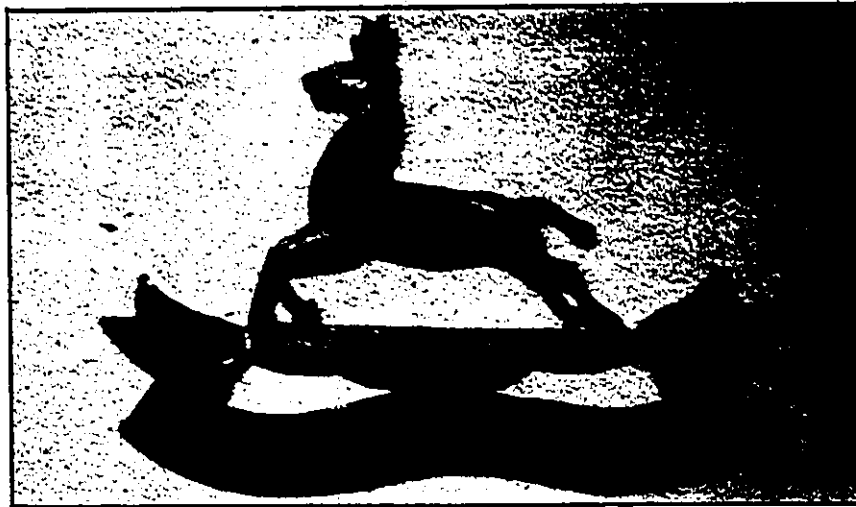
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**THE ROYAL CANADIAN  
DRAGOONS AND THE  
ANGLO - BOER WAR, 1900**

by Hugh Robertson



THESIS PRESENTED TO THE SCHOOL OF  
GRADUATE STUDIES IN PARTIAL  
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
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## INTRODUCTION

It is over eighty years since the one thousand volunteers of the Royal Canadian Regiment embarked on the Allan vessel "SARDINIAN". These troops formed part of Canada's first overseas military campaign and were bound for the southern tip of Africa to assist Britain against two small Afrikaner states in the second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). Over seven thousand\* Canadians volunteered their services in this conflict. In addition to the troops there were Canadian correspondents, doctors, engineers, nurses, priests and teachers who went to South Africa at the turn of the century. Many did not return --- some were killed in action, some died of disease, while others chose to settle in South Africa.

Any student searching for a Canadian perspective on the conflict in southern Africa will find, on the one hand, that there has been considerable writing on imperial sentiment in Canada at the end of the nineteenth century, and, on the other hand, much research

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\* Not all saw action since many landed in South Africa after the peace and others did garrison duty in Halifax.

on the effects of the South African War\* on domestic politics. However, there is a paucity of serious historical studies on Canada's actual participation in the war.

Indeed, Canada's participation in the Boer War, while minor in comparison to Canada's involvement in both world wars, has been almost totally overlooked by historians.\*\* In a survey of the literature on Canada's role in South Africa written in 1938 W.B. Kerr<sup>1</sup> stated that the best account of the Canadian activities was still that of a British officer written in 1907.<sup>2</sup> He wrote that "... from the standpoint of history the Canadian accounts leave much to be desired,"<sup>3</sup> and his final comment is as true today as it was forty years ago: "there is no official history and no satisfactory general account for the public."<sup>4</sup> In a recent bibliography J. Granatstein and P. Stevens reiterate that "there is no modern military history of the Boer War and the Canadian role in it."<sup>5</sup> These sentiments were echoed by Desmond Morton in his biography of Sir William Otter, and he suggests why such neglect is to be

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\* The name most commonly used by Canadian historians. Also often described as "The Boer War."

\*\* Recently there have been some important studies such as Morton's work on Otter, and Carman Miller's socio-economic analysis of the troops.

regretted: "Canada's participation in the South African War has been oddly ignored by historians, and a rich vein of social history could be tapped by students who choose to examine the extensive statistical records of the Militia Department."<sup>6</sup>

One of my main purposes, therefore, is to mine this vein --- along with various others that exist --- and in doing so to help complete what I feel is a sadly incomplete record. Focusing this thesis on the Royal Canadian Dragoons seemed an appropriate selection for two important reasons: the first is that there has been no examination of the role of a Canadian mounted regiment in action and mounted men formed the bulk of the Canadian contingents. The second reason is that the regiment played an important role in the war; they won, for example, three Victoria Crosses in one engagement, an event unique in the annals of Canadian military history. The main purpose of this thesis then is to assess and to describe the role of a Canadian mounted regiment going to war at the turn of the century --- why they volunteered, how they lived, fought and died and what they achieved. It is a response to Desmond Morton's urging "to follow the troops in the field."<sup>7</sup>

A wide range of sources has been consulted in completing the thesis. Wherever possible primary material has been used, some of it actually uncovered

during the research for this study. The primary material includes memoirs of RCD veterans, contemporary magazine articles, war correspondents' reports, official reports and pamphlets. I located collections of private papers and have made extensive use of the letters and diaries of individuals such as Anderson, Heron, Hilder, Smith and Turner. Unpublished official records in the form of regimental diaries, attestation papers and military correspondence have also proved useful.

The major repository of source material is the Public Archives of Canada, and the material is located mainly in the Public Records and the Manuscript Divisions. The Newspaper Division of the National Library has an extensive collection of newspapers of the period, including a number of South African publications. Other repositories that have proved useful in this project have been the Directorate of History of the Department of National Defence, the Canadian War Museum, and the Royal Canadian Dragoons Regimental Museum at C.F.B. Gagetown.

The secondary source material consists mainly of articles, books and unpublished dissertations. In addition, use has also been made of primary and secondary sources in Afrikaans.

This study commences with the background to the participation of the RCD in the war. The next chapter

takes the regiment through recruitment and training, across the Atlantic to Cape Town and then by train to the front. Succeeding chapters describe the trials and tribulations of the campaign, finally bringing weary and often disillusioned men back to Canada at the end of their term of service. The concluding chapter contains a summation of the role and achievements of the regiment in the war.

NOTES

- 1 W.B. Kerr, "A Survey of the Literature on Canada's Participation in the South African War", Canadian Historical Review, XVIII No. 4 (1937), pp. 419-427.
- 2 John Stirling, The Colonials in South Africa, 1899-1902, (Edinburgh: N.P., 1907).
- 3 Kerr, "Survey of Literature", p. 422.
- 4 Ibid., p. 425.
- 5 J.L. Granatstein and P. Stevens (editors), Canada Since 1867 -- A Bibliographic Guide (Toronto: Samuel Stevens and Hakkert, 1977), p. 45.
- 6 Desmond Morton, The Canadian General, Sir William Otter (Toronto: Hakkert, 1974), p. 369.
- 7 Desmond Morton, "Colonel Otter and the 1st Canadian Contingent in South Africa, 1899-1900", in Policy By Other Means (Essays for C.P. Stacey), edited by M. Gross and M. Bothwell, (Toronto: Clarke Irwin, 1972), p. 97.

CHAPTER I - THE BACKGROUND

Positive changes were transforming the military system in Canada at the turn of the century. This was made possible by the progressive reforms of General Officers Commanding like Ivor Herbert and E.T.H. Hutton, the threat of American intervention, a changed attitude on the part of the government and an altered public perception of the role of the military. There were still problems such as political patronage, but a new direction in military matters was gradually being fashioned.

The country was divided into twelve military districts with the headquarters of its Department of Militia and Defence in Ottawa. The acrimonious relationship between 'minister and general' over control of the Militia Department reached its climax during Hutton's term as General Officer Commanding (1898-1900).<sup>1</sup> In 1899 the Minister of Militia and Defence was Dr. F.W. Borden, a medical practitioner from Nova Scotia, and his Deputy-Minister was Lieutenant-Colonel L.F. Pinault. The Department was divided into a civil branch and a military branch, and the civil branch had the responsibility of supplying the South African contingents and arranging transportation.

The fledgling permanent force, numbering about 900 men, was built around the artillery, cavalry and

infantry regiments. These were based respectively at Kingston and Quebec, Toronto and Winnipeg, and London, Toronto, St. Jean and Fredericton. In addition, however, there was a Volunteer Militia, which was entitled to a total establishment of 2,996 officers and 34,309 ranks at the time of the South African War.<sup>2</sup> The actual number on strength fell considerably short of these figures, however. The Volunteer Militia were divided into city and rural corps. City militia units usually drilled weekly, and by 1899 rural units were attending regular summer camps. The military system benefited also from the addition of improved equipment, such as machine guns and Lee Enfield rifles. A major shortcoming in the permanent force at the outbreak of the South African War was a lack of administrative departments --- there was no Corps of Engineers nor an Army Medical Corps, although a start was made to establish such departments during the war years.

While these changes were taking place in the Canadian military system war broke out between Britain and the Boer republics\* in October, 1899. The war was the culmination of a century of friction and conflict. The simmering feud was exacerbated by the discovery of

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\* Zuid-Afrikaanse Republiek (Transvaal) and the Orange Free State.

gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886 and the subsequent influx of "Uitlanders". To protect the Transvaal Boers from political and cultural domination these alien workers were denied political rights for a lengthy period. Certain mining magnates, such as Cecil Rhodes and Alfred Beit, who had accumulated vast fortunes in gold and diamond mining, were determined to bring the Transvaal under British control, and attempted to do so by exploiting "uitlander" dissatisfaction.<sup>3</sup> An invasion of the Transvaal, planned by the "gold bugs" and launched in 1895 under Dr. Jameson, failed dismally. The abortive Jameson Raid confirmed the fears of British expansion, and expedited a Boer drive to seek allies in Europe.

In May, 1897, Alfred Milner was appointed British High Commissioner in Cape Town. This was a crucial appointment since Milner was to play a decisive role in the events that led to the outbreak of war. He was concerned about the decline of British power in international affairs and firmly believed that only the consolidation of the Empire could arrest it; extending British control over the Transvaal and integrating it in the Empire was an essential part of his plan for imperial consolidation.<sup>4</sup> Milner developed a close relationship with the mining magnates, and having skilfully deceived Joseph Chamberlain, set about using

the plight of the "uitlanders" as a pretext for provoking the Boers into a declaration of war.<sup>5</sup>

On Monday, the 9th of October at 1700 hours, the State Secretary of Zuid-Afrikaanse Republik (Transvaal) delivered an ultimatum to the British agent in Pretoria, demanding that the British Government withdraw its troops from the borders of the Transvaal. Two days later the British government replied with a rejection of the ultimatum and the two Boer republics declared war on Britain.

During the late summer of 1899 Canadian public interest in the confrontation in South Africa began growing rapidly. Propaganda from politicians, pulpit and press created a pressure on English-speaking politicians for participation in the feud in southern Africa. Offers of troops from officers commanding militia units poured into Ottawa. The Boer declaration of war on the 11th of October pushed public emotion to fever-pitch in English-Canada and thereby confronted Sir Wilfrid Laurier with a dilemma. A few days earlier on the 4th of October he had announced that Canadian troops would only be called out to defend Canada and then only with the approval of Parliament. But returning from a visit to Chicago he found himself faced by a divided cabinet --- English-Canadian members demanded involvement in the conflict, while Israel Tarte led Quebec's opposition

to participation in an imperial war. Eventually a decision was reached that offered the best opportunity of securing the tenure of the Liberal government. On the 13th of October the cabinet by order-in-council announced that the Canadian government would equip and transport volunteers to South Africa.

The process of enlisting the volunteers was immediately set in motion. Twelve enrolment centres were designated and these corresponded approximately with the twelve military districts into which Canada was divided. It had been decided to send a regiment of 1,000 infantry, composed of eight companies, under command of Lieutenant-Colonel W. Otter. Applications for positions, both officers and ranks, poured in to most recruiting centres. Company captains assisted by local commanding officers selected the men on the basis of physique and character, knowledge of drill and rifle skills. Positions were open to members of the small permanent force and the militia, and in areas where recruiting was disappointing individuals with no military training were accepted. A special oath was administered verbally and once the attestation paper was signed and witnessed the recruit was formally in the pay of the Department of Militia and Defence. Within fifteen days the volunteers from Halifax to Victoria had assembled in Quebec and in the late afternoon of the 30th of

October, 1899, the converted battleship "Sardinian" sailed down the St. Lawrence to an enthusiastic farewell.

The wildly cheering crowd had barely dispersed from the docks when Laurier offered a second Canadian contingent to the British government.<sup>6</sup> These were the early days of the war, days of buoyant expectations when victory against the upstart Boers was regarded as a 'mere matter of marching'. Consequently the War Office declined the offer, although it was very appreciative of Canadian support. However, the British Government did indicate that a possible acceptance would be considered should future events necessitate it.<sup>7</sup> The disastrous British setbacks of mid-December, 1899, collectively known as "Black Week",\* brought about a change of heart. In a cable dated the 16th of December, 1899, Mr. Chamberlain, the Colonial Secretary, indicated that Her Majesty's Government would gladly accept a second contingent from Canada.<sup>8</sup> Within the short span of two months the British authorities had learned that infantry were no match for the elusive Boers, and the request specifically mentioned trained mounted troops.<sup>9</sup>

On the 20th of December the Canadian government issued provisional orders for the formation of a

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\* December 10th-15th, 1899. Stormberg, Magersfontein, and Colenso.

regiment of mounted rifles and three batteries of field artillery, and the following day the Governor-General cabled the Colonial Secretary with details of the composition of the contingent. The regiment of mounted rifles was composed of two battalions designated the 1st and 2nd Battalion, the Canadian Mounted Rifles.<sup>10</sup> Each battalion was divided into two squadrons. The nucleus of the 1st Battalion comprised officers and men of the Royal Canadian Dragoons (RCD).\*

The Royal Canadian Dragoons traced their origins to the early cavalry units formed in the province of Canada in the mid nineteenth century. The formal formation of the regiment dated from the Militia Act of 1883, which established a permanent corps in Canada. The act empowered the government to organize permanent schools of artillery, infantry and cavalry, and it is from the latter, based at Quebec, that the RCD developed. Shortly after the North-West Rebellion in 1885 a Mounted Infantry School comprising one hundred men was established at Winnipeg. In 1892 the Winnipeg and Quebec troops were merged to form the Canadian Dragoons and the following year they received the designation.

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\* On the 1st of August, 1900 the name of the 1st Battalion, the focus of this study, was changed to The Royal Canadian Dragoons and it will be referred to as such throughout this study. The 2nd Battalion will be referred to as the Canadian Mounted Rifles.

See Appendix.

"Royal". The Quebec troop was renamed A squadron and moved to Stanley Barracks in Toronto in 1893, while the Mounted Infantry School became B squadron and remained in Winnipeg. In 1895 Lieutenant-Colonel F.L. Lessard assumed command of the Royal Canadian Dragoons at their Stanley Barracks headquarters in Toronto.<sup>11</sup> It was this unit that formed the core of the 1st Battalion, Canadian Mounted Rifles that sailed to South Africa as part of the second contingent.

NOTES

- 1 For an excellent account of this relationship see Desmond Morton, Ministers and Generals, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970).
- 2 I am grateful to Mr. B. Greenhous of the Directorate of History, Department of National Defence for this information.
- 3 Thomas Pakenham, The Boer War, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979), pp: 56, 89.
- 4 Ibid., pp. 20, 21, 31, 35, 64.
- 5 Ibid., p. 115.
- 6 Canada, Department of Militia and Defence, Supplementary Report: Organization, Equipment, Despatch and Service of the Canadian Contingents during the War in South Africa (1899-1900), No. 35A, 1901, p. 67.
- 7 Ibid., p. 67.
- 8 Ibid., p. 68.
- 9 Ibid., p. 68.
- 10 Canada, Department of Militia and Defence, Militia Orders, 1899. No. 271, 28 December, 1899.
- 11 Based on a forthcoming centennial history of the Royal Canadian Dragoons by Brereton Greenhous.

CHAPTER II - AFRICA BOUND

The 1st Battalion (RCD) was organized in two squadrons (A and B), with four troops in each squadron and a headquarters staff of fifty-three for a total of 371 all ranks.\* There were scenes of unbounded enthusiasm as men flocked to the enrolment centres\* to enlist, some even dropping their militia ranks to enrol as privates.<sup>1</sup> Telegrams from volunteers poured in from across the country to militia headquarters in Ottawa. By the 3rd of January the recruiting of 371 men for the 1st Battalion had been completed; one quarter were from the permanent force, largely Royal Canadian Dragoons, and the remainder were volunteer militiamen and civilians.<sup>2</sup>

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<u>'A' Squadron</u>	<u>Place of Enrolment</u>	<u>Concentration Centre</u>
1st Troop	Toronto	Toronto
2nd Troop	Toronto and St. Catharines	Toronto
3rd Troop	Ottawa and Montreal	Montreal
4th Troop	London and Kingston	Toronto
<u>'B' Squadron</u>	<u>Place of Enrolment</u>	<u>Concentration Centre</u>
1st Troop	Winnipeg	Winnipeg
2nd Troop	Portage la Prairie, Virden, Brandon, Yorkton and Winnipeg	Winnipeg
3rd Troop	Montreal, Quebec, Cookshire	Quebec
4th Troop	Sussex NB, St. John, NB, and Canning, NS.	Halifax <sup>3</sup>

See appendix for the oath that was administered.

Communities from Winnipeg to Halifax tried to outdo one another in honouring their volunteers. Oyster suppers and benefit concerts were held to raise money to provide the men with extra cash and additional life insurance. In a decision motivated partly by patriotism and partly by profit the London and Lancashire Life Assurance Company offered to insure the lives of the soldiers for an additional 5%.<sup>4</sup> When the orders arrived for the troops to move to the centres of concentration there were rousing farewells at the railway stations. Many towns declared half-holidays and festooned their streets with flags, bunting and banners, and not even the chilly January weather could cool the ardour of the townsfolk as they cheered their men to the stations.

Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg, Quebec and Halifax had been designated as points of concentration for the troops and in these cities preparations were under way for the serious business of war. The farewell cheers were still ringing in their ears as the men who gathered in Montreal found themselves thrust into a rigorous routine and subjected to the strictest military discipline. There was scarcely a spare moment in a day that commenced at 6 a.m. and terminated with lights-out at 10:15 p.m., and included three to four hours of drill, caring for the horses and drawing supplies. The officers were determined that their men would be thoroughly prepared for the

African veld\* and they were unsparing in their emphasis on excellence. Besides the occasional brief break for a game of Canadian football in the drill shed the only free time for reading, writing and relaxing was after church parade on Sunday. Special leave was granted only on rare occasions, one of these being for last minute weddings. Lieutenant Turner was married at the Cathedral in Quebec on the 8th of January and enjoyed a day's leave in Montreal with his bride,<sup>5</sup> but Corporal Collins was less fortunate and he had to leave for Montreal immediately after a hasty wedding ceremony in Ottawa. The recruits in Montreal were treated to an unusual evening's entertainment courtesy of the American Biograph Company when they were shown some of the first moving pictures ever filmed on the field of battle. A great cheer echoed through the hall when action scenes involving the first Canadian contingent in South Africa appeared on the screen.<sup>6</sup>

While the men were engaged in preparatory training some of the officers were assigned to select horses for the contingent. They were as rigorous in their choice of animals as in the selection of the men. The qualities that they sought included an easy temperament, jumping ability and endurance. One Friday in early January

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\* The flat, grass-covered South African prairie.

the Montreal Drill Hall took on the appearance of a mediaeval horse-fair when sellers from miles around paraded three hundred animals. The officers carefully selected forty sturdy chargers, rejecting many good mounts because their tails were not long enough to discourage the African flies. All unbroken horses were placed in the charge of a former mounted policeman for training.?

In Ottawa the Militia Department took on the appearance of a busy railway station as the outfitting of the second contingent got under way. Many staff members worked through the New Year weekend preparing supplies for forwarding to recruiting and concentration centres and to Halifax, the port of embarkation. Equipment, such as springwagons with tarpaulin tops, was purchased locally and freighted directly to Halifax.

The 1st Battalion (RCD) had been scheduled to depart from Halifax on the converted Elder-Dempster freighter, "Montezuma", in late January. To avoid congestion and confusion at the port of embarkation departures from the centres of concentration were staggered. The western group comprising troops 1 and 2 of B squadron set out from Winnipeg on the 8th of January, 1900. It was an unusually mild winter day when the eighty men under Major V.A.S. Williams marched coatless through Winnipeg to the railway station where, amidst tearful farewells

and thunderous applause, they boarded a special Canadian Pacific train. The men were accommodated in two tourist cars, each of which was partitioned for the officers, and a kitchen car was attached. The eighty-two horses were loaded in nine palace-cars that provided each horse with a box-stall. Concerned Winnipeggers had donated liberal supplies of tobacco and liquor and these were replenished repeatedly by enthusiastic crowds at wayside stations. One highlight of the trip was the supper of succulent Sudbury turkey, and another was the daring quest of the northern Ontario girls for soldiers' buttons. The girls would attempt to wrench the buttons off the coats of unsuspecting soldiers as they strolled along the platform. If that method failed, they would willingly trade kisses for buttons.<sup>8</sup>

To the rousing accompaniment of martial songs the C.P. Special rolled eastwards through the snow-clad countryside, ever closer to the sea that would carry them to the battlefield in distant Africa. Enthusiasm and confidence soared with the growing camaraderie on board the troop-train. The prospect of battle with the Boers who had the temerity to challenge the might of the British Empire was intoxicating to even the most pacific trooper. But underlying the excitement was the nagging concern that it would be all over before they set foot on African soil.<sup>9</sup>

In Montreal the same fervent farewells were repeated for the local volunteers. Thousands lined the streets on a chilly Thursday night to cheer the troops as they marched through the falling snow to Bonaventure Station. Amidst the stirring music of the Police Band and the rousing renditions of "Rule Britannia" and "The Maple Leaf Forever", the men of third troop, A squadron struggled through the backslaps and handshakes of the seething crowd to the waiting cars. It was midnight before the Intercolonial train steamed slowly out of the station to the tune of "When Johnny comes marching home again" and gathered speed as it headed out into the darkness.

Quebec gave Lieutenant Turner's troop a spectacular send-off, surpassing in number and spirit the farewell to the first contingent two months earlier.<sup>10</sup> Hundreds of residents in snow-shoes lined the streets with flaming torches and thousands more thronged the station to bid farewell.

Disappointment awaited the troops, however, for as the troop-trains were converging on Halifax rumours of delay were circulating in the port city. The Canadian government had negotiated with the Elder-Dempster Company for the use of the "Montezuma" as a troop-carrier. Shortly after her arrival from New Orleans some crew members were quarantined with suspected typhoid supposedly

caused by contaminated drinking water in the ship's tanks. A medical board ruled that the "Montezuma" was unsafe as a troop-carrier. Despite protests by the Elder-Dempster Company, the government rejected the vessel as a transport ship and the Company reluctantly agreed to replace her with the freighter "Milwaukee", which had originally been chartered to take mules to Cape Town. A major conversion would have to be undertaken as soon as the vessel reached port and her departure for southern Africa was tentatively scheduled for mid-February. When the delay was announced it was decided that the Toronto detachment\* would remain in Toronto until shortly before the "Milwaukee" was due to sail. The delay caused disappointment but it did permit more time for basic training of the recruits.

The Winnipeg men were the first to arrive in Halifax and they set up quarters in the Exhibition buildings at Willow Park in the north-west part of the city. The long, low exhibition tables doubled as beds and lockers; straw-filled mattresses covered with two grey blankets were laid out and the soldiers' kit was piled at the end. The horses were only slightly less comfortable in the livestock building.<sup>11</sup> Colleagues from Montreal, Quebec

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\* Troops 1, 2, and 4 of A Squadron and the headquarters staff. This constituted almost half the battalion.

and New Brunswick arrived shortly afterwards to take up residence at Willow Park. Dressed in the uniforms of the permanent force and of most of the volunteer cavalry regiments in Canada they were a motley group of recruits. However, within a few days the equipment sent from Ottawa was distributed and the khaki uniforms, stetson hats and leather boots with spurs transformed the contingent into a well-groomed unit.

While irritated at the delayed departure, Major V.A.S. Williams, the senior Dragoon officer in Halifax,\* was nevertheless grateful that he had a month to prepare his men, and he prescribed a busy daily schedule of mounted, dismounted and skirmishing drill. The Exhibition track was used for training the green mounts and occasionally for light relief the Dragoons would challenge the Mounted Police to a speed contest. The western broncos had greater speed and endurance than the horses purchased in the east and invariably the "Mounties" carried the day. A number of the recruits were inexperienced horsemen and they had difficulty handling the spirited steeds. One Saint John volunteer, William Anderson, had set his

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\* Colonel Lessard who had been appointed to command the 1st Battalion was already in South Africa and Colonel T.D.B. Evans was still with the Toronto detachment.

heart on fighting for the Queen in South Africa, but when he failed his riding test he was rejected for service.<sup>12</sup> Undaunted by his failure and resolute in his determination to join the Mounted Rifles, he practised his riding daily with the assistance of a friendly sergeant. The Dragoons had not seen the last of William Anderson.

Meanwhile the troops were being trained to operate under battle conditions. Mounted infantry minor tactics revolved around a group of four men. At the command the whole squadron would gallop up to a designated place where three men in each group would dismount and advance with their rifles. The remaining member was the horseholder and it was his responsibility to lead the horses to the nearest cover and wait there mounted, ready to return promptly at the call of the troop officer. Controlling three riderless horses was no easy task for an inexperienced rider with a rifle slung across his back and initially there were numerous riderless horses wandering all over the Halifax common!<sup>13</sup>

As the men became more proficient Major Williams put them through their paces in front of enthusiastic crowds on the Common. They drilled in different formations and then practised escorting the guns and tactical approaches to trenches. Blank ammunition was used to simulate battlefield conditions, and in one exciting

exercise the squadron rode several miles down the Windsor road and using 'blanks' tried to flush an imaginary enemy from the woods. As Major Williams was to point out in his farewell speech prior to embarkation, the five-week sojourn had provided invaluable experience for the men: it had inured them to the rigours of military life and had transformed raw recruits into trained troopers. There were deficiencies in the training, however. Private Hilder complained that less than a day was devoted to rifle practice and little instruction was given the men in the use and care of the Lee-Enfield rifles.<sup>14</sup> In one last memorable review the 1st Battalion thrilled a large crowd with a cleverly-planned storming of the Citadel. In successive waves they charged, fell back, wheeled and charged again, but the indomitable old fortress refused to be taken by mere mounted men.

The Haligonians took the troops to their hearts and showered them with genuine hospitality; they were invited into homes, and they were entertained at parties and dances. The mayor spearheaded a drive to raise funds for the entertainment of the men. With so many soldiers in the city incidents were likely to occur; some were humorous, others less so. One of the more amusing occurred at a social evening as a Dragoon was dancing with a prominent young socialite. While they were whirling around the floor his spur became entangled in the lace

of her petticoat. As they disengaged and moved apart the petticoat began unravelling and the embarrassed young lady was soon trailing yards of expensive lace. The hostess hastened to the rescue with a pair of scissors and separated the spur from the lace as the guests collapsed in paroxysms of mirth.<sup>15</sup>

Some of the city ladies were a little too zealous in the welcome they extended to the soldiers and the Mayor had to issue strict orders to Chief of Police to keep them from the mens' quarters.<sup>16</sup> One of the Halifax newspapers warned parents to keep their daughters away from the "partly civilized westerners". The men were incensed at this statement and one evening a dozen called at the editor's house. He was grabbed when he came to the door and escorted to the garden where one of the cowboys had thrown a rope over a sturdy branch and had fashioned a noose. The editor was informed that unless he apologised and retracted the statement he would be hanged in his own garden. The following day the retraction appeared in the newspaper.<sup>17</sup>

On the whole the civilian and military elements got along very well together and the police chief spoke highly of the mens' conduct. To repay some of the kindness of the citizens the troops arranged an "at home" at Willow Park early in February, and proved themselves exemplary hosts in a highly successful and thoroughly enjoyable evening.

Sundays followed a similar pattern during the stay in Halifax: church parade was a regular feature, and after a hearty midday meal the men were usually free to pursue their own leisure interests. The Sunday sermons invariably included reference to the conflict in Africa, some openly exhorting support, others more muted and philosophical in their analysis of war. In a sermon that could have been delivered by an Afrikaner 'dominee'\* in the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk in Pretoria, the Reverend Armitage, using as his reference Sennacherib's attack on Jerusalem,\*\* contended that war against slavery and oppression was justified.

January was a busy month for Halifax: one thousand volunteers converged on the city from across Canada, and two troopships departed for Cape Town. The Dragoons participated in an impressive inspection ceremony on the departure of the Canadian Mounted Rifles, and formed part of the cavalcade in the chaotic and exuberant farewell procession to the docks where the ship that would carry them to South Africa lay waiting. Once inside the dockyard they lined up on their mounts and cheered lustily as the mounted police and cowboys embarked in

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\* Clergyman.

\*\* Second Chronicles, Chapter 32, Verse 8: He has human power, but we have the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles.18

single file. The realization that the Western battalion would soon be engaged in battle with Kruger's cohorts brought pangs of envy to the Dragoons who would have to content themselves with mock-battles on the Common for another three weeks.<sup>19</sup>

The "Milwaukee" finally arrived from New Orleans on Sunday evening, the 4th of February. An atmosphere of frenetic activity prevailed as 350 tradesmen, scurrying and scrambling like so many ants, feverishly set to work to prepare the ship for her scheduled departure. Under the able supervision of Captain Creighton, Superintendent of the Elder-Dempster Company, carpenters, machinists, boilermakers, sailmakers, tinsmiths and plumbers spared no effort to transform the freighter "Milwaukee" into the troopship "Milwaukee". The big freighter had accommodation for only a few passengers and quarters had to be created for 600 troops and even more horses. Dormitories, store-rooms, galleys and ice-chests had to be carved out of her cavernous innards, while the bare iron decks had to be floored with wood from stem to stern. There was also intense activity on the condemned "Montezuma" as workmen dismantled installations like the horse stalls and transferred them to the "Milwaukee".<sup>20</sup>

The Company had offered to transport Red Cross parcels for the First Contingent free of charge and hundreds of packages were arriving in Halifax. Books

and magazines for leisure reading on the voyage were also arriving in substantial quantities. As renovations progressed the victualling firms that had won contracts moved in to supervise loading the supplies, and to keep a sharp lookout for pilferage. Nor were the needs of the horses ignored for over 400 tons of hay was lifted aboard and stored for the voyage. Then the artillery pieces and wagons were hoisted aboard while fifty men loaded the shells and bullets and deposited them in the ship's magazine.

Rumours that pro-Boer Americans from the New England states intended to sabotage the troopship circulated in the port city. Troops with minds focused on the fray in Africa gave the stories little thought and less credence. Colonel Percy Sherwood, Commissioner of the Dominion Police, was less complacent, and he assigned a number of special constables to watch the quay, mixing surreptitiously by day with the tradesmen and maintaining an unceasing nocturnal vigilance. Only one incident was recorded: a foreigner was apprehended emitting guttural sounds, but upon investigation he turned out to be an inebriated Norwegian who had wandered on to military property while seeking his ship in the small hours.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the gallant efforts of the conversion crew the sheer magnitude of the task coupled with a shortage

of plumbers and tinsmiths and insufficient natural ice\* forced a postponement of the departure date by almost a week. By Monday morning, 19th of February the conversion of the "Milwaukee" was finally completed. After a thorough inspection she was handed over officially to the government at noon the following day, and thirty hours later she was on the high seas bound for Africa.

The worst blizzard of the winter hammered Halifax on Sunday, 18th February, and hardly a soul ventured out in the stinging, swirling snow. Church parade was cancelled and the men spent a quiet day reading, writing and chatting. Meanwhile their infantry colleagues of the First Contingent were perishing on the dusty Free State veld in numbers not experienced since 1814.<sup>22</sup> At Paardeberg Drift\*\* it was Bloody Sunday for the Canadians who had been cut down by withering Boer crossfire after a futile frontal assault. There they lay trapped under a searing sun; the dead unmoving, the wounded gasping with pain and thirst and the survivors motionless behind any obstacle offering protection against the whistling mauser bullets. The Dragoons, like the infantry, would learn that speculating about battle was dramatically different from the actual experience of battle.

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\* Natural ice was required for the massive ice-chest on board, and a spell of mild weather had caused a shortage in the Halifax area.

\*\* South African term meaning "Ford".

The Toronto detachment finally entrained for Halifax on Thursday the 15th of February. Only three thousand hardy souls braved the bitter weather to cheer and wave them out of the station at 7:15 p.m. that evening. Presentations from the city and people of Toronto had been made in January. Each officer received a pair of field glasses, a revolver, a silver matchbox and twenty-five pounds, while the other ranks received the silver matchbox and five pounds. An insurance policy to the value of one thousand dollars was also taken out on the life of each volunteer. The troops stopped for an early breakfast at Cornwall, and arrived in Montreal at 9:00 a.m. to be greeted with the exciting news that Kimberley\* had been relieved. Colonel Evans, with his nine officers and 156 men and their horses transferred to an Intercolonial train and left for Halifax an hour and a half later, arriving there on the evening of the 18th. A weary group of men trudged off through the aftermath of the blizzard to their quarters in the new Armoury building near the Citadel, while their colleagues in B Squadron led the horses off to the Exhibition ground.

The arrival of the Toronto detachment meant that the Dragoons were united at last and Colonel Evans assumed command. The composition of the regiment had

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\* The Boer siege of Kimberley was raised by General French on the 15th of February, 1900.

changed somewhat during the time in Halifax because thorough medical examinations had disqualified several troopers. Pneumonia, hernia and scarlet fever had been the major causes of disqualification.\* There had been some riding accidents but they were not serious enough to prevent the men from sailing, and only two of the horses were declared unfit for service.

The final days had arrived! By day the men were busy packing kit for loading, cleaning uniforms and writing last-minute letters to friends and relatives and in the evenings they were involved in farewell social occasions. The Elder-Dempster "smoker" for the troops on the last Saturday night was generally acclaimed to have been the best entertainment the men had enjoyed in Halifax. Special passes were issued to all the men on Monday to permit them one last night 'on the town', and the troops deserted the barracks and crowded into the main hotels for a night of revelry that was free of unpleasant incidents. Out of town visitors were crowding into Halifax; visitors from as far afield as Windsor, Ontario, had filled the hotels, and dockyard tickets for the departure were eagerly sought. The authorities had

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\* Captain Webster of the "Milwaukee" commented to a reporter in New Orleans on a later voyage about the remarkable physique of the Dragoons. Rigorous physical examinations eliminated all but the fittest, one even being rejected because he had a chipped tooth claimed the Captain.23

decided to issue more tickets but to tighten security after the chaotic dockside scenes when the "Pomeranian" sailed.

Wednesday the 21st of February dawned clear and fine: it was a propitious beginning to the long-awaited day. The men rose early and breakfasted together at the Exhibition Grounds amidst scenes of jubilation and joyful camaraderie: that esprit de corps so crucial to any combat group was beginning to develop. During the morning the last of the kit and the horses were taken down to the "Milwaukee", but on returning to barracks it was discovered that one of Lieutenant Borden's\* saddles had been forgotten. William Anderson, still unwavering in his determination to accompany the Canadian troops to Africa, was anxiously awaiting an opportunity to get his belongings aboard. The mislaid saddle provided an ideal opportunity. He secretly crammed his belongings into the canvas bag that held the saddle and watched with bated breath and a pounding heart as it went off to the ship. Later in the morning the men marched down to the "Milwaukee" to deposit their kitbags, and carefully choosing an opportune moment Anderson quietly slipped away and concealed himself in an isolated corner of the engine-room.<sup>24</sup>

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\* Son of the Minister of Militia and Defence, later killed in action.

"A...ten...shun!" roared the regimental sergeant major, and the command reverberated throughout the cavernous hall as over three hundred robust troops smartly clicked their heels. They presented a magnificent spectacle as they stood erect and motionless in broad-brimmed roughrider hats and great-coats with their Lee-Enfield rifles at their sides waiting to be inspected by Lord Seymour, Commander of the Imperial Forces in Canada. It was 2 p.m. The gaily decorated armoury was filled to capacity with relatives, friends and well-wishers. After the inspection there were rousing speeches from Lord Seymour, Lieutenant-Governor Daley of Nova Scotia and Dr. Borden, the Federal Minister of Militia. Major Williams replied thanking the Haligonians for their generous and unstinting hospitality.

At the conclusion of the ceremony the soldiers marched out onto the street and cheering crowds engulfed them as civilian and military police fought to maintain control. By comparison the earlier troop departures were but dress rehearsals for the Royal Canadian Dragoons, and on that crisp and sunny afternoon the residents turned out in thousands to cheer the troops on their way to the Cape. A gala atmosphere pervaded the city as people jammed streets, doorways and windows to catch a glimpse of the celebrities as they marched through streets bedecked with flags and bunting. The special correspondent

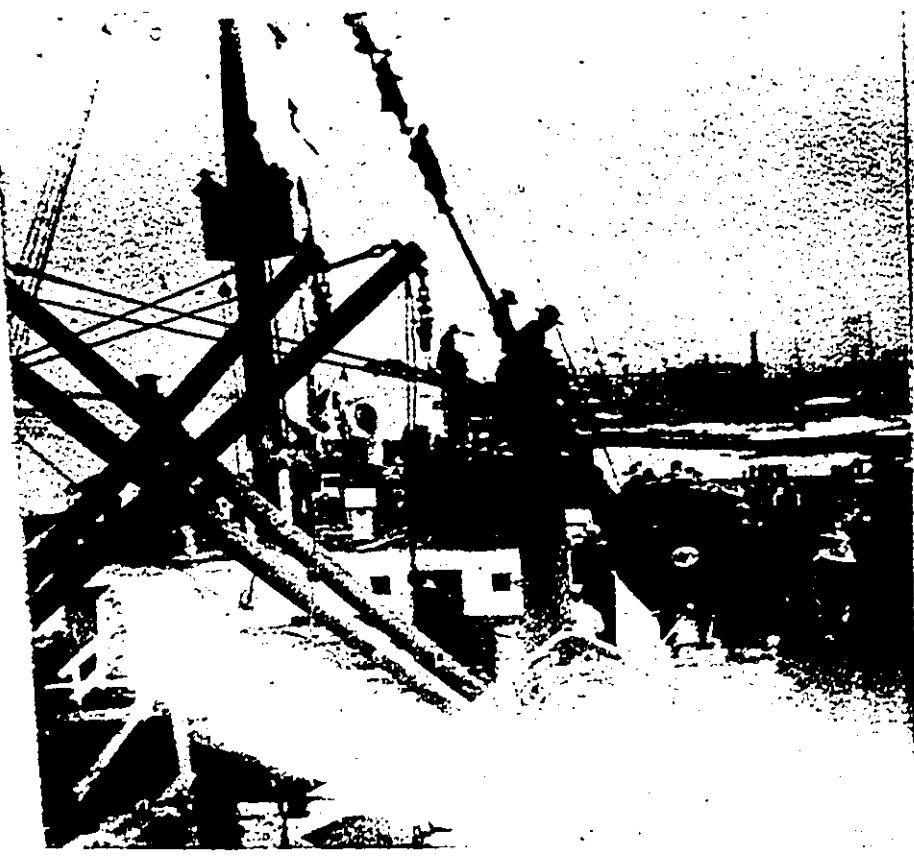
of The Montreal Star was moved to describe the scene as "a spectacle of overwhelming grandeur."<sup>25</sup> Interspersed among the troops were five bands whose stirring martial music whipped the surging throng to a fever-pitch that reached a crescendo as the serpentine column manoeuvred its way to the dockyard gates. The teeming crowd swarmed around the gates, but tight security and firm control permitted only the 3,000 ticket-holders to gain entry, and the others scurried around seeking vantage points overlooking the harbour.

The Dragoons formed up in front of the "Milwaukee" and then embarked in single file; the last man finally cleared the gangplank one hour later. Once on board the men occupied every possible lookout, some even ensconcing themselves in the rigging. Down in the engine-room stowaway Anderson could hear the cheering but he dared not expose himself to share in the farewells for fear of being discovered. At 5 p.m. Captain Webster rang orders to the engine-room and as the driveshaft engaged the propeller a dull vibration spread throughout the ship signalling to the men that the adventure they had dreamed about so frequently in the past two months was at last underway.

The lines were cast off and the big ship was gently manoeuvred into the stream by two tugs. Once the hawsers were slipped the public were allowed on the wharf and a



EMBARKATION AT HALIFAX



FAREWELL FROM THE RIGGING

seething mass swarmed over the cobbled surface. Cheer after cheer went up as the "Milwaukee" moved slowly away, rolling together into a lusty roar that crossed the water in a series of sonic waves. The troops reciprocated with thunderous applause and joined in the singing of patriotic songs, and then as if the invisible thread linking ship and shore was suddenly severed, the tumult subsided. It was as if all present sensed the significance of the occasion: reports of Bloody Sunday were hauntingly fresh and the possibility that many loved ones would not return was too obvious to ignore. The subdued crowd, many wiping tears, quietly dispersed, while on board some of the men overcome by the emotional farewell and moved by the solemnity of the occasion sought the seclusion of their quarters.<sup>26</sup>

Once free of the tugs, the "Milwaukee" headed for the open sea followed by a retinue of small boats, some with bands playing patriotic music. Gradually they gave up one by one and with a farewell blast on their whistles turned around and headed back to their moorings. At 6:25 p.m. the pilot was dropped and Captain Webster ordered full steam ahead as he nosed his ship into a south-easterly direction. Cape Town lay 7,000 nautical miles ahead.

The "Milwaukee" steamed out into a placid Atlantic Ocean ~~under~~ a black satin canopy of shimmering stars.

Most of the men were up on deck after dinner smoking and watching the twinkling lights of the fishing villages slip by on the starboard side. At 8:35 p.m. the flashing light of Cape Sambro lighthouse faded into the darkness severing their last link with the mainland. An exhausted group of men, physically and emotionally drained by the day's activities, crawled into their hammocks and were soon rocked to sleep by the pulsing throb of the propellers and the gentle motion of the ship.<sup>27</sup>

The Dragoons formed only part of the total complement of troops\* aboard the "Milwaukee." All told twenty-nine officers, six hundred and five men, ninety-five crew and six hundred and fourteen horses sailed from Halifax. Colonel W.D. Gordon had been appointed commanding officer for the voyage with Colonel Evans second in command.

The men were up early next morning and were greeted by an unusually warm day and a very calm sea. Orders such as Boat Stations, Medical Inspections, and Smoking Regulations were published and the remainder of the day was spent organizing and establishing the daily routine. But by evening there was another development: the wind had started to freshen and there were ominous signs that a storm was brewing. The next morning the "Milwaukee" was

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\* The rest were largely members of 'C' Battery of the Royal Canadian Field Artillery.

fighting a raging hurricane, pitching and rolling in the turbulent seas and vibrating violently as the thrashing propeller emerged from the icy grey water. The fact that the ship lacked heavy ballast and that the horses were quartered high in the vessel only helped to accentuate the rolling motion. Seasickness took a heavy toll of the men and few ventured down to meals that day. Many sought solace in their swaying hammocks, but these were no place to escape the wrath of the sea for the swinging of the hammocks aggravated their condition. The warning cry "under below" was repeated frequently as ashen men leaned out of their hammocks and retched uncontrollably. The odours wafting up from the galley only served to exacerbate the agonies of the wretched soldiers.

The horses suffered as much as the men in the deplorable conditions and in an effort to reduce their distress Captain Webster hove to for twelve hours in the heavy seas. The hurricane lasted all day, buffeting and pounding the "Milwaukee" mercilessly, and creating near-intolerable conditions for both man and animal. On the following day the storm began to moderate; the winds diminished, the rough seas subsided and the siege mentality of shipboard life gradually lifted.

Sunday 25th February dawned bright and warm as a summer's day. The tempest had eased for the sabbath; a

providential development and a portent of God's presence contended the Chaplain as he conducted an impressive service on the upper deck. A and B squadrons lined up on the port and starboard sides respectively with the officers in front and the organist and choir accompanied by three violins at number four hatch. Some of the sick soldiers were brought up on their hammocks for the service. It was a moving occasion and as the words and music wafted over a tranquil blue sea many of the men were reduced to tears.<sup>28</sup>

The Reverend Lane\* was ably assisted by Thomas Best, the Y.M.C.A. representative, in the religious sphere of life on the troopship. Besides the regular Sunday church services they also conducted optional evening prayer meetings which were well attended. Much time was spent counselling men individually and in groups, discussing their hopes and aspirations and helping them examine their inner fears of the ordeal ahead. Best had brought large quantities of literature which he dispensed among the men for use during their leisure hours.

The two men were instrumental in popularising the evening sing-songs and active in organizing concerts.

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\* Lane was a vehement prohibitionist, and a thorn in the side of the Government. It was rumoured that many parliamentarians rejoiced when it was known that he was going to Africa!<sup>29</sup>

The Elder-Dempster Company had donated \$50.00 for the purchase of instruments and others had been donated and an accomplished brass band had been assembled from among a number of talented musicians on board. The first concert took place on the 6th of March and the troops were entertained to a pleasing rendering of popular songs and recitations with excellent musical accompaniment by the band. Unfortunately a lack of orchestral instruments thwarted the formation of an orchestra on board the troopship.

The "Milwaukee" had undergone a major conversion and refitting in Halifax within the remarkably short period of two weeks. A mule-transport with accommodation for a handful of passengers was transformed into a troopship with austere but comfortable accommodation for 650 men. The officers were provided with cabins and a dining room while the ranks were housed in large dormitories below decks. Hammocks were strung from the deckheads and initially some men had difficulty staying in their swaying berths. There was little danger of falling far wrote one trooper because the hammocks were so close together that a man would merely tumble into the adjacent one.<sup>30</sup> Sleepy soldiers didn't have to go far for breakfast; with the mess tables spread out below the hammocks they literally rolled out of bed and down to breakfast! Ventilation of the cramped quarters was

a necessity especially in the tropics and air-scoops, fans and windsails had been installed to make life below decks tolerable.

The needs of hundreds of soldiers with healthy appetites had been taken care of by the construction of a large well-equipped galley and bake-house capable of feeding one thousand men. An ice-room had been constructed amidships to store the fresh produce; it was insulated with wood and lined with lead and sawdust to preserve the 250 tons of ice. Thirty-five thousand pounds of beef had been stored in the ice-room and pens for 125 sheep had been constructed on the deck so that the diet of preserved and salt meat could be varied with fresh mutton.<sup>31</sup> An earlier Militia Order had spelled out in minute detail the rations, medical supplies and water for men and animals on the troopships.<sup>32</sup> Adequate provisions for a period of three months had been brought aboard in Halifax as well as 2,100 tons of fresh water. Distilling apparatus capable of producing 10,000 gallons per day had been installed to supplement water supplies.

Precautions were taken to ensure the health and safety of the troops. Two well-equipped hospitals capable of holding ten men each as well as a surgery and dispensary had been constructed. Eighteen large lifeboats had been added to the normal complement; they were painted and inspected to ensure compliance with Admiralty

requirements. Life preservers were provided for every individual on board, and the fire-equipment had been thoroughly checked.

Storage space had received special attention during the renovation and numerous baggage-rooms had been carved out of any available area. Space had even been found for a guard-room and two prisons! The magazine had been built in an isolated part of the ship and comprised three compartments containing artillery shells, small arms ammunition and rockets and small arms.<sup>33</sup> It was locked and sealed and closely guarded for the duration of the voyage.

Accommodation for 650 horses had been built on four decks in the after-section to isolate the equine odors. The stalls, with detachable feeding troughs, measured two feet by six feet and were separated by a two inch plank. Gangways five feet in width were built between the rows of stalls to permit the horses to be exercised. Wooden battens were fastened to the floor and covered with cocoa matting or sawdust to prevent slipping, and canvas hammocks were installed for use in rough weather. A long bushy tail was essential to ward off the swarms of flies in Africa, but the horses on 'Pomeranian' and the 'Laurentian' had worn off much of their hair by switching their tails against the stalls.

Consequently the tails of the horses on the 'Milwaukee' were fitted with protective canvas covers.

A number of horses were quartered on the upper deck and except for the first few stormy days they were more comfortable than those below, and they suffered no losses. The oats and baled hay were also stored on the upper deck and many of the men camped in the hay in preference to a hammock below decks. Adequate forage\* for the voyage had been brought aboard and stored above and below decks. Captain Webster was concerned about the combustibility of the hay in the hold. It had been loaded when covered in frost and he ordered the hatches opened and air forced in and this eliminated the threat of fire. Daily rations for the horses included five pounds of hay and five pounds of oats mixed with bran, and as a special treat while they lasted, carrots on Saturday.

Excellent care was provided by the Veterinary Officer, the Veterinary Surgeon and the officers and men under the most trying circumstances. During the first few days the horses suffered dreadful agonies in the heavy seas. They were buffeted in their stalls and not having learned to roll with the ship they would lose their footing and collapse in the icy water that swirled over the

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\* 250 tons of hay, 125 tons of oats, 60 tons of bran.

floor.\* Having survived the frigid North Atlantic they were then subjected to the enervating heat of the tropics. Crammed in like sardines, they sweated and gasped for breath in the intense heat, which not even the electric ventilation fans could mitigate. Stable pickets worked in relays clipping the thick winter coats and cleaning and disinfecting the stalls. Duty in the fetid stench and heat resembled the conditions of the Augean stables and demanded almost the same herculean strength and courage of the duty hands.<sup>34</sup> The horses were on their feet throughout the voyage and except for being walked along the gangways they had no exercise. A total of thirty-eight were lost during the voyage from fever, pneumonia and heat exhaustion.<sup>35</sup> Considering the atrocious and contrasting climatic conditions a loss of 6%\*\* was not excessive and bears testimony to the attention given the horses by the officers and men. A dead horse was removed from its stall immediately and by means of the steam winch the carcass was heaved overboard to the waiting sharks below. An intimate bond had developed between horse and rider and it was an agonizing experience for a trooper to witness his mount being

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\* For a good description see Larry Worthington, The Spur and the Sprocket (Gagetown, N.B.: Royal Canadian Dragoons, 1968), pp. 15-16.

\*\* The 'Laurentian' lost 10% and the 'Monterey' 29%.



ANOTHER CARCASS GOES OVERBOARD

dropped overboard and to watch it bobbing in the ship's wake among the bales of spoiled hay and the dorsal fins of the ubiquitous sharks.<sup>36</sup>

Deep in the bowels of the ship stowaway Anderson suffered the torments of seasickness in silence and isolation. Occasionally he would venture up on deck for a breath of fresh sea air, taking care to avoid officers, and then returning to the seclusion of his comfortable nest in the engine room. Once his appetite returned a friend arranged for him to receive tidbits of food, and with recuperation came a feeling of confidence which prompted him to abandon his warren and to join his compatriots. On 5th March, however, he received the shattering news that he was to be arraigned before the Commanding Officer that morning. Not until Lieutenant Borden whispered in his ear that he had arranged everything and that there was nothing to worry about did he realize that he was being charged only with illegal boarding. The charge was read by the duty lieutenant and Colonel Gordon, the Commanding Officer, asked William Anderson whether he had anything to say in his defence. The stowaway replied that his action was motivated solely by his desire to be a soldier of the Queen. After a cursory deliberation with the officers on the tribunal Colonel Gordon announced the punishment: William Anderson was to be taken for medical examination

and then sworn in as a brave young soldier in the 1st troop of A Squadron. Word of the decision soon spread around the ship and the plucky stowaway was accorded a hero's reception among the admiring troops.<sup>37</sup>

The day started with reveille at 5:30 a.m. and various drills and duties kept the men occupied until lunch. Some, like stable duty, were onerous while others like the bathing parade\* were rather more pleasant.

'Smoke-breaks' were eagerly awaited. "Commence firing" was the order permitting the lighting of pipes and cigarettes, and "Cease firing" signified the end of the 'smoke-break'. Most of the drills took place on the hurricane deck and here sergeant-major Widgery regularly put the men through a rigorous series of calisthenics to harden them for the ordeal ahead. Life-boat drill was practised assiduously, and their competence enabled the men to be at their stations ready to lower the boats within two and a half minutes of the alarm bells ringing. The surgeon-major was active organizing an ambulance corps, and the stretcher-bearers spent two hours a day drilling under an experienced corporal. A miniature rifle and revolver range had been constructed at the rear end of the deck and it was used frequently for revolver practice and competitions and for rifle

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\* The men were given a choice, the canvas pool or the fire-hose!

training using the Morris Tube.\* One trooper lamented bitterly that the ocean was not used as a practice area, contending that firing at moving targets in the sea would have been excellent preparation for the elusive Boers.<sup>38</sup> At the end of each day a night guard of six men under a corporal assumed the responsibility for patrolling the vessel and maintaining a careful nocturnal watch over the sleeping ship.

During the course of the voyage various items of military gear had been distributed and after the final issue a week out of Cape Town, the men were well-equipped for battle. Their arms included a .45 Colt revolver and a .303 long Lee-Enfield rifle with sword-bayonet, and among the accoutrements the Canadian-developed Oliver waistbelt for bayonet and revolver and the heavy cotton-web bandoliers holding one hundred cartridges. Each man had a blue and white serge uniform and a khaki uniform, a broadbrimmed cowboy hat, a waterproof coat, boots and puttees and all the other necessities for waging war.

Any group of men invariably finds fault with mass-produced meals and the Dragoons were no exception. There was some justification for the mutterings towards the

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\* A .22 calibre tube inserted in the barrels of the rifles.

end of the voyage when fresh supplies were exhausted and the men had to be content with tinned meat, soup and biscuits. Hot weather killed many of the sheep and the mutton tasted odd.<sup>39</sup> Condensed sea-water, which was both discoloured and brackish, replaced fresh-water and although the men and horses soon became accustomed to it, the tea and coffee never did taste the same. No consensus regarding the ship's fare emerges. In his official report the officer commanding the artillery commented that the rations were of good quality and that there were no complaints from the men.<sup>40</sup> Trooper Heron wrote unequivocally "the water is rotten and the food is nearly as bad",<sup>41</sup> while Trooper Hilder grudgingly admitted that the ship's food was palatable and that none went hungry.<sup>42</sup>

Ship's rations were supplemented by supplies of tobacco, jam and candy distributed from parcels sent by well-wishers in Canada and by purchases from the ship's canteen. Stocks in the canteen included canned goods, cigarettes, ginger ale, lemonade and beer priced at 15c per bottle. Payday in early March had placed \$12,000 in the pockets of the troops so aggregate demand was considerable. Combined with limited supplies this produced a classic case of demand-pull inflation and resulted in a flurry of complaints about price gouging.<sup>43</sup>

Despite the high prices the canteen supplies were exhausted before the "Milwaukee" reached Cape Town.

As the "Milwaukee" approached the tropics, living conditions below deck became increasingly unbearable. When the ventilation equipment was unable to remove the sultry, stale air from the quarters below, permission was granted for the men to sleep on deck. On humid nights hundreds took advantage of this concession and trooped up on deck with blankets to chat or gaze at the star-studded sky and then fall soundly asleep to the soporific throb of the engines.<sup>44</sup> Some of the officers installed their hammocks on the bridge deck in order to take advantage of the cool night air. Occasionally this proved more of a cooling experience than they expected, for careless sailors sometimes failed to see them or lost control of their hoses while cleaning the decks in the early hours.<sup>45</sup>

Despite a regular and busy routine on board, there were opportunities for recreational activities. Undoubtedly the favourite was bathing in the 20x10 feet canvas pool which had been constructed on the upper deck. Filled with cool, clean salt water it was the scene of much merriment as grown men frolicked like children under the searing tropical sun. The men had been warned against overexposing their tender skin to the sun and protective headgear and canvas shoes were

issued. A large canvas awning was erected on the hurricane deck for protection from the sun and seats were provided for leisure use.

After the first few stormy days the ship was blessed with glorious weather, often unbroken for days on end. At night the decks were alive with men, sitting in pairs or in small groups chatting, smoking, gazing at the Southern Cross or listening to Captain Webster's phonograph. The discussions invariably centred on the war for the men were anxious to share in the action and determined to make their mark before the war was over. There was much earnest speculation about its length (the outcome was never questioned) and the consensus was that it would be all over by Christmas at the latest.<sup>46</sup> It was an optimism quite unsupported by events in Africa, setbacks of which the Dragoons were aware before they left Halifax.

Sundays were free days and the men engaged in a variety of leisurely activities. Many basked in the sun or cooled off in the pool, some read or wrote letters\* under the canvas canopy while others played quoits or sat watching the retinue of sharks, porpoises and flying

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\* Mail was collected twice during the voyage but there was no opportunity for forwarding to Canada until the ship reached Cape Town. By the end of the voyage over 6,000 letters had been franked at no charge with the distinctive post-mark.<sup>47</sup>

fish and some were even fortunate to spot a spouting whale. A number of ships were sighted during the voyage, many of which were involved with the war effort. One exception was a large sailing ship bound for Liverpool from India cruising along at twelve knots with all sails set.<sup>48</sup>

There were many moments of light relief on the trip, one in particular occurring while the "Milwaukee" stopped near the equator for engine repairs. While the ship was becalmed, eight pickets on stable duty decided to cool off in mid-Atlantic. Easy access to the water was provided by an open hatchway only three feet above the surface. As the swimmers slipped into the sea the spectators hanging over the rails were betting on who would be first around the ship. The duty officer wondering what the attraction was rushed over to the railing and on seeing the splashing swimmers immediately ordered them back to the ship. They were arrested, arraigned before the Commanding officer and given fatigue duty for a week. He had not regarded this as a very serious incident but had imposed the penalty to discourage others from emulating the swimmers because sharks were always present waiting for their daily carcass offering.<sup>49</sup>

The most exciting day of the voyage was Saturday 17th March, St. Patrick's Day. The patron saint blessed

the day with perfect weather and after a morning of regular routine, athletic events commenced at 2 p.m. amid great enthusiasm. The entries were numerous and the competition keen. Rivalry between the troops was vigorous but good-natured, and a victorious troop member was accorded a rousing acclamation by his colleagues. The program comprised a great variety of activities: boxing, wrestling, tug-of-war, three-legged races, egg-and-spoon events and the most demanding and exciting, the obstacle race. The contestants ran down the steps to the upper deck, then up a slippery board, across a narrow plank, through three barrels suspended in the air, onto a platform followed by a dive into the pool and back to the hurricane deck. All this was accomplished to the continuous and deafening cheering of the spectators. When the points were tallied at the end of competition A squadron was declared overall winners. By general acclamation it was a highly successful recognition of the Irish patron saint and Saint Patrick was liberally toasted at the canteen that evening.<sup>50</sup>

Another activity with considerable spectator appeal was the boxing bouts held frequently in the evenings. The contests provided an outlet for the pent-up martial energy of both pugilists and cheering onlookers. This type of contact contest was not confined only to the

troops; many men had brought their dogs along and canine combats had not only spectator appeal but also enabled some of the troops to satisfy their gambling passions.\* One encounter between a husky and a mastiff drew so many spectators and punters that latecomers had to find seats in the rigging.<sup>51</sup>

As the voyage drew to a close, a series of farewell dinner parties was held in the officers' mess. The officers gave Captain Webster, the ship's captain a dinner in appreciation of his services, and he reciprocated and hosted a farewell dinner on behalf of the Company. The saloon was decorated with flags and the group sat down to a splendid spread under a large photograph of Queen Victoria. Although the ship had been at sea for twenty-five days, the chef had garnered a varied supply of foodstuffs and provided an assortment of delicious dishes. The ship's band played for the occasion; providing pleasant dinner music and, after the toasts, accompaniment for a sing-song. A thoroughly enjoyable evening was finished off with games on deck and an open-air boxing match.<sup>53</sup>

The correspondent of The Montreal Herald on board ship wrote in laudatory terms about the officers as men

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\* The dogs didn't always restrict their aggression to their canine colleagues for one Yukon dog got among the chickens and killed three before he was hauled out by his owner.<sup>52</sup>

of integrity who were considerate and concerned about the welfare of the troops.\* The month at sea had witnessed the shaping of a healthy relationship between officers and men that was both cordial and respectful. Colonel Lessard would be met at Cape Town by a regiment in fine fighting trim, well-trained and equipped, fit and relaxed and bound together by firm bonds of comradeship.<sup>54</sup>

The troops had benefited immensely from the sea voyage: the sea air, regular hours and habits, good food, abundant sunshine and exercise had combined to produce a unit that was in excellent mental and physical condition.<sup>55</sup> They had not been adversely affected by the tropical heat which was an encouraging portent for the climate that lay ahead. The only serious cases requiring medical attention had been an incident of sunstroke and an infected eye. The medical officer had kept a careful watch on the health of the troops and he had conducted regular medical examinations throughout the voyage. All soldiers had been vaccinated against

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\* Not everyone was complimentary. Dr. L.V. Price of New Brunswick sailed in the "Milwaukee" to take up a medical position with the British Army in South Africa. He referred to the officers as "those darn Canadian rats. I hope every darn officer we brought out with two or three exceptions will die of fever and not have the honour of having their guts (will not say brains for they haven't any) blown out."<sup>56</sup>

small-pox. But because of a limited supply of anti-typhoid serum only the younger members were inoculated against that scourge of the veldt, enteric fever, since it was believed that the older men would be less likely to contract the disease.<sup>57</sup>

The men had thoroughly enjoyed the voyage and it was a healthy, happy and harmonious group that engaged in final preparations for disembarking at Cape Town.<sup>58</sup> When the unique configuration of Table Mountain started pushing above the south-eastern horizon, the "Milwaukee" had been at sea for twenty-eight days, and during that period had covered 6,491 knots at an average speed of 232 knots per day. The route had taken the ship south-east across the North Atlantic, passing within sight of towering Fogo Island in the Cape Verde group; and across the equator into the South Atlantic. The "Milwaukee" steamed past Ascension Island and then to the disappointment of the soldiers within sight of strategic St. Helena and on into the cool north-flowing Benguella current. The Dragoons had hoped to mail their letters at St. Helena for trans-shipment to a north-bound ship and to obtain the latest news of the war.

The troopship edged her way into Table Bay and at 4:45 p.m. on Wednesday, 21st March dropped anchor in the shadow of majestic Table Mountain. It was four weeks to the hour since the "Milwaukee" had moved away from

the Halifax dock. The harbour and the bay were crammed with transports bringing men and materiel to augment the British war effort, and the Canadians were welcomed with bursts of prolonged applause from the nearby ships. The news-starved Canadians learned of the latest developments in the war from newspapers brought aboard by British officers.

Ten transports were waiting ahead of the "Milwaukee" for dock space, and the prospect of further delays for men anxious for action was exasperating. Private Kingley decided to relieve the boredom of waiting by shooting seagulls with his revolver.<sup>59</sup> The Quartermaster immediately recalled all revolvers to prevent repetition of a potentially dangerous practice, and they were never reissued.\*

Since the "Milwaukee" was carrying horses she took precedence in the waiting line and on Saturday afternoon Captain Webster received orders to steam into the harbour. South-east gales frequently ravage the Cape and an untimely 'south-easter' forced the captain to postpone the long-awaited docking. Finally at 7 a.m. the next morning the "Milwaukee" tied up at the crowded dock in pelting rain. The reception was not especially

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\* They were not needed during the campaign because the men never got close enough to the enemy, and the 45 Colts only added unnecessary weight.

warm because of the early hour and the presence of so many troops and transports, but the Canadians did receive a generous showering of hospitality at a supper that evening organized by a local ladies guild.

The unloading of the gear was started immediately with the help of black stevedores, but the disembarkation of the horses was delayed by inclement weather. It was not until Wednesday afternoon that all horses and equipment had been cleared from the ship. To avoid the noisy trams the troops led their horses through a quiet part of the city to the Green Point Common where a military camp for 10,000 troops had been established. The Quartermaster had tents erected and the pickets ready to welcome the men and their mounts to the camp. The haggard horses soon recovered from the voyage and within hours of being on land most had partly regained their spritely gait. The month at sea had had reverse effects on man and mount: the horses would need a few days to recuperate fully while the men were bursting with health and energy, and having set foot on African soil were impatient to leave for the battlefront.<sup>60</sup>

NOTES

- 1 Montreal Star, 3 January 1900, p. 10.
- 2 Ibid., 4 January 1900, p. 12.
- 3 W. Sanford Evans, The Canadian Contingents and Canadian Imperialism (Toronto: The Publishers' Syndicate, 1901), p. 127.
- 4 Montreal Star, 5 January 1900, p. 6.
- 5 Public Archives of Canada, Sir Richard Turner Papers. MG 30, G 20, Diary entry, 8 January 1900.
- 6 Montreal Star, 10 January 1900, p. 9.
- 7 Ibid., 10 January 1900, p. 9.
- 8 Ibid., 16 January 1900, p. 12.
- 9 A. E. Hilder, Comrades All (Unpublished memoir in author's possession), p. 21.
- 10 Montreal Star, 17 January 1900, p. 8.
- 11 Hilder, Comrades All, p. 23.
- 12 Directorate of History. Department of National Defence. W. Anderson Papers. Undated letter.
- 13 Hilder, Comrades All, p. 24.
- 14 Ibid., p. 26.
- 15 Ibid., p. 26.
- 16 Montreal Star, 5 February 1900, p. 12.
- 17 Hilder, Comrades All, p. 25.
- 18 Montreal Star, 22 January 1900, p. 8.
- 19 Hilder, Comrades All, p. 27.
- 20 Montreal Star, 7 February 1900, p. 12.
- 21 Ibid., 19 February 1900, p. 10.

- 22 Morton, Otter, p. 193.
- 23 Montreal Star, 5 May 1900, p. 12.
- 24 Anderson to Father, 17 March 1900.
- 25 Montreal Star, 22-February 1900, p. 12.
- 26 Ibid., p. 12.
- 27 The Morning Chronicle, Halifax, 30 April 1900, p. 1.
- 28 Ibid., p. 1.
- 29 Montreal Star, 11 January 1900, p. 6.
- 30 Public Archives of Canada, J. B. Heron Papers, MG 30, E 355. Letter to Sallie, 20 February 1900.
- 31 Supplementary Report, Appendix C.
- 32 Militia Order, No. 2, 3 January 1900.
- 33 Montreal Star, 13 February 1900, p. 1.
- 34 Anderson to Father, 17 March 1900.
- 35 Montreal Star, 5 May 1900, p. 7.
- 36 Hilder, Comrades All, p. 29.
- 37 Chronicle, 2 May 1900, p. 1.
- 38 Hilder, Comrades All, p. 30.
- 39 Montreal Star, 1 May 1900, p. 7.
- 40 Supplementary Report, Appendix E (1).
- 41 Heron to Aunts, 28 February 1900.
- 42 Hilder, Comrades All, p. 30.
- 43 Montreal Star, 1 May, p. 7.
- 44 Anderson to Father, 17 March 1900.
- 45 Chronicle, 2 May 1900, p. 1.
- 46 Anderson to Father, 17 March 1900.

- 47 Montreal Star, 5 May 1900, p. 7.
- 48 Chronicle, 2 May 1900, p. 1.
- 49 Hilder, Comrades All, p. 29.
- 50 Montreal Herald, 5 May 1900, p. 11.
- 51 Hilder, Comrades All, p. 30.
- 52 Chronicle, 30 April 1900, p. 1.
- 53 Ibid., 2 May 1900, p. 1.
- 54 Montreal Herald, 5 May 1900, p. 11.
- 55 Montreal Star, 5 May 1900, p. 7.
- 56 Lev to Mother, 9 April 1900. Letter in possession of Mr. C. R. McGuire of the Canadian Postal Museum in Ottawa.
- 57 Supplementary Report, Appendix C (A).
- 58 Anderson to Father, 26 March 1900.
- 59 Hilder, Comrades All, p. 32.
- 60 Anderson to Father, 26 March 1900.

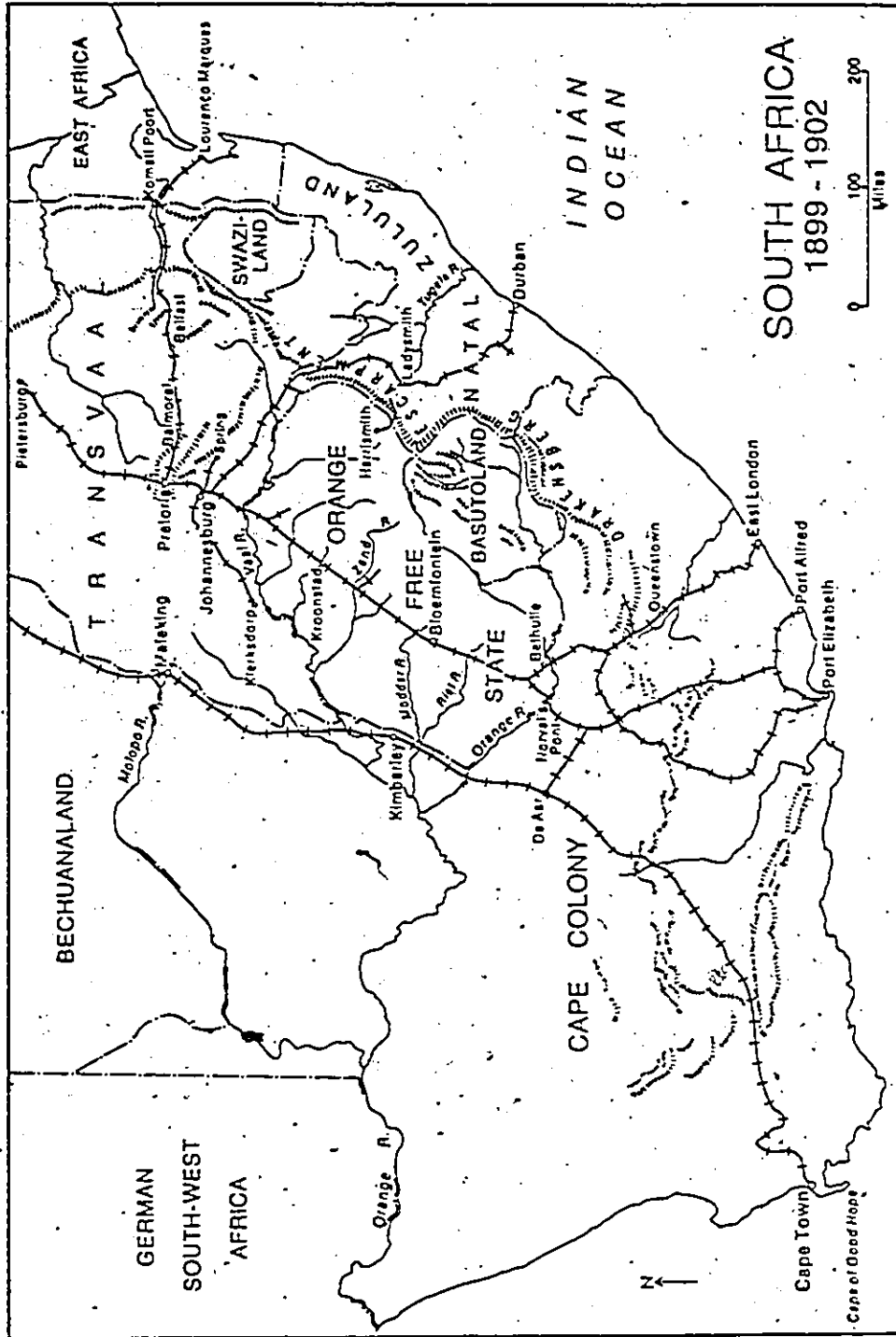
CHAPTER III - TO THE FRONT

Cape Town was the chief base of British operations in South Africa. Transports were arriving around the clock and disgorging their cargoes of men, material and animals. Khaki-clad troops mixed with local Malays, Africans, Whites and Mulattos giving a kaleidoscopic effect to an already cosmopolitan population. The Dragons had little time to savour the sights and scenery of Cape Town; a busy routine permitted only the odd stroll through downtown streets at night or on Sunday afternoon. The arrival of the Royal Canadian Dragons at the southern tip of Africa raises the question of why 371 individuals should volunteer for service on a distant continent.\* Once the Dragons reached Cape Town they started writing home and many continued writing throughout the campaign. From the letters, diaries and memoirs that have survived emerge some of their motives for enlisting to fight in South Africa.

Albert Hilder was a British-born farmhand residing in Manitoba at the outbreak of the war. He and his colleagues in the 2nd troop of B squadron were from the towns and villages of rural Manitoba, and they had had

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\* Refer to the Appendix for a statistical analysis of the socio-economic composition of the Royal Canadian Dragons. See Appendix VIII.



**SOUTH AFRICA**  
1899 - 1902

only a modicum of military training. They appear to have enlisted for reasons of adventure as Hilder later wrote in his memoirs: "we little knew what was in store for us, carefree as we were, all looking for adventure."<sup>1</sup>

A mixture of motives, spiced with bravado, emerge from stowaway Anderson's letters to his family. Commercial concerns appear to have been prominent, for on board ship he expressed the hope that business opportunities might open up in South Africa, and during the campaign he often wrote home of the opportunities for starting a bicycle business in Johannesburg. A note of national pride can be detected in his letters when he writes that the ~~Canadians~~ were making a name for themselves and were being rushed to the front because of their martial reputations. His claim that Boers would vanish when the Canadians were reported to be in the vicinity is however, difficult to substantiate. A factor that seems more prominent than any other is the search for adventure and glory. Repeatedly he writes of his anxiety to get into the "scrap" before the war is over, and of his desire for medals and bars from the Queen.<sup>2</sup>

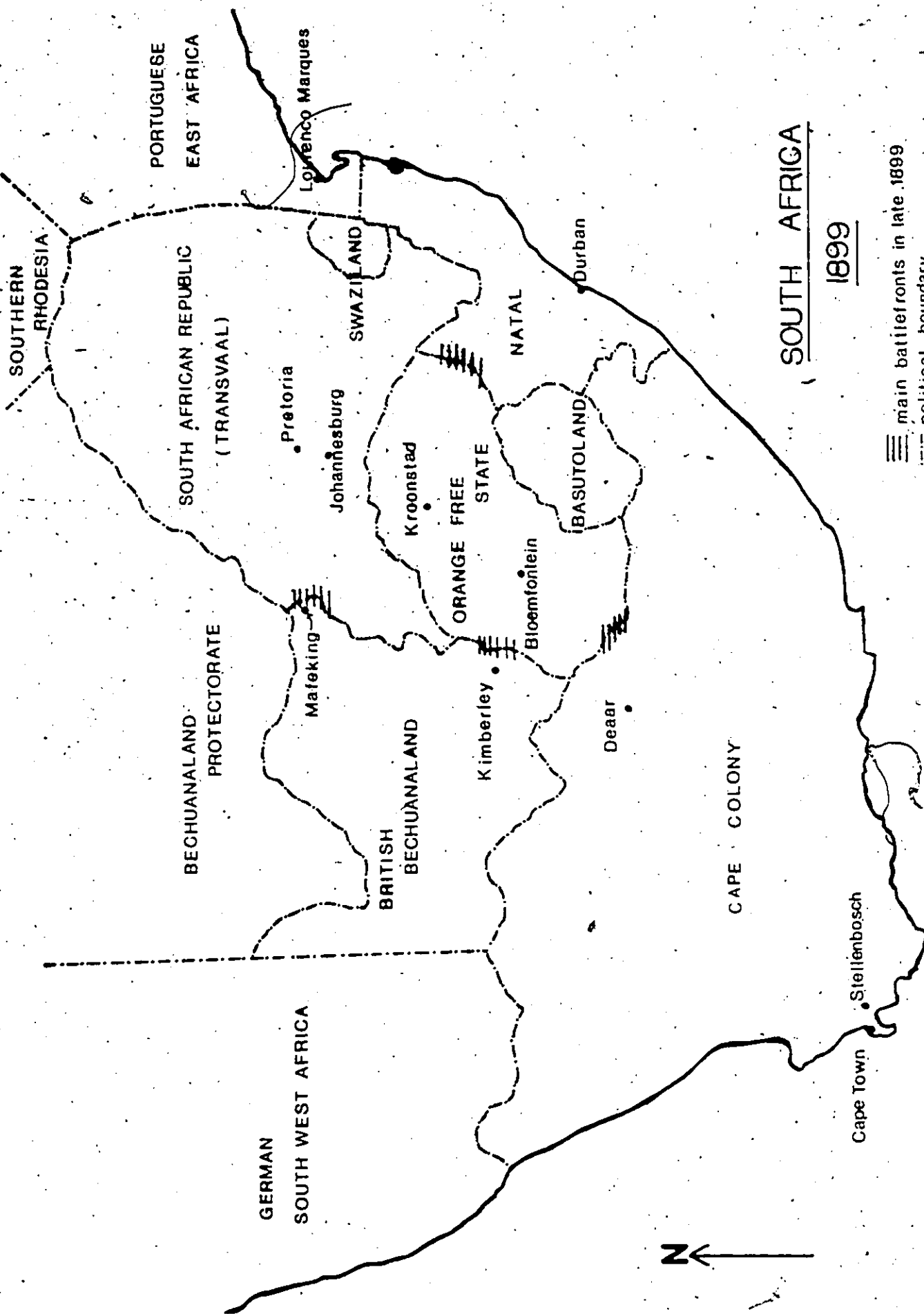
Private J.B. Heron expressed similar views about the desire to get involved in the war before it was over. In his first letter from South Africa he wrote that not even the hospital ships leaving Cape Town

loaded with the sick and wounded could diminish the lust for action.<sup>3</sup> Later on in the campaign he wrote candidly that "I didn't come down here to work but to have a good time."<sup>4</sup>

The desire for adventure is also reflected in the correspondence of Private George Smith of A Squadron. Always anxious for action, he protested that there was "no fun" in the Boers hit and run type of fighting.<sup>5</sup> Both Smith and Lieutenant Turner referred to the exciting opportunities for military action that were developing in China and the possibility of accumulating more medals.<sup>6</sup>

The individual motives for participation in the conflict in southern Africa were undoubtedly mixed and varied. Based on the extant documentary material of the Dragoons it appears that enlistment was inspired by an anticipation of excitement on a strange continent, a sense of adventure and a desire for glory. However, also underlying all these factors was a sincere commitment to Queen Victoria herself.

The conflict between the Boer and British forces in South Africa gradually settled around four main battlefronts: Northern Natal, the Orange River, Kimberley, and the Western Transvaal. The Boers made the first decisive movements of the war and they crossed over into British territory on all four fronts. They



PORTUGUESE  
EAST AFRICA

Loiçenco Marques

SOUTHERN  
RHODESIA

SOUTH AFRICAN REPUBLIC  
(TRANSVAAL)

SWAZILAND

Pretoria

Johannesburg

NATAL

Durban

Kroonstad

ORANGE FREE  
STATE

BASUTOLAND

BECHUANALAND  
PROTECTORATE

Mafeking

Bloemfontein

BRITISH  
BECHUANALAND

Kimberley

Dear

CAPE COLONY

GERMAN  
SOUTH WEST AFRICA

Stellenbosch

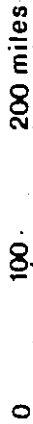
Cape Town

SOUTH AFRICA

1899

main battlefronts in late 1899

political boundary



might have achieved even greater success had many valuable men not been bogged down in futile sieges at Ladysmith, Kimberley and Mafeking. The climax of the initial Boer successes came in the second week of December, 1899 when they inflicted three major defeats on the British. After "Black Week" General Sir Redvers Buller was replaced as Commander-in-Chief in South Africa by Field-Marshal Lord Roberts with Lord Kitchener as his Chief of Staff.

Roberts arrived in Cape Town on the 10th of January, 1900 and set about implementing his strategy. He decided against reinforcing Buller's force in Natal and instead directed his main force along the railway to the western front.<sup>7</sup> General French's mounted troops relieved Kimberley on the 15th of February and then hounded General Cronje's force across the western Free State plains until the Boers dug in along the banks of the Modder river. After a bitter ten day siege, in which the Canadian infantry participated, Cronje finally capitulated on Majuba Day, the 27th of February, 1900. The Battle of Paardeberg, as the siege was known, proved to be a major turning point in the war and it signalled the beginning of British ascendancy in the conflict. One day later Ladysmith in Natal was relieved, and on the 13th of March Roberts entered Bloemfontein the capital of the Orange Free State. President Steyn

moved his capital north to Kroonstad and a new phase of the war was ushered in --- a more mobile commando war under the mercurial General de Wet.

At the outbreak of the war the Boers could mobilize only 35,000 men. The only permanent units were the Transvaal police (Zarps) and the artillery, and the remainder were able-bodied burghers\* called up in each district and formed into commandos under an elected commandant. From the outset, however, the Boers had a number of major advantages.

Mobility was a decisive factor in the opening rounds of the war. The Boers were excellent horsemen, and being largely a mounted force they were able to launch swift surprise attacks and rapid retreats. They avoided hand-to-hand fighting, frontal assaults and cavalry charges and their elusiveness frustrated the British forces. They had no supply problems because they were not dependent on a cumbersome transportation system, and they could live off the land.

Boer firepower was another decisive asset. They were excellent marksmen and their German mausers were accurate up to a mile, permitting effective sniping.

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\* Boer citizens.

In addition, they had machine-guns and powerful German artillery pieces.

The Boers had an intimate knowledge of the terrain and the climate, and coupled with a native ability at camouflage this gave them a crucial advantage over the largely inexperienced British soldiers. They were able to use rocky kopjes\* to great effect and when forced into fighting on the open veld they proved masters in the use of trenches and barbed wire. The Boers also had a very effective intelligence system.

A long attachment to the soil and a rugged lifestyle had bred qualities such as independence, individualism and initiative that were to prove invaluable in the type of warfare that evolved in South Africa in 1899. But above all there was a determination to survive that was derived from 250 years of carving out an independent existence at the southern tip of Africa. A patriotic fervour that suffused all elements of Boer life was as powerful a weapon as any other in the Boer arsenal.

The British had 13,000 troops in South Africa at the outbreak of the war, but this had doubled within a few months with the arrival of reinforcements from India.\*\*

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\* Rocky outcrops or small hills.

\*\* The British reinforcements increased steadily throughout the war and exceeded Boer forces by a ratio of at least 5:1.

These troops were dispersed along all four fronts with the greatest concentration in Natal. As the unorthodox Boer methods shaped their success so was the traditional orthodoxy of the British military system the cause of their downfall.

The initial reliance of the British on infantry and anachronistic infantry tactics facilitated the Boer advances. British infantry tactics had undergone little change in the 19th century and the line formations used in 1899 were reminiscent of the Plains of Abraham and Waterloo. Native tribes had been easy to bring down with volleys of rifle fire from British soldiers in lines, but this formation was suicidal on the open veld and rocky kopjes in the face of accurate Boer marksmen. The British infantryman's dependence on his bayonet and his lack of initiative and blind reliance on his officer's orders further reduced his effectiveness. The rigidity and conformity of the British military system was quite unsuited to the new brand of warfare that was developing in South Africa at the turn of the century. In addition, the British officers were inadequately trained to counter an ingenious and resourceful enemy such as the Boers. British troops were not prepared in the art of making and taking cover and in the construction of trenches. Indeed there was a tradition of avoiding cover because it was unmanly!

The British mounted army was also bound by traditional tactics that were unsuited to the rugged environment and to Boer methods of warfare. Full-blooded cavalry charges might have been effective against mounted tribesmen, but they were futile against an enemy that melted away into the hills. Inattention to mobile mounted units also hampered the British intelligence system.

Dependence on the railways for supplying the army further restrained British mobility. Long lines of communication also reduced the number of fighting men on the frontline.

The arrival of Roberts and Kitchener in January, 1900 resulted in a major change in British tactics. Mobility became a prime aim, and the emphasis in recruitment shifted from infantry to mounted men. The limited transportation system was diversified and wagon trains pulled by mules or oxen increased the flexibility of the British army.

When the RCD's landed at Cape Town at the end of March, 1900, the British under Roberts and Kitchener had reversed the spectacular successes of the Boers. Roberts had captured Bloemfontein, the Orange Free State capital, and Buller had at last broken the Boer stranglehold on Natal. The shape of the conflict had also changed as Boer strategy shifted to the commando system

perfected by De Wet and as the British freed themselves from dependence on the railway and relied increasingly on mounted infantry. It was to assist in this new mobile phase of the war that the Royal Canadian Dragoons had been recruited.

When the Dragoons arrived in Cape Town they were assigned to a camp located on a gray, sandy plain close to the ocean and less than two miles from the docks. It was rather incongruously named Green Point. The relentless south-easter kept the sand in perpetual motion; it found its way into the beds, the food, and clothing and to protect their eyes some soldiers even resorted to wearing goggles! Known to the locals as the 'Cape Doctor' because it blows all the germs out into the Atlantic, the south-easter brought nothing but hardship and misery to the Dragoons; it had delayed the docking of the 'Milwaukee' and now it made camp life thoroughly unpleasant. However, not even the wind and dust could diminish the enjoyment of fresh food. The meat, vegetables, fruit and bread were a welcome change from the monotony that characterised the last week's diet on board ship.<sup>8</sup> A shortage of water was a reality of South African life that the men were immediately exposed to and rationed water provided a grim portent of the rigours that lay ahead.

The Green Point camp was a scene of zealous activity as 4,000 troops prepared for their departure to the front. The Canadians were busy checking and packing their equipment, while the ring of anvils indicated that the artificers were busy shoeing six hundred horses in preparation for the sun-baked African veld. "Gat" Howard\* had joined the regiment in Cape Town, and he immediately set about selecting men for his Maxim gun crew. While the remainder of the regiment were engaged in strenuous conditioning marches, "Gat" drilled his novice crew in the art of handling the Maxim. On Sunday the 1st of April, 1900 a non-denominational church service was held on the parade ground and the following day the regiment was inspected by the Base Commander. He declared himself highly satisfied with the efficiency and appearance of the men and horses.

Two minor injuries were sustained during the stay at base camp but neither was serious enough to prevent the men from accompanying the regiment to the front. Some Argentinian remounts had replaced the shipboard casualties and one man dislocated an elbow when thrown from a Pampas bronco and another suffered broken ribs

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\* A.L. Howard was an American officer and served with the Canadian forces in the North-west Rebellion of 1885. He was in charge of the Gatling gun, hence his nickname "Gat". He stayed on in Canada and established a munitions factory at Brownsburg, Quebec.

from a kick. Not all members would be leaving Cape Town for the front. Private Ramsay had fallen down a gangway while the ship was at anchor in the bay and as a consequence of incorrect diagnosis and inadequate medical treatment he succumbed to peritonitis. B Squadron turned out en masse to pay their last respects at his funeral in a local cemetery.<sup>9</sup>

Adjacent to the Green Point camp was a prisoner of war compound which housed the Boer prisoners captured at Paardeberg. The 'Milwaukee' now restocked with provisions was waiting in the harbour to transport them to Saint Helena. One hundred and fifty members of the regiment had been selected to escort the Boers to the ship; some lined the route with bayonets drawn while others accompanied the prisoners on horseback. It was a double ignominy for the submissive group that trudged down to the docks with bundled belongings on their backs; they had surrendered to Canadian bayonets at Paardeberg and now they walked a gauntlet of Canadian bayonets as they left their motherland.<sup>\*10</sup>

British planning called for holding the Dragoons in Cape Town for a month of basic training. But Colonel Lessard, who had arrived in Cape Town with the first

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\* General Cronje and his men were accompanied by a Canadian doctor, Dr. Leverett Price of Sussex, New Brunswick.

contingent, was impatient to move his men into action. When he heard of the month's training in Halifax he immediately began to lobby for an earlier departure. A former General Officer Commanding the Canadian Militia, Major-General Ivor Herbert, was stationed in Cape Town and Lessard was able to arrange for the Dragoons to leave for the front after only a week in Cape Town. When the early departure was announced, word spread through the regiment that because the Canadians had established such a formidable reputation at Paardeberg they were being rushed to the front!<sup>11</sup>

The regiment left camp at midday on the 4th of April and passed through Cape Town and then headed east across the sandy Cape Flats to Stellenbosch, about thirty miles distant. The troops slept out in the open and then continued their march next morning, breaking the monotony by surreptitiously robbing orchards and vineyards en route. The reversed seasons meant that it was late summer at the Cape and grapes, quinces, figs, peaches and watermelons were in plentiful supply. Leading tired horses a weary group of men wound their way into the picturesque village of Stellenbosch just as the sun was setting over distant Table Mountain.

Stellenbosch was one of the earliest European settlements at the Cape; it had retained its Dutch character and its population was overwhelmingly Afrikaans.

Located in a fertile valley with the jagged Jonkershoek mountains as a backdrop, it was a major wine centre. Neat streets were flanked by shady oaks and cosy cottages and clear mountain water coursed along adjacent furrows. William Anderson was struck by the similarity of the trees to those of his native New Brunswick, particularly the pines that flourished in the warm climate and the oak that resembled the maple.<sup>12</sup> The sojourn at Stellenbosch was a very pleasant interlude for the troops and never again on the campaign would they enjoy the abundant fruit and water and similar pleasant surroundings.

The soldiers soon discovered that grapes were the only cheap commodity. Local vendors were quick to realize that because of the demand created by the numerous troops there was virtually no limit to what the market would bear. Not only were prices high but young Canadians were no match for unscrupulous money-changers when exchanging their sterling pay for South African currency. It was not only the locals but also the Massey-Harris Agency that engaged in questionable exchange practices. Some measure of retaliation followed when those who still had Canadian money discovered that unwitting merchants in Stellenbosch assumed that because of the queen's head their dollars were a type of sterling.<sup>13</sup>

Cape farmers were reluctant to sell their horses and it was decided to import horses from England, Australia

and the Argentine. After landing at Cape Town the horses were transferred to the remounts centre at Stellenbosch where they were broken in and trained. The Canadian officers were busy seeking out fresh mounts to replace the unfit horses before commencing the long journey northwards. It was also decided to use mules to pull the transports because they were hardier and required less care than the heavy draught horses.

The pleasant stay in Stellenbosch was shortlived; within days Colonel Lessard was ordered to prepare the regiment for departure to the front. As the horses of B Squadron were in better shape they entrained first and A Squadron and Colonel Lessard and his staff followed a day later. It would be three weeks before the regiment would be reunited in Bloemfontein. Accommodation on the trains was crowded and although the compartments only had berths for six passengers eight men were assigned to each compartment.<sup>14</sup> They were further aware of their spartan existence when they discovered they were on standard rations which comprised 'hard tack'\* and canned beef and sometimes tea or coffee.

The train route passed through some of the most attractive countryside in South Africa: through acres of trellised vineyards, alongside sparkling rivers, past

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\* Hard-baked biscuits.

glistening Paarl Rock and through verdant valleys and tortuous mountain passes. A dramatic change of scenery confronted the troops as the straining locomotives emerged from the Hex River valley - stretching for endless miles was the flat, barren landscape of the Karoo. Mile after mile across the arid terrain the troop trains snaked northwards belching trails of silver-grey smoke. Nothing but the odd kopje broke the monotony of the dreary wastes of sand and scrub. The farmers among the troops were unanimous that the whole Karoo wasn't worth one good Canadian farm. The men passed the time playing cards or in endless talk speculating about the war and wishing the tedious trip would end.<sup>15</sup>

Although crowded in their compartments, the men were more comfortable than the horses in the crude boxcars, who were severely buffeted by the uneven stopping and starting of the trains. The Cape line was the main supply route to the western front and frequent stops were necessary to allow trains to pass on their way south to Cape Town. Usually the trains would wait at desolate sidings consisting of a handful of corrugated iron buildings but occasionally they would pull in at stations where the men could supplement their austere rations at canteens. The trains were often slowed down by damage

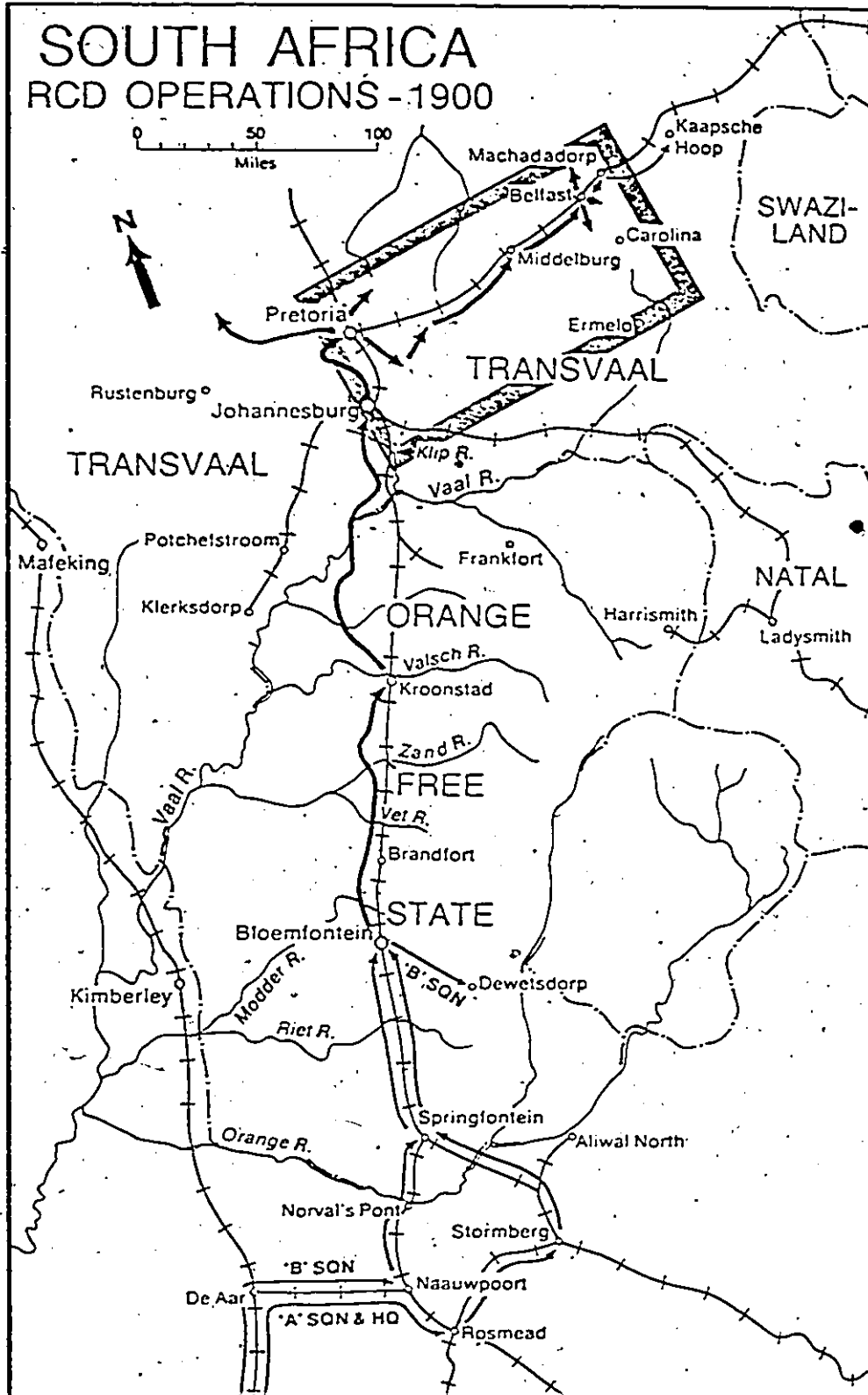
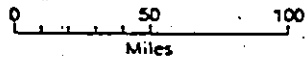
to the lines inflicted by Cape rebels,\* and as a precaution every bridge was guarded by British sentries. To relieve the unending boredom the sentries would hold up signs reading "Papers please" and the passing Canadians dropped old newspapers out to help them pass the hours.<sup>16</sup>

B Squadron changed trains at De Aar, a major railway junction, and travelled eastwards to the central war zone reaching Norval's Pont on the Orange River at midnight on Tuesday the 10th of April where they were ordered to detrain. Across the sluggish, turbid Orange River lay the Orange Free State, and although the capital, Bloemfontein, had surrendered to Lord Roberts a month earlier there were many Boers in the countryside who refused to give up their battle for self-determination. To delay the British advance they had blown up the bridge across the Orange River and the Dragoons were forced to cross over on a pontoon bridge constructed by the Royal Engineers. The mules had great difficulty hauling the heavily laden transport wagons up the steep, sandy banks of the river and the troops had to down their equipment and help push. Once on the flat Free State veld the sweating column of men and animals moved off in the direction of Springfontein, a railway junction twenty-

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\* Cape Afrikaners who were sympathetic to the cause of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, and who gave active support to the republics.

# SOUTH AFRICA RCD OPERATIONS - 1900



five miles to the north. They were in enemy country and exercised extreme caution as they moved across the kopje-studded plains. It was a difficult march, executed partly at night: no lights were permitted and the wagon-train stumbled follow-my-leader fashion over the rough veld. A weary group of men trudged into the large British base at Springfontein at noon and set up camp.

The Orange Free State was an area of active opposition and B squadron was given its initial taste of patrolling and scouting. The first contact between Dragoon and Boer occurred on one of these missions when Sergeant McLeod and a small group of scouts captured two Boers, sixteen head of cattle and a quantity of rifles and ammunition. Having made contact with the enemy B squadron was anxious to be moved into the front line.<sup>17</sup> It was with a certain amount of exasperation that they learned that their next chore was to escort a thousand mules north along the railway line to Bloemfontein.

Meanwhile A squadron reached De Aar. It was then that Colonel Lessard learned from the station-master that B squadron had been ordered on a separate expedition. He was bitterly disappointed to discover that he was to lose half his command. After departing from De Aar A squadron followed a more circuitous route than B squadron to the Orange River. The journey was broken

frequently to water and feed the horses. While strolling along the platform at Burghersdorp Colonel Lessard found himself face to face with Lord Kitchener, Chief of Staff to Lord Roberts. When asked if he had anything to report Lessard expressed his disappointment at the loss of B squadron. Kitchener ordered his staff officer to recall the squadron and assured Lessard that his errant men would be waiting further along the line.<sup>18</sup> The men of A squadron finally reached the Orange River opposite Bethulie where the customary impasse awaited them --- the railway bridge had been destroyed by a Boer commando. The Royal Engineers had constructed a pontoon and the Canadians crossed over at noon after devoting the morning to swimming and washing in the river. The destruction of railway lines and bridges prevented the British from using the railway network as a supply line and forced them to rely on oxen and wagon trains in the Orange Free State. Guarding a mile-long convoy of wagons amidst the choking dust and cacophony of braying animals and cursing native drivers was not a Canadian's idea of war, however essential the supply trains were to the war effort.<sup>19</sup> Through Good Friday the men of A squadron plodded along escorting the slow-moving wagon train in the direction of Springfontein. They reached the town on the following day to find B squadron waiting in camp as Kitchener had promised.

The reunion was shortlived for B squadron was ordered off the next day to assist in the escorting of the mules and the supply column to Bloemfontein. The Dragoons were about to receive their baptism to the vagaries of southern Africa's weather. The skies had clouded over by morning and when the convoy moved out of camp a steady downpour had commenced. Cursing as they heaved and shoved the wagons out of the glutinous mud all day long, they struggled northwards in streaming rain alongside a railway rendered useless by the Boers. They were forced to camp in a morass that night and as it was too wet and cold to erect the tents canvas sheets stretched between the wagons served as covers for the sodden soldiers. Spirits had been dampened but the ardour and determination to reach the fighting zone around Bloemfontein was undiminished.<sup>20</sup> Keeping dry and pulling wagons out of the mud were not the only tribulations to test the men, for further along the route they encountered a British unit also herding mules. Inadequate control resulted in the animals becoming excited and stampeding and soon the veld was covered with straying mules. Fortunately, most of them were recovered by morning.<sup>21</sup>

By the 20th of April B squadron had reached the farm of President Steyn on the southern outskirts of Bloemfontein and on the following day they rode into the capital. The men were anxious to meet up with their

compatriots of the first contingent,\* but the Dragoons had hardly dismounted when they were ordered to leave immediately for Springfield east of the capital to join Colonel Alderson's 1st Mounted Infantry Corps.

In the meantime A squadron was forging north from Springfontein in the monotonous role of escort to a three mile convoy of supplies, mules and horses. When they reached the southern outskirts of Bloemfontein they set up camp at Lawton's Farm where the squadron was inspected by General Hutton.\*\* He expressed his satisfaction with the fitness of the men and horses, and stated how pleased he was to have the Canadians in his Mounted Infantry Brigade for the march to Pretoria.<sup>22</sup> Orders were issued to Colonel Lessard to march his men through Bloemfontein to Fisher's Farm six miles north of the capital. There they joined five thousand troops encamped prior to the push north. On the 26th of April at 3 p.m. A squadron was inspected by Field Marshal Lord Roberts. He was accompanied by his wife and daughter, his aide-de-camp Colonel Septimus Denison of Toronto, and General Hutton.

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\* The Royal Canadian Regiment had marched into Bloemfontein on the 15th of March. By the time B squadron arrived they were in action east of the town.

\*\* Hutton had been appointed to a position in the British Army in South Africa after his dismissal as General Officer Commanding the Canadian Militia.

After the march past Lord Roberts complimented the squadron on its drill and appearance, expressing pride in having such fine men under his command and he looked forward to seeing them in action. He also expressed confidence that the Dragoons would sustain the reputation already won by the Canadians at Paardeberg. The officers were then presented personally to Lord Roberts by General Hutton.<sup>23</sup>

The Dragoons of A squadron spent a week at Fisher's Farm awaiting Lord Roberts' decision to commence the march north to Pretoria. The men were kept occupied in a variety of camp duties: horses had to be groomed, forage and water transported by ox team from town, and trenches and outpost shelters had to be constructed. These were tedious tasks for men within earshot of the reverberations of the big guns from the east and envious of their colleagues locked in combat south-east of the capital. An element of excitement was introduced by regular outpost duties and reconnaissance patrols. Invariably a laggard got lost, but fortunately it was friendly territory and the sheepish soldier would wander in to camp the following morning. It was an error in judgment that they could not afford to repeat in less friendly territory to the north.<sup>24</sup>

The highlight of the stay at Fisher's Farm was the arrival of the first delivery of mail from Canada.

Excited men sat around the camp reading and rereading letters from relatives and friends and poring over Canadian newspapers for news of the war.<sup>25</sup> Although right at the front the soldiers were oblivious of developments in the conflict for reasons of military security.

After the defeat at Paardeberg and the capture of Bloemfontein the Boers lost their initiative in the Free State. However, led by the resourceful and astute Christiaan De Wet the Boers had made a spirited recovery in the south-eastern corner of the state. Roberts had formulated a plan to clear the Boer forces from this area and B squadron was assigned a role in the operation. Alderson's force including B squadron was to push the Boers south-east to Dewetsdorp while another British unit approaching from the south was to relieve the beleaguered garrison at Jammersdrift near Wepener and force the enemy north and then the cavalry would hasten east past Thabanchu and cut the Boers off as they headed north along the Basutoland border.<sup>26</sup> If executed according to plan it could be a repetition of Paardeberg, where French's cavalry had cut off the Boer wagon trail.

The 1st Mounted Infantry Corps under Alderson moved out of the Springfield camp on Sunday morning the 22nd of April with B squadron on the extreme right, and headed off down the road to Dewetsdorp. Along

the main route between Bloemfontein and Dewetsdorp lay Leeukop, a large hump jutting out of the veld with a long ridge running south-west. The Boer commander in the area, Field-Cornet Lemmer decided to stall the British advance at this point and he positioned one thousand men, three field guns and two pom-poms\* on Leeukop. Early in the afternoon Alderson commenced the attack on the mountain stronghold with an artillery barrage.

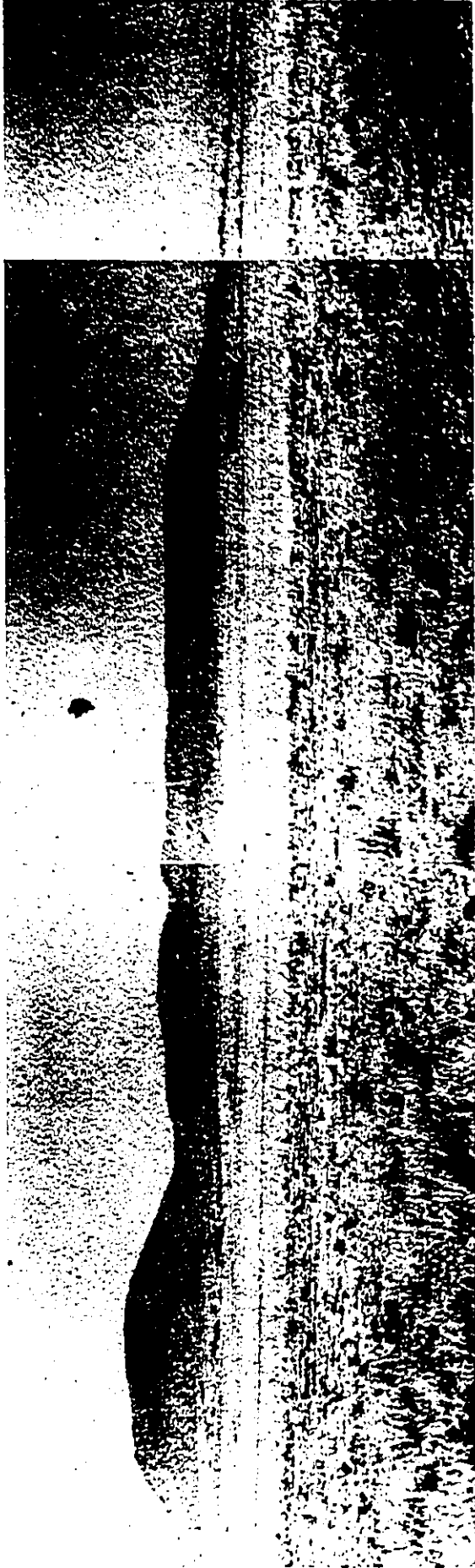
At 3 p.m. Colonel Alderson ordered Major Williams to find a crossing over a small stream and to investigate a lone farm-house flying a white flag.<sup>27</sup> Williams chose Lieutenant Van Straubenzie's first troop for the mission, and after finding the ford they pushed on to the house flying the flag.\*\* Dismounting at a safe distance they approached in extended order to search the apparently vacant buildings. At five hundred yards there was a volley of fire from the concealed enemy and the Canadians dropped to the ground and sought cover. It was a serious situation for they were pinned down by accurate rifle fire and dared not expose themselves. Lieutenant Van Straubenzie managed to get a message back to Major Williams who brought

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\*. 37mm. Maxim automatic machine gun.

\*\* There are two views regarding the flag:

1. The Canadians were aware of the deceitful practice and were cautious.<sup>28</sup>
2. The Canadians were still novices and believed that the flag signified an absence of danger.<sup>29</sup>



LEEUKOP FROM THE NORTH-WEST

2

up the other three troops to relieve the beleaguered first troop. Lieutenant Young's troop moved forward and drew the fire away from the first troop enabling them to get back to their horses and ride off.<sup>30</sup>

The men had barely regrouped in troop formation when they were subjected to shell fire. An error in their early training almost caused disaster. The preparation in Halifax had involved close order grouping and the men had not been trained to ride in extended order. The shells were falling dangerously close when a British officer rode up and called out frantically to Major Williams: "Extend your men, Sir!" The order was given immediately and the men galloped off one hundred feet apart, and regrouped in troops outside the range of fire. The Canadians had learned an important lesson and never again would they ride in close order when under fire.<sup>31</sup>

The squadron had escaped without any casualties in their baptism of fire but had lost three horses. Lieutenant Straubenzie had a remarkable escape when his horse was shot between the neck and shoulder and collapsed under him.\* The men had passed their first test under fire successfully and although novices they had performed creditably in a difficult situation, and had earned the

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\* There is dispute as to whether this much-quoted incident occurred while approaching the farmhouse or while remounting to get away.

compliments of Colonel Alderson and General French.<sup>32</sup>

The Canadians had learned two important lessons from the encounter: never to trust the white flag and always to ride in extended order.

Meanwhile the battle of Leeukop continued until evening as an artillery duel and by dark the British had secured the flanks and pinned Lemmer and his men down on the prominence. The Canadians camped in the open that night, well satisfied with their first experience on the firing line. All tents had been left in Bloemfontein because they were too heavy and cumbersome to carry on patrol, and it was to be many months before the men again slept under cover. Reveille sounded at 5:30 a.m. next day and the troops awoke to find Leeukop deserted --- the Boers had slipped away during the night! It was a tactic the Canadians would encounter frequently in the months ahead and it always caused frustration and annoyance; they couldn't understand why an enemy would refuse to fight it out. Reared in the British military tradition the Canadians could not appreciate the Boer approach: it was crucial for them to conserve men and material, whereas the British were often guilty of sacrificing men\* and wasting material. If there was any

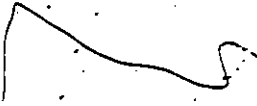
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\* Succinctly summed up in the aphorism: "The Boers fought to live, while the British fought to die!"

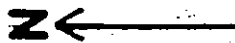
risk of encirclement the Boers would commence a methodical retreat and withdraw their slower vehicles during the fight, leaving sufficient men up front to delay the British advance and having done so then disappear under cover of dark. So effective was this ploy that the British seldom had an accurate estimate of the number of Boer combatants in a given battle.<sup>33</sup>

Later that morning members of B Squadron returned to the house where they found one Boer still hiding. He was taken into custody for court-martial and the house was then set alight. It had only partially burned when it exploded showering stone, mortar and timber over a wide area. It had obviously been used as a secret arsenal and this to the angry Dragoons was further justification for the burning. The British Commander had approved the looting and burning of farms where white flag deceit had been practised and the implementation of the order saw a number of farms reduced to smoking ruins.<sup>34</sup> Van Straubenzie's dead horse was discovered but it had been stripped of all his kit and saddlery.<sup>35</sup>

In the afternoon the corps continued its advance towards Dewetsdorp. The Canadians did some reconnaissance work but played no prominent part in forcing the enemy from positions along the route. The following day the Dragoons were on escort duty acting as right flank guard to the ammunition column, and had no part in driving the



BLOEMFONTEIN



● THABANCHU

▲ THABANCHU MOUNTAIN

▲ LEEUKOP MOUNTAIN

SOUTH-EASTERN

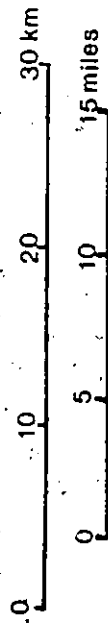
ORANGE FREE STATE

----- political boundary

Dewetsdorp

SCALE

1 : 250,000

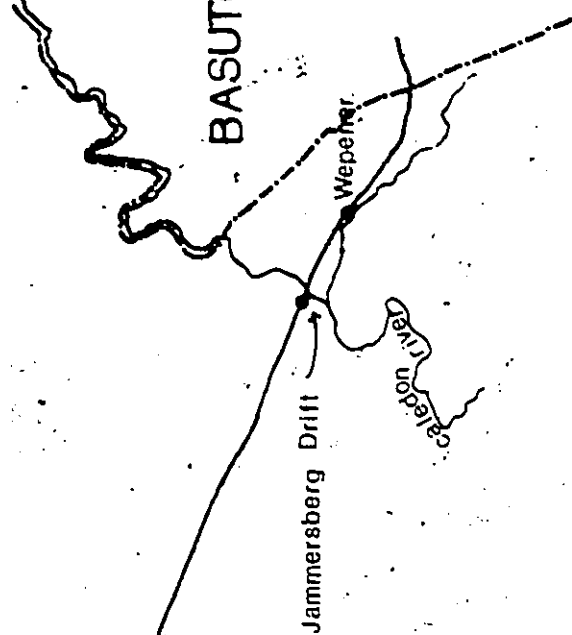


Jammersberg Drift

Wepeher

Caledon River

BASUTOLAND



remnants of Lemmer's force from the kopje strongholds and opening the road to Dewetsdorp. The force bivouacked near Dewetsdorp that night but fear of a Boer counter-attack resulted in the soldiers maintaining an all-night vigil.

The mission was completed when Generals French and Rundle's divisions joined forces on the 25th of April near Dewetsdorp and General Brabant's Colonial Division\* raised the siege at Jammersdrift, twenty-two miles down the road near Wepener. The operation was only a partial success, for although it had given the British control of the area it had failed to trap De Wet's force.<sup>36</sup> Many more Canadians would spend much time in the months ahead involved in the same futile task of trying to corner the wily Boer general.

The Dragoons were rewarded for their sleepless night and a tiring day searching farms when they were assigned a prosperous farm with an extensive orchard as their campsite.<sup>37</sup>

The capture of Dewetsdorp allowed Alderson's corps to return to Bloemfontein\*\* and the march commenced on the 26th of April. For the next three days the mounted

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\* Containing half a dozen Canadians who had signed up independently.

\*\* The Dragoons returned along a similar route as the outward one to the capital and did not venture anywhere near the Waterworks as indicated on a map issued with Colonel Lessard's authority.

column scoured the countryside for cattle, sheep, horses, forage and food, and in the process were also able to vary the monotony of a military diet! All property belonging to Boers who had passes to their homes and had taken up arms again was destroyed or confiscated, and the Canadians shared in this unpleasant task.<sup>38</sup> The column reached Bloemfontein on the 29th of April with a large collection of sheep, cattle and horses, constituting in the words of one writer "the most tangible result of the operation."<sup>39</sup>

The men of B Squadron were ordered to a camp in Bloemfontein where they spent a day relaxing, washing and reading their first mail. The following day the "fighting bees" marched through the town to join the remainder of the regiment at Fisher's Farm where they regaled their envious colleagues with stories of their adventure.<sup>40</sup>

NOTES

1. Hilder, Comrades All, p. 27.
2. Anderson correspondence. To Father, 17 March 1900.  
To Edith, 9 April 1900.  
To Chubbs, 27 April 1900.  
To Edith, 8 May 1900.  
To Edith, 21 July 1900.
3. Heron to family, 21 March 1900.
4. Heron to Andrew, 17 July 1900.
5. Smith to Mother and Father, 8 June 1900.
6. Ibid., 10 August 1900.
7. Pakenham, Boer War, p. 317.
8. Hilder, Comrades All, p. 34.
9. Ibid., p. 34.
10. Ibid., p. 35.
11. Anderson to Edith, 9 April 1900.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Montreal Herald, 12 June 1900, p. 5.
15. Ibid.
16. Montreal Star, 25 May 1900, p. 5.
17. Ibid.
18. Interview with Colonel Lessard, The Goat, no date.
19. Montreal Herald, 12 June 1900, p. 5.
20. Ibid., 25 May 1900, p. 4.
21. Turner diary, 25 May 1900.

- 22 Montreal Herald, 12 June 1900, p. 5.
- 23 Ibid., 4 June 1900, p. 1.
- 24 Ibid., 6 June 1900, p. 4.
- 25 Ibid., 12 June 1900, p. 5.
- 26 Amery, L.S. (ed.). The Times History of the War in South Africa, Vol. IV p. 69.
- 27 Montreal Herald, 30 May 1900, p. 10.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Montreal Star, 29 May 1900, p. 7.
- 30 Ibid., p. 14.
- 31 Hilder, Comrades All, p. 38.
- 32 Montreal Herald, 30 May 1900, p. 10.
- 33 Amery, Times History, Vol. IV, p. 72.
- 34 Montreal Star, 2 June 1900, p. 8.
- 35 Ibid., 5 June 1900, p. 6.
- 36 C.S. Goldman, With General French and the Cavalry in South Africa, p. 208.
- 37 Hilder, Comrades All, p. 41.
- 38 Montreal Herald, 27 June 1900, p. 3.
- 39 Amery, Times History, Vol. IV, p. 72.
- 40 Hilder, Comrades All, p. 42.

CHAPTER IV - WE ARE MARCHING TO PRETORIA .....

Lord Roberts had decided to drive northwards to capture Pretoria, believing that the symbolic significance of seizing Kruger's capital was more important than the difficult task of eliminating pockets of Boer opposition in the Orange Free State.<sup>1</sup> Before the march on the Transvaal could get underway the railway artery had to be repaired. The railway was the British lifeline, transporting military supplies, hospital equipment, food and remounts from the seaports to the main bases, and an adequate reserve of supplies had to be accumulated in Bloemfontein for the push north. By the end of April forty-four thousand officers and men with 200 guns and a retinue of wagons were ready in the vicinity of Bloemfontein awaiting the order to commence the assault on Pretoria.

The Commander-in-Chief's plan of attack called for a wide east-west extension of his line of advance as he forged north. By threatening their flanks with encirclement Roberts had discovered that the Boers could be forced from most positions. His first objective was Kroonstad, the new capital of the Orange Free State.<sup>2</sup> Roberts himself would follow the railway line with the main column composed largely of infantry, and on the east a mixed column of infantry and mounted troops would

drive north. Greater mobility was required on the western flank in order to cut the railway by rapid encircling movements and thereby to halt the Boer retreat. Lieutenant-General John French was given command of the western column which was composed of cavalry and mounted infantry.\* Major-General Edward Hutton was in charge of the mounted infantry, and once again the Royal Canadian Dragoons were assigned to Lieutenant-Colonel Alderson's unit within the brigade of mounted infantry.

Fisher's Farm was the scene of unusual activity at daybreak on Tuesday, the 1st of May. The trundling of the guns, the neighing of the horses and the shouts of the riders, the braying of the mules and the curses of the drivers, and the creaking of the wagons: all these were the unmistakable signs of an army on the move. B squadron had only returned from the expedition to Dewetsdorp the previous day but men and horses were in fine shape as they took up their position near the rear of French's mounted column. Their colleagues in A Squadron

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\* The cavalry carried cumbersome lances and sabres as their standard equipment, and still relied on the full mounted charge (Arme Blanche). The mounted infantry were trained infantry soldiers who were taught to ride. The horses provided mobility but the fighting took place on foot. The mounted rifles were horsemen who were trained to fight on foot. The distinction between the latter two became blurred during the war as they both relied on mobility and firepower.

were assigned a position in the van of the advance where they would assist with the scouting, a role that the Canadians would play with distinction throughout the campaign.<sup>3</sup>

Advance troops, like A Squadron were the antennae of the army. Playing the dual role of scouts and advance guard their function was to scrutinize the countryside for signs of the enemy and to examine carefully kopjes and ravines so as to seek out safe routes for the army following behind. Farms had to be checked and the passes of the occupants inspected.<sup>4</sup> It was a highly dangerous activity for the broad open plains provided little cover and ambushes in kopje country were an ever-present threat. One Canadian correspondent likened this task "to hunting for a gas leak with a candle".<sup>5</sup> Considerable independent action was required of the advance guard for they were strung out in order across the veld at intervals of two to three hundred yards, and the isolation was increased when kopjes separated the scouting parties. A supporting reserve of fifty men usually followed about a thousand yards behind the reconnaissance groups and the main body of the column a similar distance further back.\*

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\* It was only on two occasions during the Dragoons tour of duty that the scouts failed to give the leading brigade timely warning of the enemy. This was at Kalkheuwel and Kameelfontein and on both occasions the main body got too close to the scouts.

Another protective duty was that of providing flanking patrols a thousand yards on either side of the main column. This was a less dangerous activity because on the march to Pretoria they were following a retreating enemy and there was little likelihood of a flank attack. In addition, rear guards were necessary to collect stragglers and to prevent misconduct; \* this was a thoroughly unpleasant task in the choking dust raised by a column of wagons and animals.

An especially hazardous aspect of the reconnaissance work was drawing the enemy's fire. If a kopje was suspected of harbouring Boers, the advance party would move forwards in extended order presenting themselves as targets. When the enemy opened fire the scouts would wheel around and race back under covering fire from the supporting forces.<sup>6</sup> It was an unnerving experience for those involved but it was very important in determining the presence of the enemy, since smokeless powder prevented the exact location of the enemy being determined.

Scouting was an art in which the Canadians excelled. Qualities such as riding ability, independence and ability to take cover enabled them to develop into some of the most successful scouts in the British army. Furthermore, the outdoor experiences of many of the

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\* The action at Leliefontein on the 7th of November 1900 was a notable exception.

Canadians enabled them more quickly than the British regulars to match the methods of the Boers.

The first assignment of the mounted infantry was to outflank the Boers and to prevent them from retreating from Brandfort. Three miles west of Brandfort the mounted troops were confronted by two separate groups of kopjes occupied by Boers. At noon the order was given to clear the kopjes and two troops of A Squadron moved forward cautiously to draw the enemy's fire. Extricating themselves from a withering Boer crossfire the Canadians galloped out of rifle range. They had successfully ascertained the position of the enemy and the rest of the regiment was brought up and, with the assistance of the artillery, pom-poms and machine-guns, poured a heavy fire into the kopjes. A protracted duel ensued and it was not until late afternoon that the Boers skilfully evacuated their positions and retreated northwards.<sup>7</sup>

It was the first experience under fire for A Squadron and they performed with courage and resolution. That the Canadians were still novices despite their training was illustrated by an incident during the encounter. A British Staff Officer, approached Colonel Lessard with an order for the men to mount and change position. Some of them ran to their horses without unloading their fully cocked rifles. Unfortunately

two of the rifles discharged, and one of the bullets travelled between Lessard and the Staff Officer. The latter galloped off to report the incident to Colonel Alderson and recommended that because of their inexperience the Canadians should be sent back for further training. Colonel Lessard, however, insisted on staying at the front and agreed to accept full responsibility for any further incidents.

Both squadrons camped on high ground north of Brandfort that evening and from their elevated position they could see the Boers scurrying north over the flat Free State prairie. A desperate race was in progress --- the Boers were trying to reach the safety of the Vet River with their supply wagons, artillery and rolling stock while the British were determined to outflank and intercept them by cutting the railway line. The Boers had a phobia about being encircled and whenever their flanks were threatened they would beat a rapid retreat and entrench themselves in a new position. They had anticipated the British flanking movement and maintained a running rearguard fight as they retired. It was disciplined and systematic; with mobile long-range guns they held the British at bay while their slower wagons hastened north, and then the mobile guns would retire to another position and commence shelling allowing the convoys more precious time to reach the

temporary haven across the Vet. The Boers were past-masters in the art of rear-guard fighting, and their remarkable mobility was a major factor in their success.<sup>8</sup>

Using these tactics the Boer forces reached the Vet safely. Once the rolling stock had crossed the bridge they demolished it with dynamite. The northern bank formed an ideal defensive position --- the river was up to forty yards wide with steep, bush-covered banks and had few fordable drifts.

General French decided to attempt a number of simultaneous crossings of the Vet. The mounted column including the Dragoons moved off at daybreak on the 5th of May and headed for the Vet which lay fifteen miles to north. At noon B squadron received instructions to dismount and to advance towards the river thereby drawing the enemy's fire. They advanced cautiously in extended order over 2,000 yards of open ground and 500 yards from the river they were ordered to lie down while a dozen scouts were sent ahead to reconnoitre the southern bank. Within a few minutes there was a burst of rapid fire and the scouts emerged from the bushes and beat a retreat to the main party. The Boers then turned their mausers on the prostrate men and swept them with a hail of bullets. Miraculously not a man was hit. Smokeless powder made it impossible to discern where the Boer marksmen were located and the order was

given to pour a heavy fire into the bush-covered banks across the river. Concentrated rifle fire combined with effective covering artillery partially silenced the hidden enemy.

It was an uncomfortable experience for the Canadians; they were forced to lie unprotected in the burning sun while subjected to intense rifle fire and the incessant gnawing of innumerable red ants. Waterbottles soon ran dry and the agonies of dehydration set in. There was widespread relief when the order was whispered around that they were to run the gauntlet of enemy fire and make for the bushes fringing the southern banks. Leaving the main body of B Squadron behind Turner took charge of the advance line of scouts and instructed the group to follow a dry ravine to the water's edge. When he asked for volunteers to cross over to the occupied north bank every man volunteered. \* The group cautiously eased themselves into the cold green waters of the Vet and followed in single file. As the water rose gradually they lifted their rifles higher until they were out of their depth and had to swim. The Boers had left that section of the river unguarded as they believed that it was too deep to cross, and the Canadians crossed over

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\* The number varies between six and twelve men. They included J. Rae, F. Berg, R. Russell, W.J. Reid, R. Reid, D. McKibbin, and W.J. Jay. (British).



THE VET RIVER



THE ZAND RIVER

safely and clambered up the steeply wooded bank where they were joined by Lieutenant Borden and a private who crossed over further west.\*

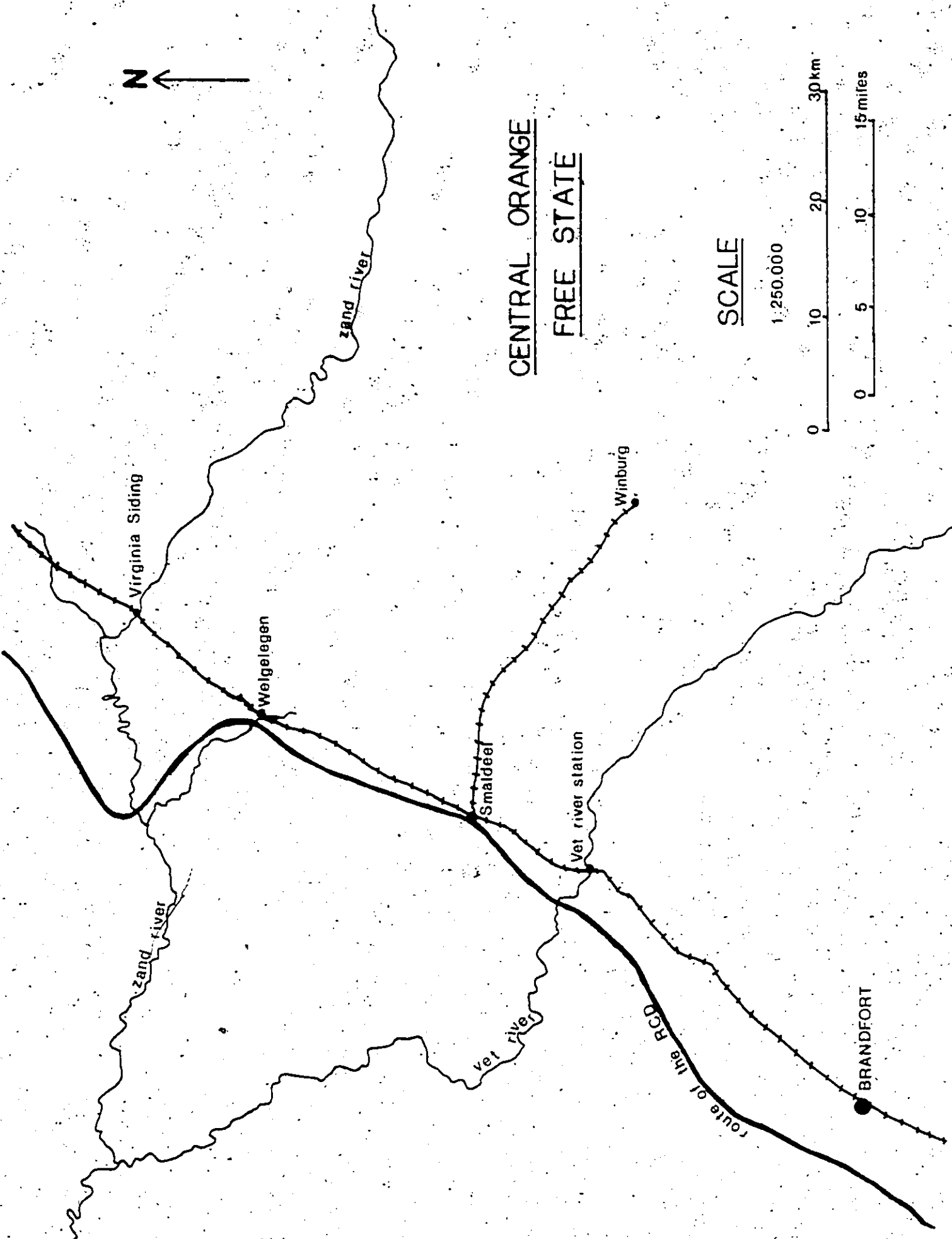
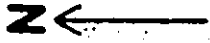
Two men were sent ahead to reconnoitre but were detected by the Boers who then turned their fire on the rest of the group. As they were heavily outnumbered, the decision was made to recross the river and this was accomplished under a heavy covering fire. The horses were waiting and the dripping men mounted quickly and rode off to cross over again at a drift further downstream. By this daring act the Canadians had tested the Boer defences and by diverting Boer attention they had enabled mounted units including the remainder of the Dragoons to cross the Vet further west thereby opening the vital western flank.\*\*9

By evening the whole brigade of mounted infantry had crossed the Vet and bivouacked on the north bank. Some Canadians celebrated the crossing with chicken and Cape apricot brandy while others were lucky enough to camp in a deserted farmhouse; but for the men who had swum the Vet it was a cold, cheerless night in their wet

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\* The Boers were oblivious to the Canadians crossing and there is no substance to Trooper Anderson's<sup>10</sup> assertion that the river ran red with blood, or Trooper Rae's<sup>11</sup> that bullets were splashing everywhere.

\*\* This action earned a mention in dispatches for the group and a D.S.O. for Turner.



CENTRAL ORANGE  
FREE STATE

SCALE

1:250,000



uniforms. Borden suffered from rheumatism for three days after his immersion in the cold water and Turner ruefully noted in his diary<sup>12</sup> that all the letters from his wife had been ruined.

The northward pursuit of the Boer army continued over the following few days. The next major geographical barrier was the Zand river, about thirty miles north of the Vet. A determined effort was made to stall the Boers before they crossed the Zand and destroyed the bridge. The Canadians were part of a flying column sent out to accomplish this task, but effective rearguard fighting kept the attackers at a safe distance and allowed the Boers to cross the Zand with their supply column. Puffs of dust in the distance and muffled explosive sounds indicated that the railway had been severed by the retreating Boers.

Kroonstad was the new capital of the Orange Free State, and the Boers had decided to defend the town with a determined stand on the Zand. Reinforcements were brought in and General Botha was given overall command of the defending force. The winding Zand river with steep, sandy banks covered in thick bush was an ideal site for a fortified stand.

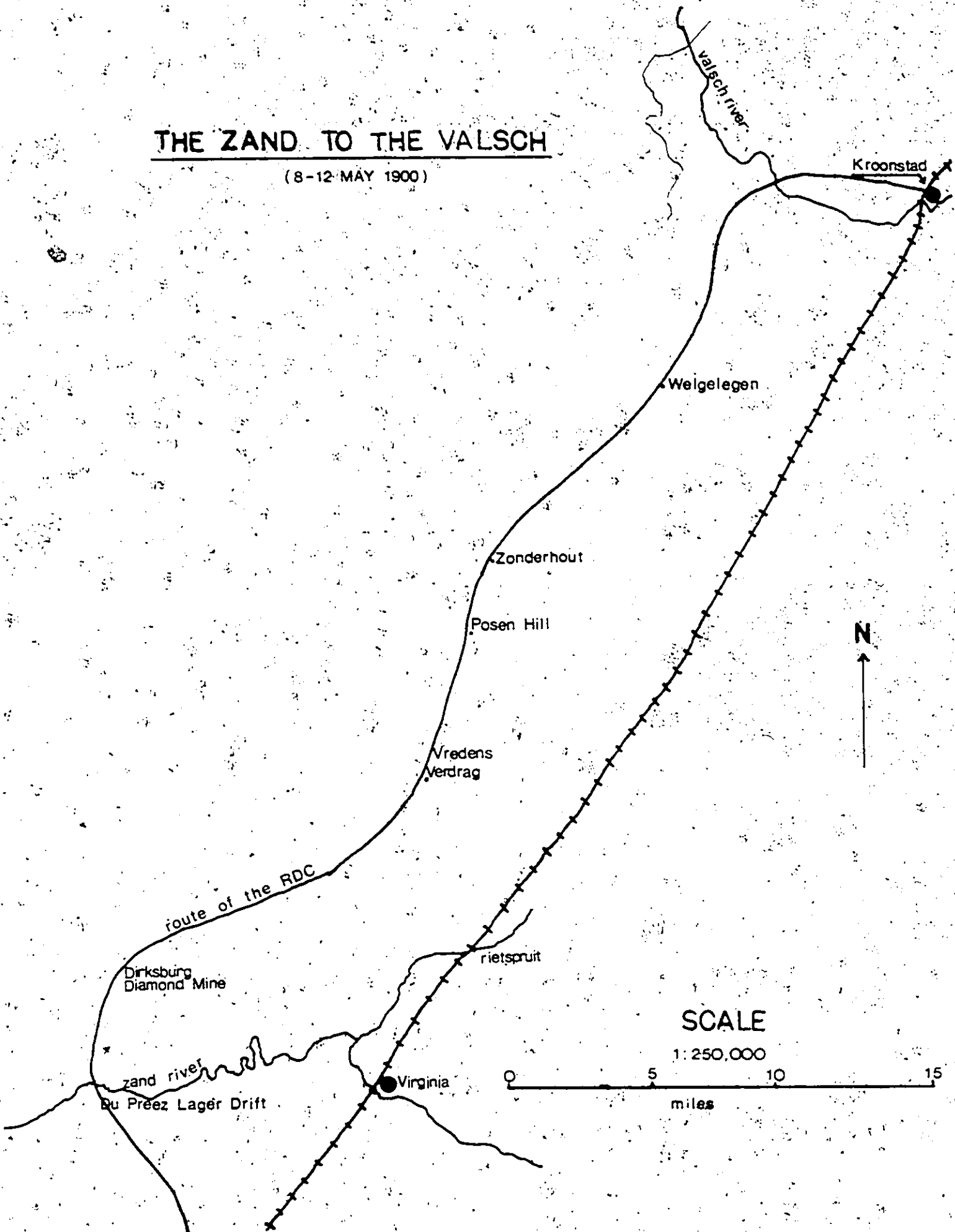
Eight miles south of the Zand lay the Doorn river. It was here that French's mounted column was camped. Lord Roberts believed that the mercurial Boers could

only be defeated if they were surrounded and forced into a frontal action, and he ordered the customary flanking attacks by the mobile units hoping to concentrate the Boer forces in the centre for an attack by the main army.<sup>13</sup> During the afternoon of the 9th of May the Dragoons moved off with French's mounted troops to commence the turning movement on the western flank. The force approached Du Preez Lager Drift, the main crossing of the Zand in that area, anticipating finding it heavily fortified. To their surprise it was unoccupied, and they took possession of the adjacent drifts and bivouacked on the banks of the river for the night.

The mounted infantry and the cavalry set off in the bitter pre-dawn and spread northeast in a wide arc over the flat rolling veldt. Ahead lay a series of gently sloping kopjes aligned in a north south direction and overlooking the rail-line and the Boer positions on the Rietspruit. The sudden appearance of the mounted units on his right flank alarmed Botha and he sent two hundred horsemen to check them and thereby to allow the Boer forces to withdraw north along the railway. General French sent his cavalry to take control of the ridge of kopjes, but they walked straight into a Boer trap. Alderson was instructed to take his men there at a gallop to prevent the unit being encircled and annihilated. The Canadian and British mounted men rode

# THE ZAND TO THE VALSCH

(8-12 MAY 1900)



up from a ridge in the rear, dismounted and advancing carefully under cover helped drive the Boer attackers off. The cavalry had been severely mauled by the Boers and dead and dying men were strewn among the boulders.\*

The Canadians helped tend the wounded and then spent most of the day protecting the crippled unit. In the afternoon they rode north to Posen Hill. They were about to bivouack for the night at Zonderhout farm when Alderson was ordered to move south again and assist the rear party at Vredens Verdrag. They stumbled through the dark in a futile mission and camped at midnight at the scene of the earlier disaster. Many of the dead had not been buried and most of the wounded were moaning in anguish. To add to the discomfort rations were scarce because contact had been lost with the transports and a lack of wood meant they had to use "buffalo chips" to brew tea and to warm themselves in the icy darkness.<sup>15</sup>

The British passage of the Zand river was the most important engagement on the advance to Pretoria. It marked the termination of Free State resistance to the British advance to Pretoria\*\* and it forced the Boers to

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\* Soldiers and correspondents<sup>14</sup> claim that it was a white flag trick, but there is no mention of deceit in the official British history, The Times history and Goldman. In all likelihood it was an effective Boer trap.

\*\* Only at Klipriversberg just south of Johannesburg, would the Transvaal Boers make a last-ditch stand to stop the British.

abandon Kroonstad. At noon on the 12th of May Lord Roberts entered Kroonstad and accepted the surrender of the town and the Canadians trooped in later in the afternoon. The Dragoons had been active on the march from Bloemfontein, and had been complimented for their coolness under fire, their patient endurance of short rations and their hard work.<sup>16</sup> Due largely to their expert use of cover and extended order under fire they had suffered no casualties. The Canadians were becoming dangerously complacent, however, and they attributed the lack of casualties to deteriorating Boer marksmanship because of progressive demoralization.<sup>17</sup>

The break at Kroonstad provided a much-needed rest and both soldiers and horses benefited from a stay free of the tensions and tribulations of the battle-front. Rations were limited because of food shortages but this was amply compensated for by the availability of fresh meat. For many of the Canadians the stopover was the first opportunity to remove their boots and socks since leaving Bloemfontein. Water for washing was a scarce item on the march, and the men seldom washed more than twice a week. At Kroonstad they scrubbed themselves in the cold waters of the Valsch river and laundered their grimy clothes. Few of the men ever bothered to shave on the march as hot water was too scarce and the process was too time-consuming.

Rumours were circulating in Kroonstad that a number of prominent Boer leaders had surreptitiously returned to their farms west of the town. A flying column under Colonel Alderson was assigned to undertake a three-day reconnaissance mission to the Bothaville area. The column was composed of one hundred Canadians (Dragoons and Mounted Rifles) and one hundred British mounted infantry. Turner was chosen to command the Dragoon contingent and Young and Cockburn were appointed to assist him. Ammunition, emergency rations and oats were hastily packed and at 5 p.m. on Wednesday, the 16th of May the men departed. They travelled through the night and the following day with short breaks to rest and to feed the horses. Under cover of dark that evening they began their investigations. The column would approach a farmhouse suspected of harbouring combatants, and while the remainder waited in reserve a dozen men would rush the house with revolvers cocked. They visited many houses in rapid succession throughout the night and captured twenty-four prominent prisoners. By the time the group halted at 10 a.m. the next day they had covered sixty miles in a semi-circle which took them within twelve miles of Bothaville. The major portion of the route was over difficult terrain and covered in total darkness. Most of the mounted men had difficulty keeping awake; some fell asleep on their mounts and were jolted awake

on impact with the ground. After a four-hour rest they continued for another fifteen miles before camping for the night and they rode into Kroonstad the following day. There were no casualties, although five horses had collapsed from exhaustion. The Dragoons had played a significant part in one of the most remarkable missions of the campaign.<sup>18</sup>

With the arrival of supplies by wagontrain and the rapidly approaching railhead Lord Roberts decided to resume the advance to Pretoria. The northward push was to be achieved by the tried and trusted flanking movements --- the capture of the capital was too important for innovative tactics. The cavalry and mounted infantry would move north on the western flank harrassing the Boer right and they would then head east to the railway and attempt to cut off the Boer retreat along the railline.<sup>19</sup>

At 4 p.m. on the 19th of May orders were issued for the mounted infantry to march off after divine service next morning. In a simple, solemn service the chaplain asked for divine protection for the success of the mission as the men sat bowed and hatless on their restless mounts. At the conclusion of the service General Hutton gave the men a short 'pep-talk' on the difficult days that lay ahead and then the brigade headed out onto the open prairies of the northern Free State.<sup>20</sup>

The push to Pretoria was pursued with relentless vigour and the inexorable advance continued day after day. French's mounted column snaked its way north over the sunbaked veld making good time on the splendid natural road. The churning wheels and hooves raised clouds of choking dust which revealed the position of the column for miles around. This was of no strategic import since the Boers were intent on reaching the Vaal river and had little interest in the movements of the British troops.

The tasks assigned to the mounted troops required speed and flexibility and they were allocated a mule transport company to carry food and forage. Mules were faster and hardier than the slow-moving oxen, and performed better during the day whereas the oxen preferred the cool of the night.<sup>21</sup> The mules were hitched up to a variety of transport wagons and were able to keep in fairly close proximity to the mounted men. The Cape buck wagons, Scotch carts and Canadian wagons were the most serviceable of the transports. The only complaint Colonel Lessard made about the latter was the lack of sideboards which would have facilitated loading and allowed larger loads.<sup>22</sup>

The men always carried a full day's rations in their haversacks and often sufficient for two days so they could operate independently of the transport column. In addition to their waterbottle and rations, they also

carried innumerable pieces of equipment. Clothing and eating utensils were packed in the saddle wallet while a coat and a blanket were placed immediately behind the saddle. Oats and hay were strapped to the left of the saddle and from the other side dangled a collection of pots, pans, hatchets and picketing tools. The accumulated weight of equipment, feed, rifle, ammunition and saddle totalled approximately seventy-five pounds and when the weight of the soldier was added it meant that the horses were carrying an average of 250 pounds each. It was not surprising that emaciated horses often collapsed under this weight.<sup>23</sup>

The column covered the sixty miles from Kroonstad to the Vaal river in six days but many more miles were covered in patrolling and scouting. The rapid march left its mark on men and animals. To the rigours of the march were added the inclemencies of the African climate --- hot sunny days and cold frosty nights, dust-storms and thunderstorms. The horses and mules suffered severely and many had to be led out of the ranks and shot because of their gaunt and debilitated condition.<sup>24</sup> The rotting carcasses filled the African air with the stench of decay and the scattered skeletons would mark the route for years to come.

The men were often in the sun for hours on end under a blazing sun. There were usually no lunch breaks

and they satisfied the pangs of hunger by munching on a biscuit and slaking their thirst from their waterbottles.<sup>25</sup> When the scouts located a dam the men would edge their horses into the turbid water and while the horses drank the less cautious men would fill their bottles with the dirty water. On one occasion an RCD trooper's horse got stuck in the mud and he had to dismount in the cold, murky water and pull the unfortunate animal out and then ride out the day in muddy, wet clothes.<sup>26</sup>

The campsites were frequently selected without any consideration for human comfort: cheerless and shelterless they were invariably veiled in a fog of dust when they weren't located in a marsh.<sup>27</sup> Often the men would stumble in late at night and after attending to their horses and swallowing a meagre supper they would collapse fully clothed in an exhausted sleep using their saddles as pillows.<sup>28</sup> The dry Free State air seldom provided a nocturnal cloud cover and clear, frosty nights created harsh conditions for the men huddled on a rubber sheet and covered only with a blanket and an overcoat.<sup>29</sup> When the transports failed to arrive with their bedding gear the officers suffered more than the men and often they spent half the night walking around to keep warm. Some like Turner and Forrester would crawl under the Cape cart in an effort to seek protection from the numbing cold.<sup>30</sup> The rum issue was a great boon on chilly nights!

Reveille was sounded between three and four o'clock in the morning. Preparing breakfast in the dark or in the dim light of a candle was too arduous a task for sleepy soldiers and a mouthful of hardtack and a cup of tea provided the standard start to the day. Usually the order to depart was delayed until dawn but in an emergency the column would move off in the dark and sometimes in thick mist. In the inky pre-dawn it was impossible to see the numerous antbear holes that dotted the veld and frequently a horse would step into one sending his sleepy rider sprawling on the veld.<sup>31</sup>

When the supply wagons were in contact with the column the men would draw their own rations. The standard issue was bully beef, tea, coffee, sugar, jam and hardtack.<sup>32</sup> The mounted men often bivouacked ahead of the supply train and when their supplies ran low they had to resort to purchasing, commandeering or looting. The veld was dotted with Boer farm-houses, and a house in the vicinity of the route of the column was soon surrounded by men eager to buy eggs, chickens, milk, butter, flour, honey, lard and soap from the timid occupants. It was often with a look of astonishment that the women of the household accepted payment as they had been told that the invaders took everything and burned the house.<sup>33</sup>

The routine of the northward advance did permit the men to indulge in cooking meals occasionally and chickens,

ducks, pigs and sheep provided a pleasant change to hardtack. A popular method of cooking was to utilize the many antheaps that covered the veld. They averaged two and a half feet in height with a wide base and were baked hard by the sun. The Canadians learned from the Africans that by cutting off the top and hollowing them out and making a fire inside they were very effective stoves. The antheaps were also used as ovens. This involved building a fire inside and when it had burned out inserting a chicken or duck. The opening was then closed up and a fire was built around the outside. It took a considerable time to cook in this manner and in their eagerness to consume the delicacies the men would occasionally eat them too soon, and illness resulting from eating half-cooked birds was a frequent occurrence.<sup>34</sup>

The mess tins were the standard cooking utensils. The men would save the fat from pigs and sheep for frying chickens and ducks and for making flapjacks if they had bran or flour. Occasionally they were issued wax candles and these would be used for frying hardtack. The duty cook would soak the hardtack in water and then fry it in melted wax. When washed down with hot coffee it was quite palatable.<sup>35</sup> An early arrival in camp allowed time to cook and the men would rotate the cooking chores while others attended to the horses. Varying the cooks lent a little variety and interest to a monotonous diet.



VELD AND KOPJE,



ANT-HILLS ON THE VELD

The men soon developed an adeptness at plucking chickens and slaughtering sheep and a proficiency at preparing palatable meals.

As the mounted men often ranged far from the convoys there was a constant need for horses and forage. Whenever horses and feed were discovered they were commandeered and a receipt was left with the Boer family,<sup>36</sup> but looting of food and possessions by the troops was strictly forbidden. Lord Roberts was rumoured to have threatened any violators with hanging and Colonel Lessard warned his men that looting of farms was against army orders.<sup>37</sup> The Dragoons were incensed: if they could raid barns for oats for the horses what about the needs of starving soldiers? Furthermore, argued the troops, if the fowls, sheep and cattle weren't taken they would be used to feed the Boer commandos and thereby prolong the war.<sup>38</sup>

Gradually an unwritten law was accepted: nothing was taken from occupied farms but deserted farms or farms where the white flag had been used deceitfully were raided and razed. To this activity the officers increasingly turned a blind eye.<sup>39</sup> The Dragoons, being mounted, ranged far and wide over the veld and frequently located unoccupied farms. They would move in and take anything not nailed down and then break up the house for firewood. If the party was in no hurry they

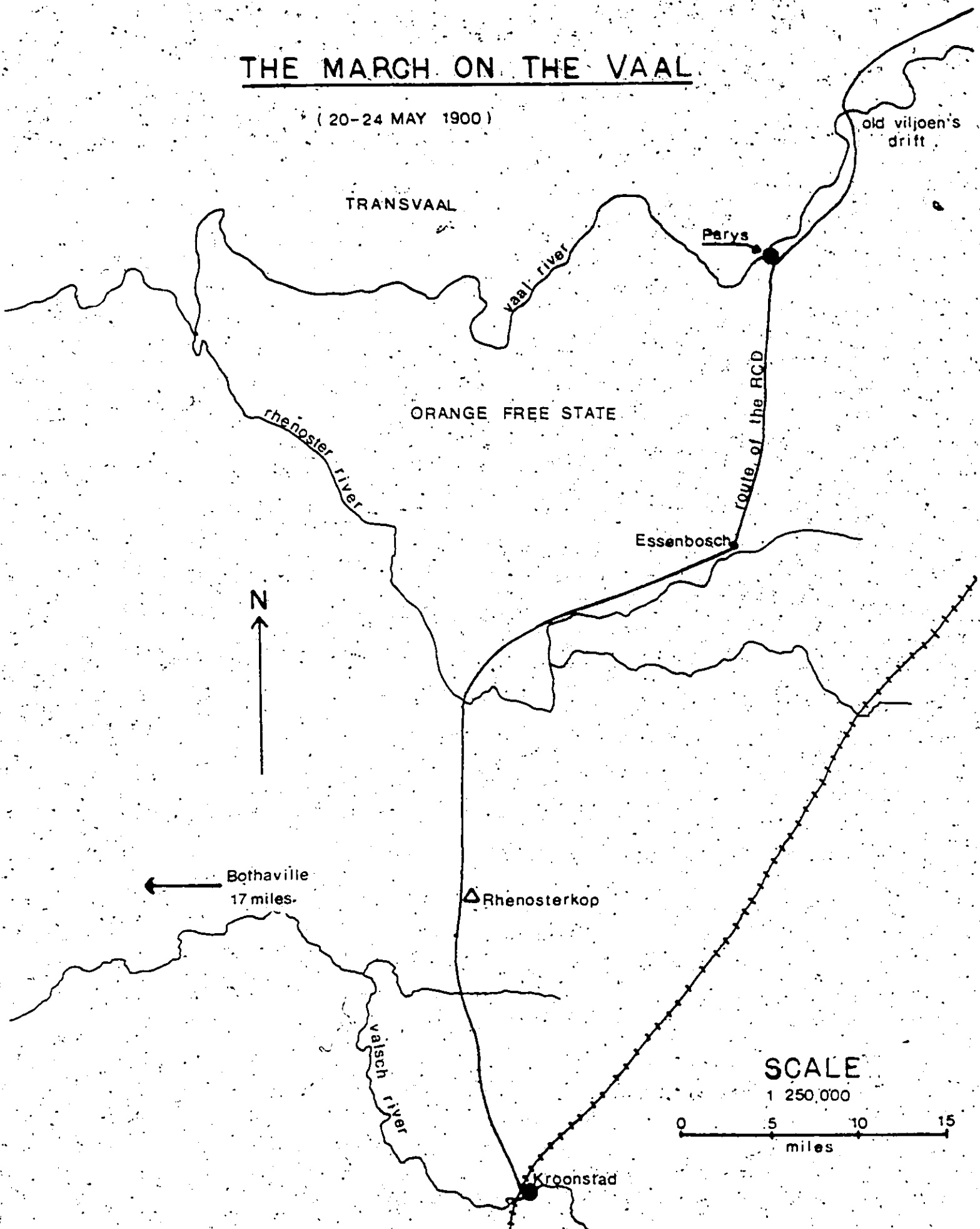
would sit around the smouldering beams eating and smoking.<sup>40</sup>  
As William Anderson wrote in a letter home the Canadians  
were determined to do something to distinguish themselves  
besides fighting!<sup>41</sup>

The mounted column headed north from Kroonstad  
passing Rhenosterkop, a prominent elevation with a  
commanding view of the flat countryside. There was little  
evidence of the enemy and the column turned east at the  
Essenbosch Spruit in the direction of the railway hoping  
to cut the Boer retreat. At Essenbosch it was learned  
that the Boers had retreated thirty-six hours earlier.  
The turning movement was halted immediately and the  
brigade was ordered to prepare for a rapid dash to the  
Vaal. The Dragoons were active in a scouting party sent  
out to reconnoitre the approaches to the Vaal and the  
absence of Boer forces in the Parys area convinced  
General French to attempt the crossing in that vicinity.  
The brief mention in divisional orders that "General  
French intends to cross the Vaal tomorrow" sent ripples  
of excitement through the camp. What better way to  
celebrate the Queen's birthday than to breach Kruger's  
laager!<sup>42</sup>

The camp was astir by 4:30 a.m. on the 24th of May  
and by sunrise the march to the Vaal was underway. After  
the longest and hardest days march of the campaign the  
column reached Parys in the late afternoon to find the

# THE MARCH ON THE VAAL

( 20-24 MAY 1900 )



old viljoen's drift

TRANSVAAL

Parys

Vaal river

ORANGE FREE STATE

rheenoster river

route of the RCD

Essenbosch

N

Bothaville  
17 miles

△ Rhenosterkop

valsech river

Kroonstad

SCALE

1 250 000

0 5 10 15  
miles

drift undefended but in disrepair. One cavalry regiment crossed over with difficulty and the Dragoons and the remainder of the column were sent along the southern bank of the river to Old Viljoen's Drift. It was a hazardous journey along a rough, rocky road in the dark, and although it was an ideal location for an ambush there was no sign of the enemy. Behind the mounted troops the five-mile long transport train trundled along powered partly by the screams and curses of the officers and the drivers. The column was virtually at a standstill by midnight when the transport officer decided to call a halt. A few miles ahead the men anxiously awaited their rations, and the officers, with equal solicitude, their beds. For the Canadians it was a hungry, cold and sleepless night and a royal birthday that would long be remembered.<sup>43</sup>

The troops commenced the crossing of the Vaal at sunrise. The horses struggled down the uneven bank and into the fast-flowing river and with the chilly water lapping at the stirrups they stumbled across the rocky drift. Less fortunate were the mules pulling the ambulances, water-carts, guns and ammunition wagons. The coursing waters and the uneven bottom created perilous conditions and some wagons overturned and were lost with the mules in the river.<sup>44</sup>

The Canadians had expected a stiff fight at the Vaal and to cross over an easily defensible position with no evidence of the Boers was anticlimactic. To discover the first farm-house on Transvaal soil flying two white flags reinforced their complacent conviction that the War was virtually over and that only mopping-up operations remained.<sup>45</sup> The column moved off in a north-easterly direction towards Johannesburg. To many of the Dragoons the "Golden City" was as coveted a prize as Pretoria.

The British had learned that Louis Botha was preparing to make a stand on the Klipriversberg immediately south of Johannesburg. The site was ideal for a defensive position for although the ridge was not high it dominated the Klipriver valley through which ran a marshy river fordable in only three places. Botha's forces were strongly entrenched along the Klipriversberg with a powerful flank extending to Doornkop. Shortly before noon on Monday, 28th May the Dragoons passed through a narrow opening in the Gatsrand and exposed before them lay the panoramic expanse of the Klipriver Valley with the ramparts of the Klipriversberg forming the backdrop. Vaguely visible on the northern horizon were the mine-shafts and tailings dumps of the gold mines. A good road wound its way down the ridge and across a bridge over the marshy Klipriver and skirted the western edge of the Klipriversberg on its way to Johannesburg.

Lord Roberts was pushing north along the railway with the main army to the eastern approaches to Johannesburg. General French had the choice of undertaking a direct frontal assault on the Boer defences or turning to the left and attacking Johannesburg from the west. He decided to test the Klipriversberg defences with a frontal attack and then to attempt a flanking movement on the west. The artillery began to bombard the ridge but when the shells fell short the cavalry and the mounted infantry were sent over the bridge to clear the Boers from the knolls between the river and the Klipriversberg. Another Canadian regiment, the Canadian Mounted Rifles, were given the honour of a front-line position in the attack. The Boer guns opened up as they crossed the bridge at Van Wyk's Rust and the troops were subjected to heavy fire as they galloped across the low-lying plain to the nearest protective promontory. The men had been curious about a number of rocks painted with lime, and when the guns opened up they realized the rocks acted as rangefinders and they gave them a wide berth.

Orders were passed to Colonel Lessard to advance with the Dragoons and to relieve the Canadian Mounted Rifles who were to proceed north along the Klipspruit to a ridge closer to the enemy's position. By now the Boers had established the range and using pom-poms and large shells they poured a heavy fire into the open area

# BATTLE OF KLIPRIVERSBERG

( 28 - 29 MAY 1900 )

JOHANNESBURG  
3 MILES

KLIPRIVERSBERG

SCALE

1:50,000



Vlakfontein  
camp 29 May

site of the battle  
of Doornkop

route of the RDC

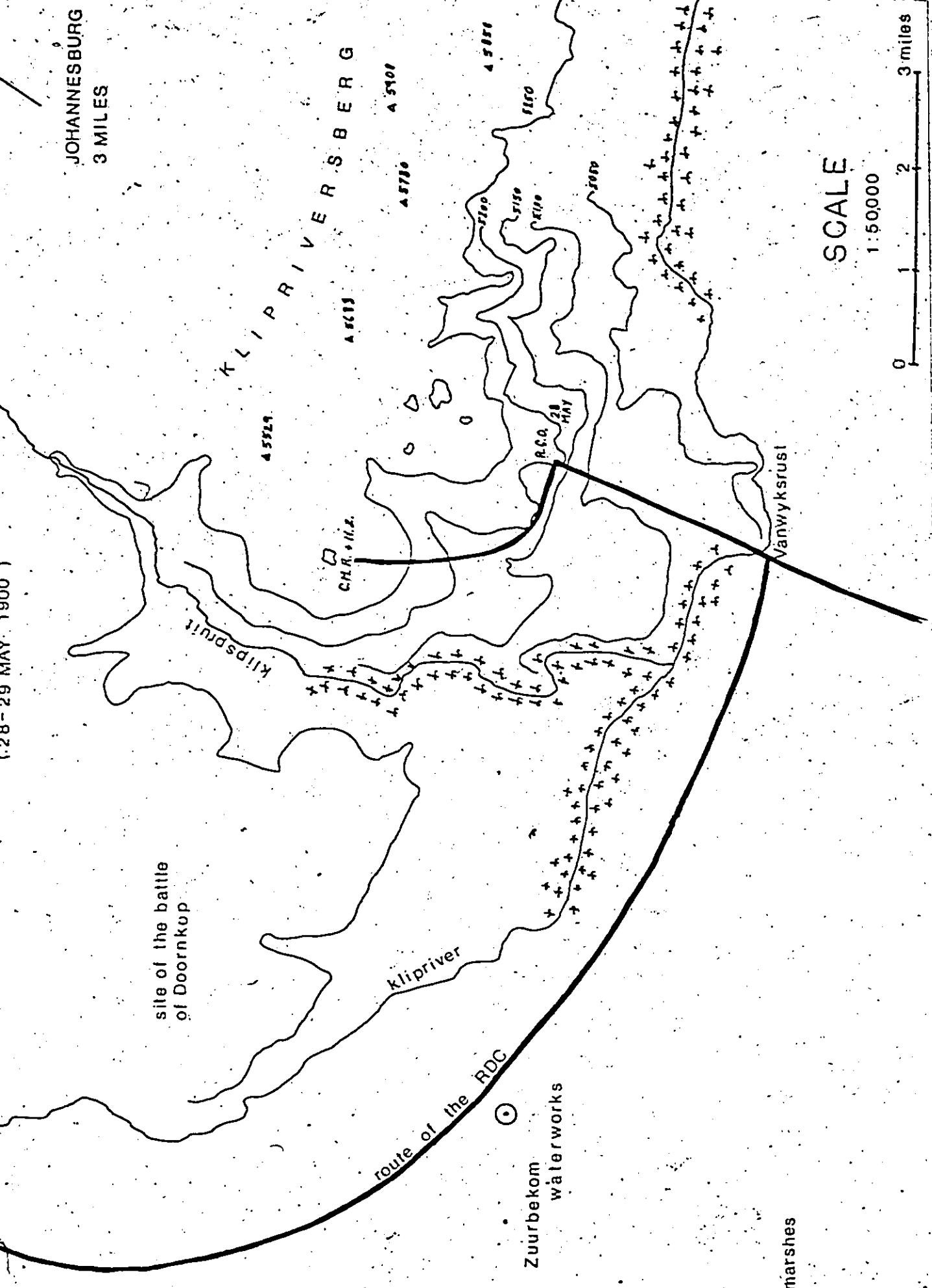
Zuurbekom  
waterworks

marshes

Vanwyksrust

CHR. H.L.

R.C.C.  
28  
MAY



which the Dragoons had to traverse. Lessard ordered the men to increase speed and to extend further as the shells dropped with increasing frequency among the horses. After running a mile-long gauntlet of enemy fire the Canadians reached the safety of the knoll and dismounted. Although there had been many close calls not a man had been hit. All afternoon the Boers poured shells and bullets onto the front-line positions manned by the Canadians and the New Zealanders. Not only were they able to hold the strategic knolls but by evening the Boers had been forced to retreat from the forward ridges to the main position on the Klipriversberg.

The Canadians were ordered to hold the strategic knolls overnight to prevent the Boers regaining control of the forward ridges. Patrols were posted to counter a possible night attack and fires and smoking were forbidden. The Dragoons spent a cold, sleepless and anxious night on the barren kopje and when the sun peered over the marshes in the east the ground was covered with a glistening mantle of thick frost and the water-bottles were frozen solid. They awaited the dawn with trepidations expecting to be annihilated by a barrage of shell fire, but the anticipated onslaught failed to materialise. Instead the Boer fire was directed at the Canadian Mounted Rifles and the New Zealanders and a message was signalled to Lessard to send a squadron to assist

the beleaguered units. Major Williams led B Squadron across the exposed area under the heavy fire of the pom-poms, and was then ordered to turn around and return. The men were furious at the futility of such a dangerous mission and they later learned that they had acted as targets in order that the British artillery could locate the Boer guns. To their amazement not a man was hit.

Once the Canadians and New Zealanders had completed their task\* of containing the Boers on Klipriversberg they began to withdraw. As they made a dash for the bridge the Boers edged closer and redoubled their firing. The difficult task of covering the retirement of these units fell to the Dragoons and by skilful fire the enemy was checked until the last man had crossed the bridge. The retirement was assisted by covering fire from the British twelve-pounders and by the smoke of veld fires sparked by exploding shells. It was now the turn of the Dragoons to evacuate their position and run the gauntlet of enemy fire in a hasty retreat to the bridge. As they emerged from the shelter<sup>n</sup> of the kopje the Boers turned their pom-poms on the mounted men and shells landed in profusion as they zig-zagged in extended order. Not until they reached the bridge out of range of the guns did the ordeal end. The Dragoons had survived the barrage unscathed and to both men and correspondents this

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\* By holding the centre they denied the Boers reinforcements on the western flank.

could only be explained by sheer providence.

Colonel Alderson led his troops north-westward in an arc wide of the infantry battle and by evening they had closed up with the advance units. A ragged and weary, but satisfied group of Canadians stumbled into camp that evening. The battle for Johannesburg had been won without loss of Canadian lives, but it had been an exhausting two days. The Canadian defence had been crucial in permitting the British flanking marches and their accurate firing had kept the Boers pinned on Klipriversberg and prevented reinforcements reaching the western front. Although the Dragoons were not in the vanguard of the flanking movement in the afternoon, by reinforcing the rear of the cavalry advance they had helped divert the attention of the Boers on Doornkop from the infantry front, and they had assisted in turning the Boer right flank which opened the route to Johannesburg. A tired Lieutenant Turner scrawled a simple entry in his diary that night: "I was proud of the men today." The correspondent of the Montreal Star concluded his report of the battle with a glowing commendation: "It was a grand tribute to the pluck, energy and soldierly ability of the Canadians that they were chosen and depended upon to hold the enemy in check until the last man was out of range of the enemy's guns."<sup>46</sup>

The Dragoons were in the saddle again at daybreak the next morning en route to their assigned bivouac at

Driefontein north of Johannesburg. Standing on the lofty northern edge of the Witwatersrand\* they gazed north over rugged, rolling veld to the serrated ridges of the Magaliesberg. Tucked away out of sight among the hills some forty miles away was the prize: Pretoria, capital of the Transvaal.

From their elevated vantage point the British commander, noticing a Boer convoy making its way to Pretoria, sent a unit in pursuit. A troop of Dragoons was included in the party assigned to head off the convoy, but the group became separated. Hard riding brought Lieutenant Borden and his troop into contact with the convoy. They dismounted and engaged the enemy at 1,000 yards forcing the Boers to unlimber and return their fire. By slowing the convoy they allowed the artillery to come up in support and a number of well placed shells disabled three wagons and immobilised their big three-inch Creusot\*\* gun. The remainder of the convoy were able to get away and as the British horses were too tired to follow the Boers, were allowed to escape to Pretoria. During the encounter Trooper Morrison was responsible for a plucky act which reflected the basic training in Halifax. While the

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\* "White-waters-ridge" on which Johannesburg is situated.

\*\* The 75 mm. Creusot was made in France and had a range of almost 7,000 yards.

Canadians were dismounted some of the horses got loose and Morrison collected them under fire and concealed them from the Boer sharpshooters.<sup>47</sup>

The booty included a number of wagons containing rifles, ammunition and clothing and the Creusot which had shelled the Canadians from the Klipriversberg the day before. A commandant and fifty prisoners were captured and together with the spoils they were taken to the Canadian camp. Private Hilder and members of his troop were assigned to guard the Boer prisoners, and to their astonishment they discovered a Torontonion among them. He informed his fellow countrymen that he had become disillusioned with the British cause and decided to make his way to South Africa and join the Boers.<sup>48</sup>

Johannesburg was surrounded and the city that had figured so prominently in the events leading to the outbreak of the War surrendered with hardly a shot being fired. At 2 p.m. on Thursday, 31st May Lord Roberts formally occupied the "Golden City". Lieutenant Turner commented in his diary that with the Boers on the run and Johannesburg captured, the War would soon be over, but it would be two whole years before the fighting ceased.<sup>49</sup>

The capture of Johannesburg allowed the mounted troops three leisurely days in two camps ten miles north of the city. The Canadians used the time to bathe in the

cold waters of the Little Jukskei river and to wash and mend clothes or to sit and relax in the warm winter sun. The contents of the captured wagons were distributed among the men and a hilarious morning was spent exchanging items of clothing and then dressing up in the spoils.<sup>50</sup>

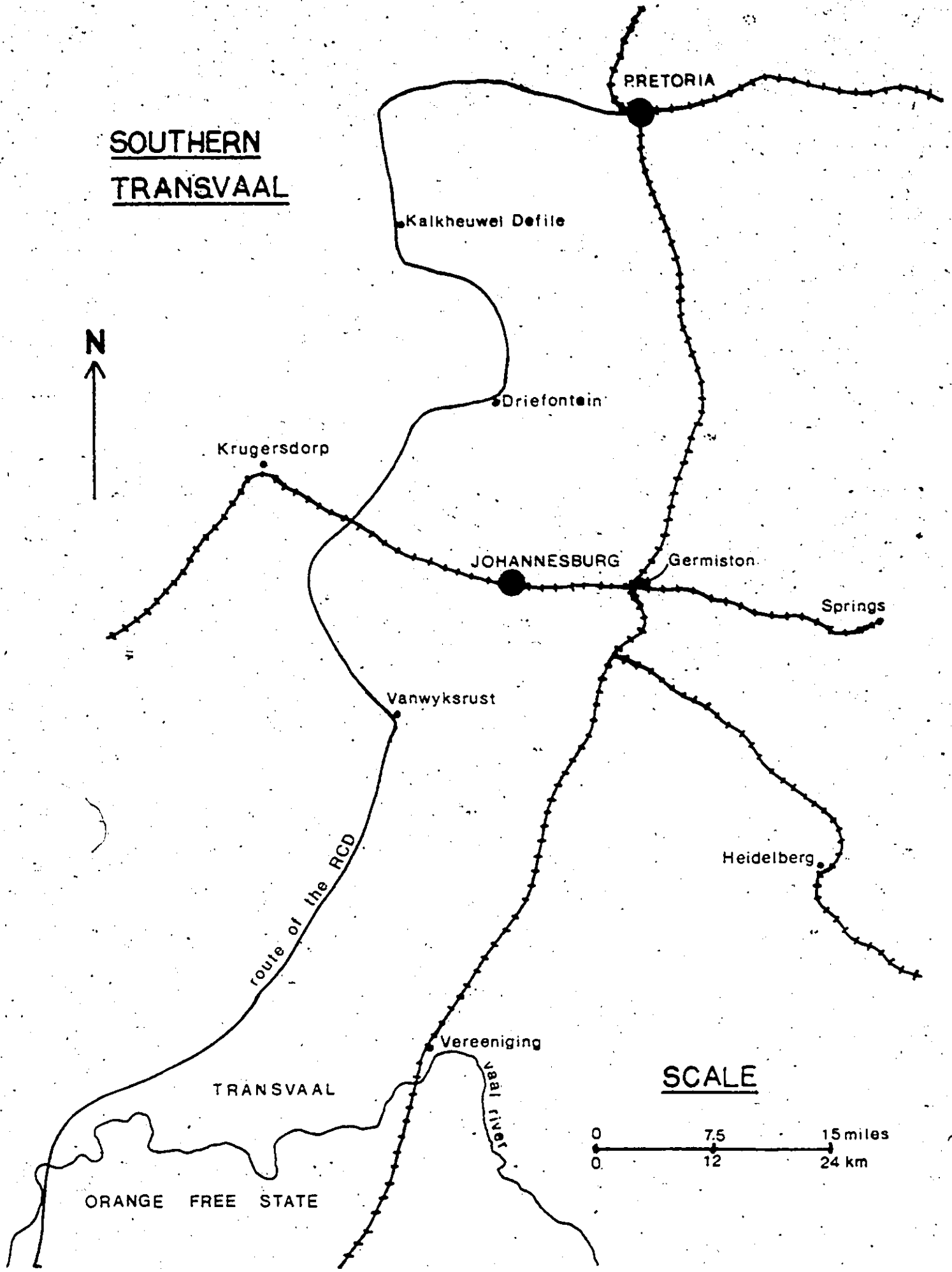
There was keen disappointment among the men at being denied access to Johannesburg. To many it was a city of dreams and to be cooped up in camp within sight of the city was frustrating. Their annoyance was not assuaged by an order that only one officer and two men from each unit could visit Johannesburg. Many Canadians had been enticed to join up by the opportunity of foreign travel and they were incensed when only six out of 700 were permitted to visit the "Golden City". The correspondents, officers and men who were selected found the visit hardly worth the ordeal of the twenty mile ride. The city had been a ghost-town since the outbreak of the War, and the lack of staples had driven prices to exorbitant levels.<sup>51</sup>

Despite concern about the long lines of communication Lord Roberts decided to launch the final assault on Pretoria, twenty-five miles to the north. The tried and tested western flanking movement was to be applied again. The mounted forces were ordered to move around Pretoria from the west and sever the railway line to the north, while the main army marched along the railway directly to Pretoria.<sup>52</sup>

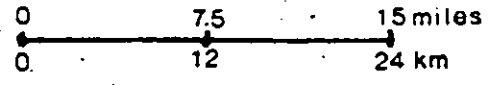
7  
The mounted column left at first light Sunday, the 3rd of June and by noon had crossed over the Crocodile river at Koodewal. Once across the river the terrain changed from rolling hills to rugged uplands punctuated by rocky kopjes and precipitous spruits. It was ground quite unsuited to mounted troops and formidable for the cumbersome transports. The Boers used the landscape to their advantage leading the cavalry on from ridge to ridge and drawing the advance party to the entrance of the Kalkheuwel Defile.

General French was anxious to reach Welgegund drift that night and the forward patrol entered the pass before it had been thoroughly searched. With steep sides and a narrow passage way the defile was a perfect ambush site. Boer sharpshooters were waiting on either side and as the cavalry entered they opened fire.<sup>53</sup> There were wild scenes of panic and confusion as the riders attempted to reel their rearing, neighing horses around and escape from the turmoil. French immediately realized the gravity of the situation and ordered the guns and the mounted infantry to the rescue. The Canadians were included in the group rushed to the front to assist the beleaguered cavalry. They dismounted and clambered up the western ridge leading to the commanding kopje. A protracted rifle and artillery duel followed and roar of the guns reverberated through the surrounding hills.

SOUTHERN  
TRANSVAAL



SCALE



throughout the afternoon. By sunset the Boers had been cleared from the defile and the surrounding kopjes and strong outposts were set up to prevent a counter-attack.<sup>54</sup> In a situation reminiscent of Klipriversberg the Dragoons were assigned the responsibility of occupying the dominant kopje and preventing the pass falling into enemy hands again. It was a cold, cheerless night: the supply wagons had fallen far behind in the rocky country and the hungry troops were not allowed to smoke nor light fires.

The vigil continued until the transports had passed through the defile and the Dragoons then took up a rear-guard position to the column. They recrossed the Crocodile river and travelled along the Rustenburg road in the direction of Pretoria. It was a good road and there was no sign of the enemy to impede their progress and yet progress was painfully slow. Many of the horses were worn out and not fit to ride, and the road was full of men leading horses or slouching along without mounts because theirs had perished. Some stragglers were able to cadge a ride on the wagons. When the brigade camped for the night a few miles north-west of Pretoria they learned that the capital had fallen and that Lord Roberts had entered the town that day.<sup>55</sup>

The Dragoons entered Pretoria at noon on Wednesday, the 6th of June. They were a very dishevelled and motley group of conquerors - dusty, bearded and clothed in torn,

dirty uniforms.<sup>56</sup> There were no signs of the triumphant reception the men had envisioned: no flags, no bands, no bunting, and no cheering throngs. The column shuffled through the town past Kruger's home and government buildings to camp on the bare veld once again. The refrain "We are marching to Pretoria" sung so frequently on the trek from Bloemfontein seemed rather empty and hollow to a weary group of men who settled into another barren camp at Koedoespoort seven miles east of Pretoria.

NOTES

- 1 Amery, Times History, Vol. IV, p. 79.
- 2 Ibid., p. 85.
- 3 Montreal Herald, 26 June 1900, p. 5.
- 4 Heron to Parents, 23 April 1900,
- 5 Globe, 2 August 1900, p. 5.
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CHAPTER V - PATROLLING THE HIGHVELD\*

The fall of Pretoria did not mark the end of the war as had been anticipated by soldiers and newspaper correspondents. After the flight of President Kruger and his government east to Machadodorp and the occupation of Pretoria by the British the Boer forces had experienced "a spasm of despair".<sup>1</sup> However, the dramatic successes of De Wet in the Orange River Colony,<sup>\*\*</sup> the defiant example of President Steyn and the dynamic leadership of Louis Botha and Jan Smuts infused a new spirit among the Boers. In addition peace negotiations with the British gave the Boers breathing space to regroup their forces.

Although the British had captured the capitals they had failed to gain control of the countryside. Their advance, like a ploughshare with a narrow track, had cut through the country throwing Boers aside but leaving them ready to reassemble at will and continue the conflict.<sup>2</sup> In the Orange River Colony De Wet launched devastating raids on British depots, and in the rugged ridges running south-east from Pretoria determined Boer commandos took up positions under Botha's leadership.

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\* The elevated rolling country of the eastern Transvaal.

\*\* On the 28th of May Roberts had formally annexed the Orange Free State and he renamed it the Orange River Colony.

The ridges are connected by lateral spurs and dissected by numerous defiles and provided excellent cover for the Boer marksmen. Botha expected Roberts to continue his advance along the railway line in pursuit of Kruger, and he established a front running twenty miles from Kameelfontein to Tygerpoort. Botha had learned the importance of strong flanks to counteract the successful British turning movements used on the march to Pretoria. He decided to turn the tables on the British and outflank them.<sup>3</sup> The Dragoons would soon experience a taste of their own medicine.

General French was still in command of the cavalry and the mounted infantry, although the wastage of men and horses on the march to Pretoria had reduced the size of the column considerably. Two days after settling in at Koedoespoort the Dragoons moved with French to Kameeldrift a few miles to the north-east. During the weekend the Canadians shared in scouting sorties in the vicinity of the Boer right flank. It was estimated that 4,000 men with fifteen guns were entrenched on the three peaks overlooking the Kameelfontein valley. The scouting was inadequate and how formidable the Boer position really was would not be fully realized until twenty-four hours later.

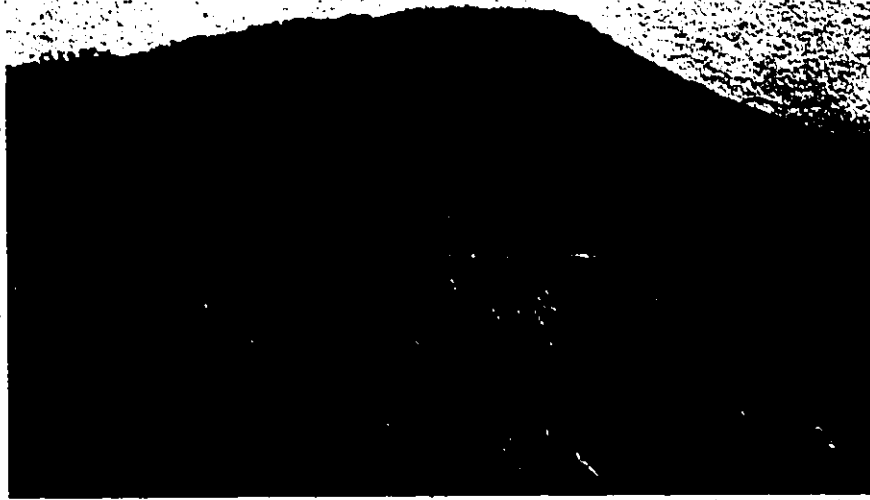
Reveille sounded at 3 a.m. on Monday morning the 11th of June and French's shrunken column moved off in

the pre-dawn darkness towards Kameelfontein Drift. It was daylight when the column began crossing the stream which was still shrouded in the early dawn shadows cast by Louwbaken kopje towering over the drift. The cavalry and mounted infantry crossed over first without opposition and a sense of confidence began to pervade the column when a shell came screaming through the air. It embedded itself in the ground next to the wagon train as it edged across the drift throwing up a cloud of red earth. Then another gun opened up accompanied by rifle fire and the exploding shells and whistling mauser bullets threw the men into confusion. As the wagons lumbered off to the west the men sought shelter on the rocky hillside. Alderson's mounted infantry including the Dragoons were ordered to launch an assault on Louwbaken but the Boers had chosen wisely and held an almost impregnable position. The Canadians were trapped on the steep boulder-strewn slopes, and the changed terrain demanded different tactics from men not accustomed to kopje conflict. They imitated the Boers by building sangars\* during the night; the rock shelters gave them protection against the Boer sharpshooters and allowed them to cook and smoke in safety.

In the heaviest fighting of the campaign the Dragoons had barely managed to hold their own against an enemy

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\* Stone breastworks.



LOUWBAKEN FROM THE NORTH-WEST



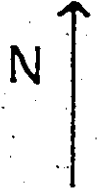
REMAINS OF BOER SANGARS ON LOUWBAKEN

with more guns and men and concealed in fortified positions. French had failed to turn the Boer right flank and with his ammunition exhausted he was in very real danger of being surrounded by the enemy. The Canadians spent one of their most anxious nights on African soil and the taunts of the Boer sentries carried in the cold, clear air seemed menacingly close.

The following morning brought a resumption of the bombardment which was supplemented by a Creusot at Edendale six miles south. Despite the rain of shells and mauser bullets the Dragoons escaped serious injury. Another day of desperate fighting saw the Canadians and the other units inching forward from boulder to boulder in the face of heavy enemy fire. At the end of a gruelling day there was no significant change in the positions of the adversaries and the assailants trapped on the steep hillside anxiously prepared for another night. But unbeknown to French's troops Roberts had taken Diamond Hill in the afternoon. Botha decided to withdraw his troops and it was so skilfully executed that only when the sun rose next morning did the weary Canadians discover that the enemy had slipped away to the east under cover of darkness. A half-hearted pursuit was undertaken but both men and animals were too exhausted and the futile chase was called off.<sup>4</sup>

# KAMEELFONTEIN

(11-12 JUNE)



BOEKENHOUT  
RIDGE

4228

krokoel spruit

4000

KAMEELFONTEIN  
VALLEY

Boer Lager



4270

4392

4200

KAMEELFONTEIN  
RIDGE

4429

Louwbaken

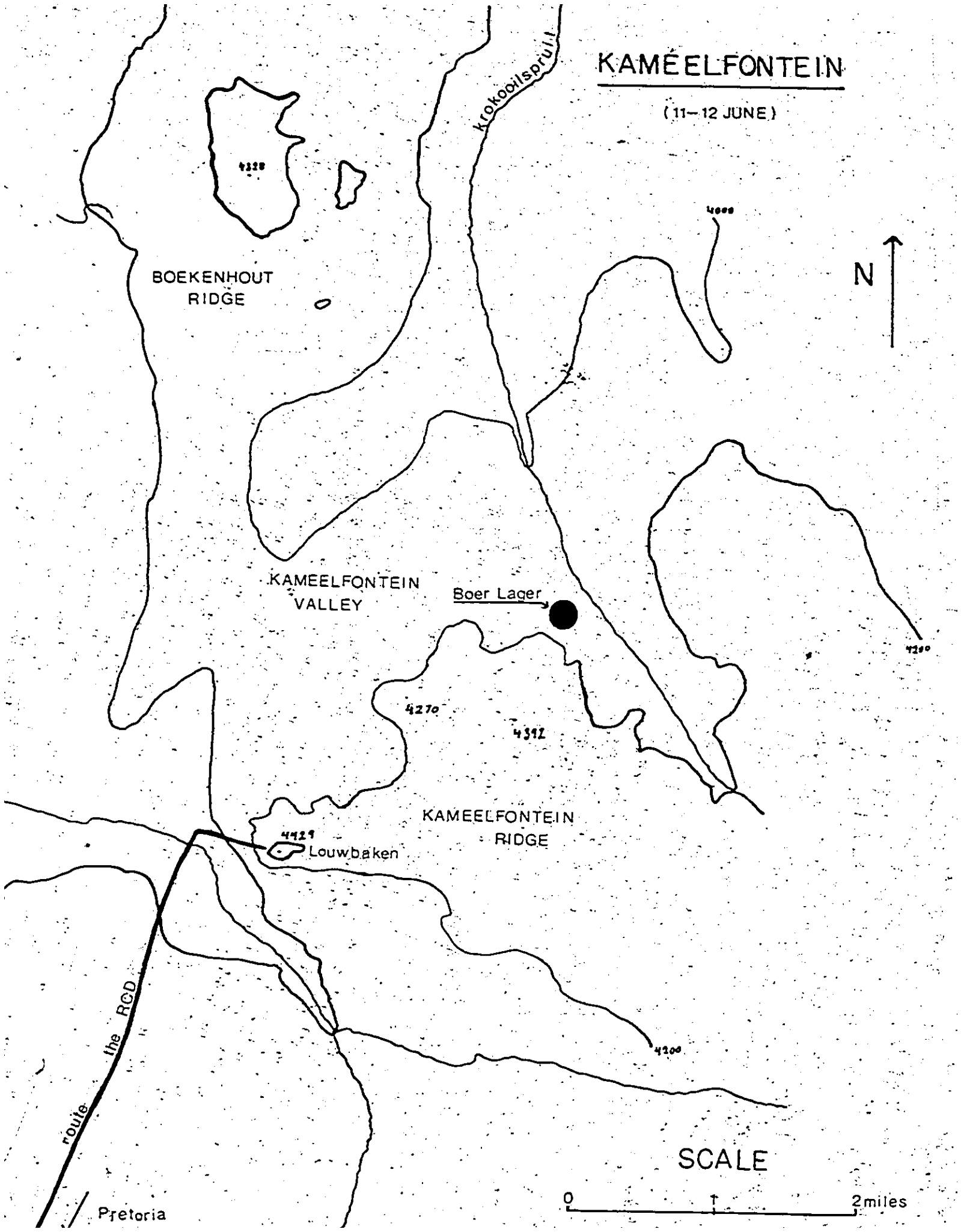
4100

route  
the RCD

Pretoria

SCALE

0 1 2 miles



The Dragoons had shared in two of the most difficult days of the campaign and had played a significant role in an extensive engagement known as the Battle of Diamond Hill. By holding the strong Boer forces at bay in the north Roberts' task was eased further down the front. Had the imperial defences at Kameelfontein cracked the road to Pretoria would have been wide open. The battle-weary troops stumbled back to base camp near Derdepoort desperately in need of rest, refitting and remounts.

One quarter of the regiment had been left at camp because of the wastage among the horses. Traditions died slowly in the British army and the cavalry still had first claim on all fit horses. Even fewer RCD's would have accompanied French if they had complied with an order to send their fit horses to the cavalry depot. To keep their faithful Canadian mounts many Dragoons declared their horses unfit for service.<sup>5</sup>

The importance of mobility in the conflict and the increased use of mounted infantry units resulted in a different role for the military horse. They were no longer primarily used in charges over flat plains but in a variety of tasks over rough terrain and subjected to greater hardships than the cavalry horses of earlier wars. Working at high altitudes on insufficient rations and heavily burdened by day and unsheltered at night took a heavy toll of animal life.<sup>6</sup>

The horses that survived the trans-Atlantic voyage in the "Milwaukee" were unprepared for fighting a mobile war on strange terrain and in an alien climate. The jolting train ride through the hot and dusty Karoo aggravated their debilitated condition. It was impossible to condition the Canadian horses for service in the war and yet in spite of the lack of preparation they performed admirably.

Proper feeding was a problem throughout the campaign. The Canadian horses were accustomed to a diet of hay and oats but initially the convoys carried only oats and bran. The bulky supplement providing roughage for digestion was to be obtained from natural grazing en route and from supplies in Boer barns. Yet there was little time to graze by day because of manoeuvres and by night they were tied up. The local grasses were often unpalatable for the Canadian horses especially after the first frosts when, in addition, they lost their nutritional value. Boer supplies were unstable and unsuitable; there was no hay, and occasionally a little corn and oatsheaves which were inadequate for hard-working horses. The British military authorities began importing hay from other countries, including Canada, but frequently it was mouldy by the time it reached the front lines and the horses refused to eat it. The twelve pound a day forage allowance was quite inadequate for horses subjected to

such a rigorous regimen and this was frequently reduced by half. Ensuring a sufficient supply of potable water was often as great a problem as providing forage.<sup>7</sup>

Horses working under harsh conditions and improperly nourished were especially susceptible to a variety of equine diseases and disorders. Weakened animals succumbed to horse-sickness, strangles, catarrhal fever and glanders in droves. The army veterinary services were deficient and many horses could have been saved with better facilities and more veterinarians with a knowledge of African conditions. Shoeing facilities were also inadequate and contributed to the prevalent problem of lameness. The horse-shoes were frequently too big and the farriers had to fashion their own shoes.<sup>8</sup> Back strain and sores was another major problem affecting the horses. These were caused by heavy or improperly fitting saddles, dirty blankets and excessive loads in the form of equipment or heavy men. When on a march the Dragoons would always walk next to their mounts to ease the strain on their backs. Despite the care lavished by the Canadians on their mounts more than half the horses that embarked at Halifax died of exhaustion, were killed in action or had to be destroyed.<sup>9</sup> It was heartbreaking to see an emaciated animal stumble and make a futile and pitiful attempt to rise on all fours. There was no alternative but the sad task of putting the animal out

of its misery and leaving its carcass to the ubiquitous vultures. During the course of the campaign over one hundred RCD horses deteriorated to the degree where they were unfit for service and they were dispatched to "sick farms" such as the one at Middleburg in the Transvaal.<sup>10</sup> Many recovered and were used later by other units.

Remounts were a very important factor in the war. When the Dragoons' horses had to be replaced it was usually with Argentinian remounts, but they lacked the strength and endurance of the Canadian mounts.<sup>11</sup> One trooper's Argentinian horse collapsed on patrol and he had to remove the saddle and carry it several miles back to camp. The South American ponies had difficulty in carrying the heavy Canadians and Colonel Lessard appealed for stronger horses but the better horses always went to the cavalry units.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the Argentinian horses were not trained for combat conditions and nor were they accustomed to being led. Horse stealing between regiments was frequently a problem. On one occasion even General Hutton's horse was taken and he was furious!<sup>13</sup> The Canadians were always on the lookout for Boer horses with their legendary qualities of endurance, speed and agility, but when they located ponies on farms they were usually 'rejects' unfit for service.<sup>14</sup>

The Dragoons spoke highly of the manner in which their Canadian broncos performed under conditions of great

hardship.<sup>15</sup> There were still eighteen of the original 375 in the regiment at the end of their tour of duty. The heavy Universal saddle issued to the regiment was not a success, however. Besides the weight it required a saddle blanket which, if not folded properly, caused back damage. The blanket also became dirty and sweaty very quickly.<sup>16</sup>

The respite in camp was brief for on the 16th of June French despatched Hutton with a force, that included Dragoons, to search for a group of Boers rumoured to be in the Klip Kop area west of Pretoria. Since the column had had a tiring day's march Lieutenant Young was chosen to lead a dozen Dragoons and a few British scouts in a sortie to locate and disarm the Boers. The group worked its way down the east bank of the Crocodile River and then crossed over and approached the suspect farm from the rear. They surprised and surrounded forty Boer combatants and on following wheeled tracks into the bush they discovered two camouflaged guns prepared to defend the farm against a frontal attack. Oxen were hitched to the guns and after an arduous journey the group reached the bivouac at midnight.<sup>17</sup> Immediately on his return to the base camp Hutton sent a letter off to Lord Minto, the Governor-General, enclosing a copy of his field report to Lord Roberts, and writing in glowing terms of the Dragoons:

I could not allow so exceptional a performance of so difficult, dangerous and delicate duty to pass without bringing the whole detachment by name to your Excellency's notice. I would add that the detachment was specially selected on account of the quality of the men and of the condition of their horses for this particular service. 18

No sooner had the detachment returned from this successful expedition than a development occurred which brought disgrace to the regiment. Two Dragoons were court-martialled and convicted of a grave offence. During the march from Johannesburg to Pretoria Private Hopkins and Private Pearce with a British Sergeant had captured a small group of Boers and forced them to surrender their rifle and ammunition. They then committed a serious military crime by selling the equipment back to the burghers. This might never have been detected had not some British scouts appeared on the scene. One could speak Dutch and as soon as they learned what had transpired they galloped after the Canadians, took them prisoner and escorted them to Pretoria. On the 20th of June they appeared before a court-martial and were convicted on the charge of "assisting the enemy with arms" and sentenced to ten years of penal servitude each. This rash act

brought disgrace to the regiment and the general feeling among the ranks was that the two men should have been shot as traitors.<sup>19</sup>

The Dragoons, like any military group, were guilty of many misdemeanours during their tour of duty. Some relatively minor such as missing a roll call, some more major such as selling supplies from the regimental transport wagons.<sup>20</sup> Two members of the regiment decided they preferred the comforts of an uninhabited house in Johannesburg to the discomforts of camp life but the authorities decided otherwise and assigned them one hundred hours in detention.<sup>21</sup> Another Dragoon who had joined the Transvaal Constabulary was found guilty of theft and after completing a sentence of 168 hours of hard labour he was discharged from the force.<sup>22</sup> The regiment would have had a much worse crime record had not one of De Wet's commandos captured and burned the train carrying the defaulters' books.<sup>23</sup>

Boer raids on the eastern side of Pretoria just outside the British picket lines were proving a nuisance and a party of 400 men including a group of Dragoons under Lieutenant Turner were sent out to clear the area. In addition Boer activity north of Pretoria prompted Roberts to order Colonel Lessard out with a column which included fifty Canadians to patrol a range of kopjes known as The Pyramids. Most of the Dragoons celebrated

the 1st of July doing outpost duty or patrolling with Lessard or Turner, while those on the sick list or those deprived of horses languished in camp at Derdepoort.<sup>24</sup>

The Canadians had experienced many disappointments in South Africa. They no longer held the romantic notions of war they once did in Canada, and illusions of glory, pomp, and honour had been swept away after the first few weeks in Africa. Perhaps the most bitter disappointment was the expectation that with the fall of Pretoria the war would end. A month after the surrender of the capital it was apparent that the war was far from over, and not until Botha and De Wet were captured would it end. There was a widespread feeling that the Canadians had suffered sufficient privations and that the British regulars should be left to complete the affair.<sup>25</sup>

At the beginning of July Lord Roberts was ready to commence the advance east along the railway to the Mozambique border.\* Any possibility of a flank attack by the enemy had to be eliminated and on the 4th of July Hutton was sent to clear the Tygerpoort-Witpoort ridge<sup>26</sup> with a column comprised of cavalry, mounted infantry and artillery. The base camp was established at Rietfontein and the Dragoons participated in extensive scouting forays in the surrounding area. Botha recognized the

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\* The railway to the Mozambique port of Lourenco Marques was the Boer lifeline to the outside world.

• Kameelfontein

PRETORIA



• Diamond Hill

• Tygerpoort

THE EASTERN  
DEFENCE OF  
PRETORIA

(JUNE - JULY, 1900)

• Witpoort

• Reitfontein

• Rietvlei

• Oliphantsfontein

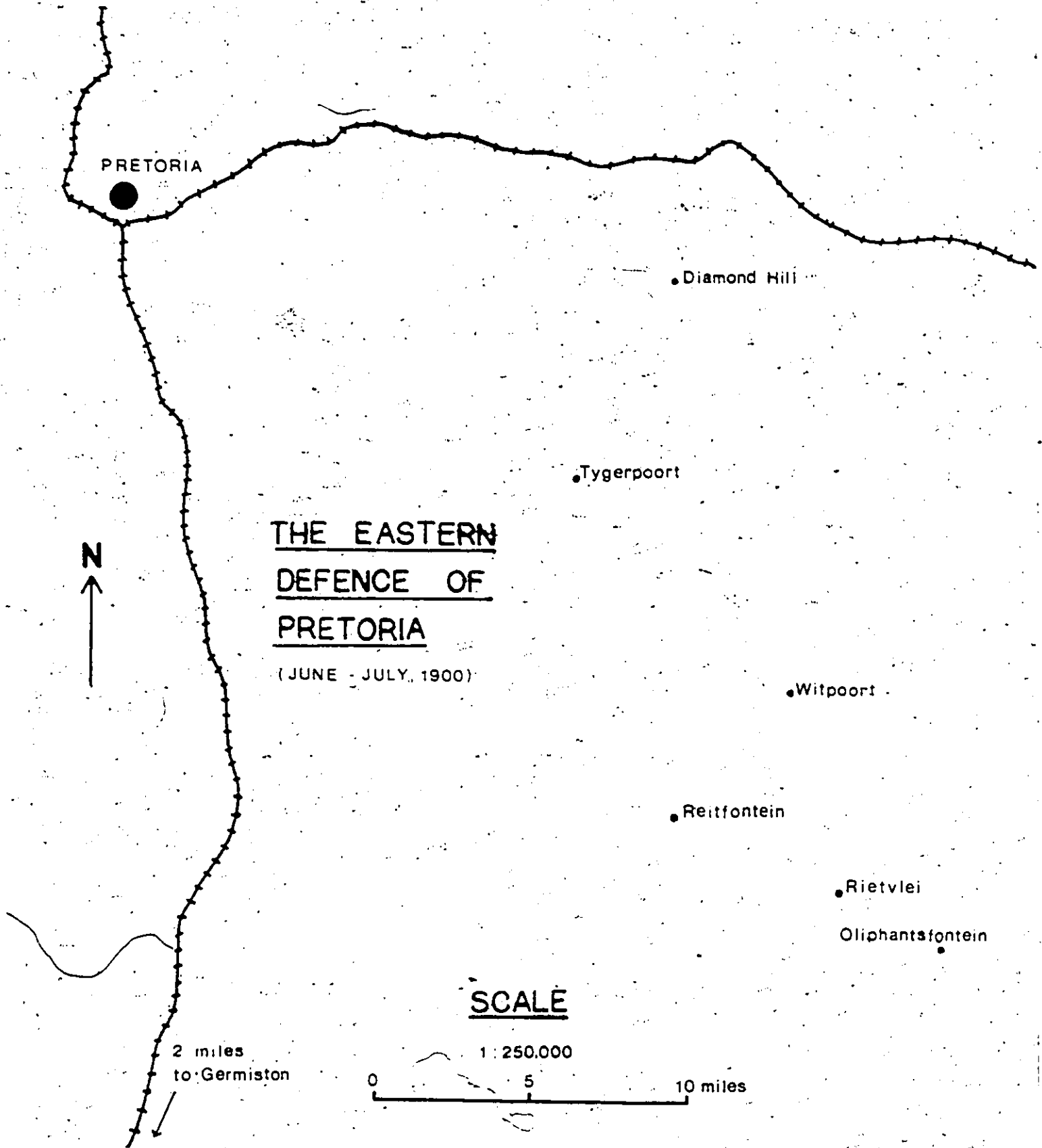


SCALE

1 : 250,000



2 miles  
to Germiston



strategic importance of the ridge and he had 3,000 men facing Hutton.<sup>27</sup>

Scouts reported a large laager\* down the road at Olifantsfontein and a force including the RCD was dispatched to clear the area. The Canadians escorted a battery of Royal Horse Artillery and soon found themselves under heavy fire. They were forced to dismount and spent an anxious day subjected to bombardment and shrapnel. The Boers drove the imperial attackers back and only darkness saved the column from being surrounded. Eight Dragoons suffered wounds in the engagement, and it was the first time in the campaign that the regiment had experienced casualties of this magnitude. So much for William Anderson's likening the Boers to a rat with a dying kick!<sup>28</sup>

Church parade was cancelled the following day because of a report that a Boer enveloping action was underway. Botha had taken charge of the action and planned to surround Hutton's base camp and clear the road to Pretoria from the south-east. A squadron was deployed on a ridge to protect the camp from the approaching Boer left flank and B squadron escorted the five-inch guns north-east of the camp. There was desultory firing throughout the day but no concerted enemy drive, possibly because of the Boer reverence for Sunday.

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\* A Boer camp.

Hutton's force had stood their ground well, but had been unable to clear the area in preparation for the eastward advance. General French had remained in Pretoria and Lord Roberts ordered him to march to Rietfontein with reinforcements to dislodge the tenacious Boers from the strategic ridge. French assumed command of the operation and launched the offensive in the predawn of the 11th of July. Under cover of the misty darkness the infantry moved forward and once the early morning sun had cleared the air the artillery, escorted by A Squadron, opened up in support. B Squadron were active on the far left flank just north of Witpoort and they helped turn the Boer right but it was too late as Botha had withdrawn the main body from the ridge and moved east out of range. The action was of major significance because it cleared the ridge of the troublesome enemy.

News of Boer successes north of Pretoria prompted Roberts to recall French with some of the troops and Hutton was left with 4,000 men to hold the recently acquired ridge. Hutton moved his headquarters to Rietvlei and set his men to work patrolling, scouting and doing outpost duty. There was little rest or relaxation for the next few days for in addition to the duties there were skirmishes with the enemy. The Canadians did find time to challenge the New Zealanders at rugger, but the Kiwis were too powerful and won easily.<sup>29</sup>

The Boers had not abandoned the ridge and Botha was determined to drive Hutton off. On Monday morning the 16th of July they launched a three-pronged attack on the British positions and by mid-morning they had engaged the entire British front from Witpoort to Olifantsfontein. By noon the cavalry and artillery had secured the British right flank, and the Dragoons working under Alderson had spent the morning battling Pienaar's commando just north of Witpoort. The focus of the action moved to the centre where a detachment of Royal Irish Fusiliers and New Zealanders was besieged by Viljoen's Commando. The RCD's were ordered to initiate a counter-attack and attempt to relieve the Fusiliers on the high ridge south of Witpoort. Lieutenants Borden and Burch led the Dragoons in the advance and "by a brilliant charge forced the Boers to give way."<sup>30</sup> As they approached the rim of boulders skirting the ridge Borden and Burch stood up to lead the assault and as they clambered up they were shot by Boer riflemen at 200 yards. Borden slumped over a rock and gasped "I am done for boys" and died within ten seconds.<sup>31</sup> Two other Dragoons were seriously wounded before the enemy was driven off. By evening the whole front had been cleared and the enemy were in retreat eastwards. It had been a memorable but sad day for the Canadians. The victims of the battle were buried the following day - one hundred lifeless bodies deposited in

a long trench in the brown veld. In another cemetery at midnight the Canadians gathered to pay their last respects to two brave comrades as Lieutenants Burch and Borden were laid to rest in a moving ceremony. In a heartfelt letter Colonel Reeves of the Fusiliers expressed his gratitude to the Dragoons for rescuing his unit and mourned the loss of Borden and Burch.<sup>32</sup>

The regiment spent the next five days at the Kietvlei camp doing outpost duty and patrolling. The tensions of the past weeks evaporated as the Boers retreated eastwards. The threat to Pretoria had been eliminated and the Dragoons had played a major role in the struggle along the ridges.<sup>33</sup>

During the first three and a half months in South Africa the regiment had been remarkably free of casualties despite a number of fierce engagements. Colonel Lessard wrote in his regimental report at the end of June:

The regiment had been continually fighting with the 1st Mounted Infantry Corps ever since it left Bloemfontein and had often been exposed to very heavy firing, and yet luck seemed to stay with us, as there were no casualties, except perhaps a few men grazed and a few horses killed or wounded.<sup>34</sup>

The Dragoons found the 37 mm. Maxim Automatic machine gun (nicknamed the "Pom-Pom") the most disconcerting of the Boer weapons.<sup>35</sup> There were twenty-five one-pound shells in a belt and when the first of a series exploded the troops knew there would be more following at twenty-five feet intervals. The explosive shells and the bark of the gun made it a frightening weapon but the material damage that it caused was minor.<sup>36</sup> The Canadians were frequently subjected to heavy bombardment by the Boer artillery. Although the effects of the Creusot and Krupp guns were often terrifying, especially on the horses, the destruction was usually minimal and many actually preferred the shelling to the rapid fire of the pom-poms.<sup>37</sup>

The RCD's were surprised at the ineffectiveness of the Boer artillery because they had superior guns to the British. Despite the reputation of the Boer gunners their aim and range-finding was inaccurate, the fuze-settings were inadequate, shells were defective and frequently failed to explode. The gunners often acted independently and failed to co-ordinate their fire and to concentrate on a specific target.<sup>38</sup>

After the fall of Pretoria the incidence of casualties among the Dragoons increased dramatically. This was partly due to rashness and over-confidence but also to closer contact with the enemy and different methods of combat. During the defence of Pretoria the RCD's often

acted as escort to the 'twelve-pounders' of the Royal Horse Artillery and because the British were usually outranged by the Boer guns they had to move closer to fire effectively. In the closer range fighting the renowned marksmanship of the Boers began to take its toll. The combination of accurate riflemen and the peerless 7 mm. 1896 model mauser made the Boers a formidable foe.

The Dragoons were issued with the .303 long Lee-Enfield Mk. I rifle, which had a magazine holding ten rounds. It was a sturdy rifle, resistant to dust, and effective to 3,000 yards. The main complaint was that it was too heavy for mounted troops to carry when they were in the saddle day after day. General Hutton refused to allow them to place the rifle in the saddle bucket because it would affect the weight distribution and harm the backs of the horses. Revolvers were recalled early in the campaign and were never reissued. They were unsuited to the type of warfare and would only have added extra weight.<sup>39</sup>

Two machine-guns were attached to the regiment, a Colt under the control of Major 'Gat' Howard and a Maxim. The Colt proved the most serviceable during the campaign, its main advantage being its mobility. The light gun and carriage required only one horse to pull it and in a skirmish it was kept firing until the last

moment and then retired at full gallop presenting a very small target. If trapped by the enemy the gun was light enough that it could be lifted off its carriage and carried away in the saddle.<sup>40</sup> The maxim was less mobile because it was bigger and heavier and required four horses to pull it. The gun also experienced problems with its water-cooling system and shells tended to jam in the breech.<sup>41</sup>

After the eastern approaches to Pretoria had been secured French was anxious to strike ahead swiftly and cut off the Boers as they retreated eastwards. The circumspect Roberts was reluctant to risk losing men in an ambush and he ordered the traditional tactical pattern of having the two flanks move ahead of the main army.<sup>42</sup> The general advance began at dawn on Monday the 23rd of July and the Dragoons were assigned a position on the right flank. During the next few days they acted as advance, flank and rear guard to the column with occasional sorties to search suspect farms. There were sporadic skirmishes with the rearguard of the retreating enemy forces and on one occasion the Boers fired the veld to hide their retreat and the Canadians had the unpleasant experience of riding through burning grass and a huge smokescreen.<sup>43</sup> The column rode into Middleburg on the 27th of July and occupied the town.

General De Wet's raids against British bases and columns in the Orange River Colony diverted Lord Roberts'

attention and it was a month later before he renewed his attack on General Botha's forces. The Boer leader had established his headquarters near Belfast and his commandos controlled large areas in the Eastern Transvaal. French assigned Hutton's troops the responsibility of holding a line of posts north and east of Middleburg, and by active patrolling to give the Boers an impression of strength of numbers.<sup>44</sup> For the next month the Dragoons were stationed at a number of posts along the railway and at the end of August they were moved to the British base at Belfast, where they remained until the end of their tour of duty. During this period they were involved in reconnaissance and intelligence work, patrolling the lines of communication, outpost duty, searching farms and punitive raids and sallies against Boer commandos.

The line of outposts were manned twenty-four hours a day and connected by a telephone system developed by the Royal Engineers. The outposts provided protection and security for the camps and allowed observation of enemy movements. The usual practice was to send the men out for two days on duty and back to camp for a similar period. Boer attacks on the outposts occurred frequently and additional duties as reinforcements were often necessary. The RCD's developed a good reputation for outpost work and the forward sentries would take up their positions among the rocks before dawn and avoid Boer

detection by keeping under cover. The remaining pickets were placed further back behind the stone breastworks. The Canadians shared in the responsibility of engineering and building the field fortifications and received favourable comments from General Hutton. Night duties in the stone fortifications were especially uncomfortable in the biting winter cold and fires were forbidden because of security. Not all stations were cheerless and number one outpost on a friendly farm south-west of Belfast was a popular duty for there was always fresh milk and meat available. Except for sporadic Boer sniping, outpost duty was a fairly tedious affair and to alleviate the boredom a trooper would sometimes walk out in to the open and stand on a rock if the enemy was at a safe distance. The target would usually draw Boer fire but because of the rarefied air the report of the rifle could be heard in time to allow the trooper to slide down behind the rock before the bullet arrived. It was dangerous but exhilarating sport for bored soldiers.\* Another incident which provided a change of routine was when a party of Australian Bushmen surprised a Dragoon outpost and took them prisoners. Not until they reached camp and the Australians were convinced that they were colonial allies were the Dragoons released. Fortunately the Australians didn't shoot first and then ask questions!<sup>45</sup>

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\* See notes, page 158.

The tedium of camp life on the highveld was also relieved by patrolling the lines of communication. Patrolling the important rail link with Pretoria was undertaken by small groups for periods of two to three days. Two men riding 400 yards out on each side acted as flanking patrol while the rest of the troop were spaced about fifty feet apart. The patrols would carry their rifles across their saddles with a shell in the breech and ten in the magazine ready to commence rapid-fire at a moment.<sup>46</sup> The troops had to be on guard constantly for bogs because once a horse was stuck in a quagmire it was impossible to extricate it.<sup>47</sup> On one tour a group of Dragoons encountered the advance guard of Lord Strathcona's Horse coming up from Natal with General Buller. During the brief meeting the Canadians were able to exchange news of the war and of home.<sup>48</sup> The RCD's were also engaged in reconaissance and intelligence work during their lengthy sojourn on the highveld, and Lieutenant Turner was complimented on his report regarding Boer equipment and movements.<sup>49</sup>

Another feature of highveld life was inspecting farms in the vicinity of Belfast. The Canadians searched farms suspected of harbouring combatants and storing arms and ammunition. If guerillas were located the farms were razed, and occasionally they were burnt in retaliation for a Boer attack on a camp or on a train.

Boer combatants who had surrendered and handed in their rifles were allowed to return to their farms and these were inspected to ensure that they were farming and not fighting. When Boer families were discovered supplying information to their fighting men they were evicted and escorted to major towns for internment. It was sad to watch the proud burghers leave their farms and possessions. The Canadians found the farm work distasteful but realised it was necessary if the Boers were to be defeated. Farm patrols also involved commandeering cattle and sheep and escorting them to camp for slaughtering.<sup>50</sup>

Early in September a small group of Dragoons shared in an expedition through nearly impenetrable country. Roberts was anxious to increase the British presence further east and south of the railway to reduce the isolation of the British garrison at Barberton. Hutton was ordered to work his way to Kaapse Hoop and establish a base there. He composed his flying column of men from Alderson's mounted infantry and 'Gat' Howard's Colt gun section comprising an all-Ottawa crew was included. They were the only Dragoons to see service beyond Belfast. The column left Belfast on September the 8th and pushed east through the most difficult terrain the Canadians had encountered in the campaign. They dropped down into the fever-ridden lowveld and then followed an arduous trek through bush-covered and mountainous terrain.

Hauling the Colt gun up and down the precipitous valleys was an especially tough task for the crew. After a week in the mining settlement of Kaapse Hoops the column returned to Belfast leaving a skeleton complement in the village. During the stay Trooper McCarthy had a brush with the law. He was arrested by the military police for pulling down an old tin butcher's shop for shelter against the rain, but the case was dismissed by the Provost-Marshal since the Boer owner was on commando and soldiers of the Queen deserved adequate shelter against the elements.<sup>51</sup>

The beginning of October saw an increase in Boer activity. Reports suggested that local commandos were planning an attack from Boschpoort on the railway, and Colonel Lessard led sixty-five men out on October the 1st. They headed north-west from Belfast and down into the steep Steelpoort River Valley and in a sharp engagement in which Sergeant Ryan distinguished himself they were able to deter an attack on the railway in that area.<sup>52</sup>

However, fifteen miles away a successful attack did take place. A troop of B Squadron on relief at Wonderfontein were called out but the enemy had disappeared leaving five members of the crew dead and the engine and water-tank perforated.

Five days later a unique encounter took place when a force composed entirely of Canadians under command of a Canadian officer sallied forth on a punitive raid against

Boer commandos who had been sniping at outposts north of Belfast. It was a sharp engagement involving much firing and scaling of kopjes in rugged country but little was achieved for the Boers were as firmly entrenched as ever. It was nearly a costly encounter for the Colt gun crew under the mercurial 'Gat' Howard was nearly cut off and captured. Colonel Lessard was understandably annoyed at 'Gat' for disobeying orders and descending into the valley.<sup>53</sup>

On the 7th of October it was prearranged that Turner's troop who were still at Wonderfontein would rendezvous with a detachment of the C.M.R. under Colonel Evans while out on patrol south of the railway. About the time of the scheduled meeting they saw a group of mounted men on the horizon and changed direction and rode over. Suddenly Herriot and Gerald Carter who were on the right flanking patrol galloped towards the men and rode into their midst. Carter went down in a volley of rifle-fire, but Herriot escaped unscathed and turned around and galloped back clinging onto the horse's neck to provide the smallest possible target. By this brave and selfless act the observant pair had warned the remainder that it was an enemy ambush and the rest of the troop retired quickly, took up defensive positions and returned the fire. When threatened by an enveloping movement Turner gave the order to retire to the railway line and a depressed group of men rode into camp that evening not

knowing the condition of Carter. Later in the evening in a generous gesture the Boers brought Carter to the periphery of the camp and left him there. He was not seriously wounded; the bullet that had killed his horse passed through his left thigh missing the femoral artery and another had lodged in his chest. Lieutenant Turner assumed the role of amateur surgeon and after sterilising a jackknife in boiling water he excised the bullet and applied a bread poultice. Carter was sent off to the base hospital the next day and made a rapid recovery.<sup>54</sup>

The plated small-calibre bullets of the high-velocity rifles made for clean uncomplicated flesh wounds and caused far less internal damage than the old lead bullets. There was seldom any deviation from the trajectory within the body, and bones bore neatly drilled holes, except at short range when shattering did occur. The small holes healed quickly in the heat and dryness of South Africa aided by good dressings and prompt attention by the ambulance corps. It was ironic that patients who died when operated on would often have survived if the wounds had been left to heal naturally.<sup>55</sup> Seventeen Dragoons were listed as wounded in action during the campaign and because of the factors listed above it is probable that the casualty figures would have been much higher in an earlier war.

There is no evidence to support the assertion by some Canadians that dum-dums and poisoned bullets were

used by the Boers.<sup>56</sup> At the outset of the War there were sporadic incidents involving the use of these abhorrent bullets but by the time the Dragoons reached the combat zone they had been condemned and forbidden by both sides. Ricochets produced misshapen bullets which did cause grisly wounds reminiscent of dum-dum wounds, and this factor might have given rise to the Canadian criticism.<sup>57</sup>

After the fall of Pretoria the Boers regrouped their forces and the Dragoons were faced by a revitalised enemy. The RCD's shared in the defence of Pretoria by their tenacious stand at Kameelfontein and in the skirmishes along the ridges further south. Their patrol work also helped protect the town from the determined efforts of the Boers to retake their cherished capital. Once the eastern approaches to Pretoria had been secured the Dragoons marched to Middleburg and a month later on to Belfast. During their months on the highveld they helped the British forces drive Botha's Boers from the railway line and performed a number of important tasks such as reconnaissance and outpost duties, patrolling the lines of communication and punitive raids on enemy bases.

NOTES

- 1 Pakenham, Boer War, p. 431.
- 2 Goldman, French in South Africa, p. 311.
- 3 Amery, Times History, Vol. IV, p. 278.
- 4 Account of the encounter at Kameelfontein was based on the following:  
Amery, Times History, Vol. IV, pp. 281-291.  
Goldman, French in South Africa, pp. 273-280.  
Maurice, War in South Africa, Vol. III, pp. 206-215.  
Montreal Star, 17 July 1900, pp. 7 & 9.  
Ibid., 4 August 1900, p. 7.
- 5 Hilder, Comrades All, p. 57.
- 6 Approximately half a million Boer and British horses died.  
G. R. Duxbury, "More about the Horse in War", Military History Journal I : 3 (December 1968): p. 35.
- 7 Globe, 1 August 1900, p. 6.  
Montreal Star, 22 August 1900, p. 9.  
Goldman, French in South Africa, p. 433.
- 8 Ibid., p. 448.
- 9 Supplementary report, 1901, Appendix C.
- 10 Globe, 1 August 1900, p. 6.
- 11 Montreal Herald, 28 June 1900, p. 4.  
Hilder, Comrades All, p. 78.
- 12 Supplementary Report, Appendix C.
- 13 Turner diary, 18 July 1900.
- 14 Globe, 1 August 1900, p. 6.
- 15 Ibid., 6 August 1900, p. 1.  
Hilder, Comrades All, p. 78.  
Supplementary Report, Appendix C
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Hilder, Comrades All, p. 60.  
Goldman, French in South Africa, p. 285.

- 18 Globe, 13 September 1900, p. 5.
- 19 Hilder, Comrades All, p. 61.  
Globe, 8 August 1900, p. 2.  
Montreal Star, 8 August 1900, p. 9.
- 20 Public Archives of Canada, RG 9 II A3 Vol. 27.  
Regimental Enquiry at Pan Station.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid., Regimental Diary. RG 9 II A3 Vol. 32.
- 23 Worthington, Spur and Sprocket, p. 37.
- 24 Montreal Star, 25 August 1900, p. 8.  
Hilder, Comrades All, p. 63.
- 25 Ibid.  
Montreal Star, 4 August 1900, p. 7.  
Globe, 4 August 1900, p. 5.  
Globe, 10 August 1900, p. 7.  
Globe, 8 September 1900, p. 6. Burch to Father.
- 26 Montreal Star, 15 September 1900, p. 6.
- 27 Amery, Times History, Vol. IV, p. 388.
- 28 Anderson to Father, 19 July 1900.
- 29 Turner diary, 15 July 1900.
- 30 Amery, Times History, Vol. IV, p. 397.
- 31 Anderson to Father, 19 July 1900.
- 32 Supplementary report, Appendix C.
- 33 Battle for the ridges was based on the following:  
Amery, Times History, Vol. IV, pp. 380-398.  
Goldman, French in South Africa, pp. 291-310.  
"Gat" Howard to Colonel Shepley. Public Archives  
MG 29, F 37.  
Maurice, History of the War, Vol. III, pp. 310-320.  
Montreal Star, 25 August 1900, p. 8.  
Ibid., 15 September 1900, p. 6.
- 34 RCD Regimental Diary.

- 35 Hilder, Comrades All, p. 52.  
Globe, 10 August 1900, p. 7.  
Montreal Herald, 28 June 1900, p. 4.
- 36 Manufactured by Vickers of Britain and used by both the Boer and British forces. It fired 300 shells per minute and had a range of 3,000 yards. The Boers also used another quick-firing machine-gun, the Maxim-Nordenfelt.  
D. E. Peddle, "Field Weapons of the Anglo-Boer War", The Journal of the Historical Firearms Society of South Africa 5:5 (June 1971) : 26-32.  
Darrell Hall, "Guns in South Africa, 1899-1902", Military History Journal 2:2 (December 1971) : 43.  
Military History Journal 2:3 (June 1972) : 85.
- 37 Montreal Herald, 28 June 1900, p. 4.  
Smith to Parents, 12 July 1900.
- 38 Hilder, Comrades All, p. 67.  
Montreal Star, 3 February 1900, p. 4.  
Montreal Herald, 25 June 1900, p. 4.
- 39 Supplementary Report, Appendix C.
- 40 Howard to Shepley, 30 July 1900.  
Anderson to Edith, 5 August 1900.
- 41 Supplementary Report, Appendix C.
- 42 Amery, Times History, Vol. IV, p. 403.
- 43 Hilder, Comrades All, p. 76.
- 44 Amery, Times History, Vol. IV, p. 403.
- 45 Outpost duties based on the following:  
E. W. B. Morrison, With the Guns in South Africa (Hamilton: Spectator Printing Co., 1901):  
Hilder, Comrades All, pp. 82-83.  
Heron to Maggie, 17 October 1900.  
Turner diary.  
Montreal Star, 6 January 1900, p. 4.  
RCD Regimental Diary.
- 46 Hilder, Comrades All, p. 84.
- 47 Turner diary, 13 September 1900.  
The last surviving Boer War veteran of Lord Strathcona's Horse, Major E. McCormick, related to me how he was cantering along on patrol in the Eastern Transvaal when

- the horse suddenly came upon a small marshy bog. The animal tried to jump the quagmire but landed short, throwing McCormick over the horse's head on to firm ground. He tried to extricate the horse but eventually had to shoot the luckless animal and leave the carcass mired in the bog.
- 48 Hilder, Comrades All, p. 79.
- 49 Turner diary, 25 October 1900.
- 50 Farm searching based on:  
Hilder, Comrades All, p. 79.  
Turner diary, 12 August, 21 August and 10 October 1900.  
RCD Regimental Report.
- 51 Maurice, History of the War, Vol. III, p. 414.  
Montreal Star, 17 November 1900. Letters from  
Plantagenet McCarthy.
- 52 RCD Regimental Diary.
- 53 RCD Regimental Diary.  
Morrison, With the Guns, p. 225.  
Heron to Parents, 13 October 1900.
- 54 Hilder, Comrades All, pp. 84-87.  
Turner diary, 13 October 1900.  
There is nothing to substantiate Colonel Lessard's claim in the regimental diary that Carter was wounded when the Boers downed arms and then fired on him as he approached.
- 55 T. James, "Gunshot Wounds of the South African War",  
South African Medical Journal 45:39 (October 1971):  
pp. 1089-1094.
- 56 Anderson letter, name and date missing.
- 57 J. Kruger in a letter to the South African Medical Journal 45:47, p. 1388.

\* This claim by Hilder does not appear to be an exaggeration. The Mauser had a muzzle velocity of 2,388 feet per second, and there was little loss of velocity up to 400 yards, but the bullet lost velocity quickly thereafter. Sound travelled at a constant 1,199 feet per second, possibly faster in the rarefied air, and at the extreme range of the Mauser (3,000 yards) the report of the rifle would be heard about eight seconds after discharge. At this range it is possible that the bullet would take ten to twelve seconds to cover the distance.

I am grateful to Mr. John Chown of the Canadian War Museum for this information.

CHAPTER VI - LIFE ON THE HIGHVELD

The Dragons had spent the latter part of the harsh Transvaal winter engaged in patrol work. They were better prepared than their colonial colleagues for the rigours of a highveld winter but still found it a thoroughly uncomfortable experience. The Belfast camp was located near a plaque indicating the highest point in the Transvaal (7,750 feet) and the clear, dry air at this elevation produced a dramatic contrast between the warmth of day and the icy cold of night. The customary winter weather pattern was a frigid night followed by morning mist which would evaporate leaving a clear sunny day. Frequently the wind would blow up warm moist air from the lowveld and it would condense into a clammy fog or a thunderstorm would blow up in the late afternoon unleashing torrents of rain and hail from black billowing clouds. As winter progressed the veld took on a russet brown hue and this was a signal for the Boers to trek north with their animals to more nutritious grazing grounds. There was no trekking to more favourable areas for the Dragons; they had to endure the whims of the weather and the clouds of dust churned up by wind and wagons.<sup>1</sup>

After many months of sleeping in the open the men were again housed in tents. The nature of the work and the inclemencies of the weather made canvas necessary.



As darkness settled over the camp myriads of bivouac fires could be seen flickering on the veld. Around the warm coals were groups of men talking in low voices or animatedly discussing provocative issues, and while some were crooning or singing others sat staring silently into the glowing fires. The hum of human sound would occasionally be punctuated by an outburst of profanity as someone discovered his blankets had been stolen, or by rifle shots as the trek oxen were shot for breakfast. By 8 p.m. the men would start retiring for the night warmed often by the rum issue or by the dangerous practice of coal fires in the tents. Before dawn the guards would waken the sergeants who would have the unpopular chore of rousing the men. The most effective method was to pull the blankets down and this inevitably elicited a string of curses. Fires were relighted and sleepy soldiers went about preparing breakfast in sulky silence.<sup>2</sup>

Then it was on with the day's duties - some moving off to nearby outposts, others preparing for a patrolling tour while the majority set about the more mundane camp duties such as fetching water, cleaning up, building fortifications and various maintenance chores. A pleasant interlude was being assigned to travel to Middleburg by train to draw rations. The ration allocation during the long stay in Belfast was adequate if not imaginative. Fresh meat was available daily, with bacon

occasionally, and ample bread or biscuits with the customary jam, tea and coffee.<sup>3</sup> Frequently the men would vary this diet by making purchases from the local Boer population. On one occasion 'Gat' Howard and William Anderson bought five pigs from a Boer family at Nooitgedacht. After slaughtering them they dressed the carcasses and sold them to members of the regiment turning a fair profit. They kept the heads and worked most of the night making forty pounds of head cheese which was eagerly devoured by the machine gun crews.<sup>4</sup>

General French and General Hutton made regular tours of the camps and outposts. Late one August night a reconaissance group in B Squadron had just returned from an exhausting trip and were preparing a meal when French rode up and exclaimed: "These Canadians, they fight all day and cook all night! When do they sleep?"<sup>5</sup> Later in the month Hutton made a formal inspection of the Canadian camp and field fortifications at Nooitgedacht and declared himself very pleased.

Occasionally the men were permitted a day's leave and some would use the opportunity to visit Canadian friends in the artillery and the C.M.K. who were also camped on the highveld. These pleasant encounters allowed the men to exchange experiences and to catch up on news from home.<sup>6</sup> Jack Heron managed to arrange a tour of an underground coal mine near Belfast, and found it interesting

but the blasting was too reminiscent of the Boer artillery!<sup>7</sup>

Lice and ants were the insects that plagued the men most. Ants would find their way into the food and the bed-rolls while lice were constant companions in the clothing. As soon as the men arrived in camp they would strip down and start searching for the vexatious pests.<sup>8</sup> There was also the occasional contact with scorpions and snakes, but Trooper McCarthy misplaced the continents when he wrote that he discovered "a big black boa constrictor" in his tent!<sup>9</sup> Some of the Canadians acquired monkeys and baboons as pets during the campaign and Jack Heron even managed to train his monkey to find lice!<sup>10</sup>

The arrival of a batch of mail created waves of excitement throughout the regiment. The joy of receiving mail was a common theme of letters written by the Canadians in South Africa. Impatient for news of family and friends and everyday happenings, the plea "Why haven't you written?" was echoed in many letters.<sup>11</sup> There was little to rival the disappointment of a soldier who failed to receive a letter in a mail delivery. It was very frustrating for troops eager for news of home to tolerate a delivery system that was so irregular; often all the mail arrived at once and there were no further deliveries for weeks. For a three month period after Bloemfontein only one batch of mail arrived.<sup>12</sup> The troops invariably

blamed the Boers for burning the mail trains but they did not realize that the British Army postal services were severely overburdened. Writing paper was always in short supply despite the quantities of YMCA paper handed out by Thomas Best and another frequent request was for a few extra blank sheets in letters from Canada. Although forbidden to mention troop movements in their letters many Dragoons described the actions in which they participated.

The clothing issued to the troops in Canada prior to departure was sadly inadequate for combat conditions. Imitation khaki was used and when washed it shrank and turned white.<sup>13</sup> When the regiment reached Cape Town after a month at sea they had to exchange their clothing for British uniforms. The Dragoons very nearly had to accept British helmets as part of the uniform, but Lord Roberts liked the cowboy hats and countermanded the order.

In the latter part of the campaign shortage of clothes became acute and the men had to resort to wearing whatever they could find. Lieutenant Morrison of the Canadian artillery likened the Dragoons to a regiment of western cowboys on parade when he saw them in Belfast. They were riding shaggy ponies and wearing their prairie hats and a motley assortment of uniforms.<sup>14</sup> Skilful darning, the occasional army issue and Red Cross parcels containing socks, underclothing and khaki flannel shirts

enabled the men to survive the harsh winter.

There were not many opportunities for recreation in camp but in late October the Gordon Highlanders organized a gymkhana. The main event was a buck-wagon race with fifty entries from the regiments based in Belfast. Ten mules were hitched to each wagon and the native drivers were dressed up as Arab sheikhs with striped blankets and turbans. The Dragoons fared better in the horse-races and were well placed in both the flat races and the steeplechase. One of the Canadian entries was a captured Boer pony specially trained by Lieutenant Turner. The only feature that marred a highly successful afternoon was the mob of Tommies around the only bookmaker - the Canadians could not get near enough to place their bets!<sup>15</sup>

The military athletic sports were held a few days later and again the Canadians figured prominently. Tom Best who was an outstanding athlete won the quarter mile event easily while McIver took second place in the mile and Niland was placed third in the shot putt. In the tug-of-war the lighter mounted regiments were at a disadvantage and the Dragoons were eliminated by a burly infantry team representing the Suffolks.<sup>16</sup>

Like the newspaper correspondents many of the chaplains returned home after the fall of Pretoria. Captain Thomas Best, the YMCA representative, acted as Protestant chaplain to the Dragoons during their tour of

duty on the highveld. But Tom Best was more than a partisan preacher and he ministered to the needs of the regiment in a multitude of ways. He issued supplies as varied as towels and tobacco, buttons and bibles. Best was a pragmatic pastor realizing that a cup of ginger tea for a shivering soldier was worth more than a sermon. He was an indefatigable worker and threw himself into a wide range of activities with boundless energy and enthusiasm. To all his tasks he brought his contagious cheerful optimism, whether it was massaging the limbs of a soldier suffering from rheumatism, or sewing patches on worn uniforms or even holding horses under fire.

The 'Y' was not held in high esteem by the troops at the outset of the war, but Tom Best was able to endear himself to the men by an unusual combination of qualities and talents. His athletic skills, musical talents and ability to imitate Boer accents appealed to the soldiers and eased his acceptance into a community so often characterised by crude masculinity. His sincerity, faith, tolerance, and compassion were equally appreciated by the Canadians. In many ways Tom Best was the embodiment of the 'Y' ideal of "Body, Mind and Spirit."

Captain Best was especially concerned about the spiritual needs of the men and he used any available occasion to spread his Christian message, be it formal church parade or starlight prayer meeting or a tent full



THOMAS F. BEST



RCD OFFICERS AT THE GREEN POINT CAMP

of soldiers. He was a persuasive speaker and by a combination of wit and warmth he had little difficulty mustering a congregation for church services. He was particularly proud of the conversions he was able to make among the soldiers.

Although "burying had become like a business" to Tom Best he always conducted his funerals in an atmosphere of dignity, sincerity and warmth. He officiated at the burial of Troopers Spence and Ratcliffe who were killed on patrol near Boschpoort. In a simple ceremony the two men, shrouded in blankets, were laid to rest in a hollow near the Belfast camp. Best read the text and after the singing of "Rock of Ages" he said a prayer and then spoke feelingly about death in a short sermon. As the trumpeter played the Last Post he gently dropped red earth on the blanketed bodies, and then committed the two Canadians to Africa's soil with a moving benediction.<sup>17</sup>

The wastage of manpower was a major problem throughout the campaign. A month before the regiment left for home Lessard could only muster three officers and eighty-three men out of an initial complement of 371,<sup>18</sup> and Turner's troop had almost disappeared. As early as the middle of May Private Bishop's troop was down to half-strength and at one time 105 Dragoons were hospitalized in Bloemfontein.<sup>19</sup> Reduced manpower was a problem common to other regiments and one correspondent wrote that the

RCD record was actually better than any other unit in French's column.<sup>20</sup>

Many men were incapacitated for valid reasons, but there was also a small number of malingerers. Some resorted to laming horses to avoid duty at the front while others managed to get themselves committed to hospital with what was disparagingly called "pom-pom fever".<sup>21</sup> What annoyed the conscientious troops especially was men being invalided home often on dubious grounds and then regaling their communities with stories of battles, in some of which they had never participated.<sup>22</sup>

There wasn't an adequate system of replacement for mounted men in the field and if a man was sick he was lost to the regiment. It was galling to know there were idle men in camp while others were doing double duty on the front lines. At the end of the campaign there was no more recognition for those who had served throughout and those who had done a month.<sup>23</sup>

Disease took the lives of more than twice the Dragoons who died on the battlefield. Contaminated water was the curse that caused enteric fever which ravaged the British army. The troops were warned that they should boil their drinking water but the lack of firewood and the inconvenience resulted in many ignoring the warning. As the farm wells were reputed to be poisoned the Canadians would usually fill their waterbottles at dirty reservoirs.

Even the wooden army water carts supplied contaminated water, and one could not trust natural water courses because of the dead animals that littered the landscape. Some like Turner were cautious to boil their drinking water and were never afflicted by intestinal disorders. For those who contracted a severe case of enteric fever, there was no cure and they wasted away in hospitals from Cape Town to Pretoria. Two Dragoons actually died from enteric fever on board ship on their way back to Canada. The shortage of washing water also contributed to a lack of personal hygiene, which was reflected by the ubiquitous lice, and this in turn facilitated the spread of diseases.<sup>24</sup>

It was not just disease and casualties that decimated the ranks for a number of Dragoons joined the Imperial Military Railways or the Transvaal Constabulary.<sup>25</sup> Recruits for the railways were sought from among the men who were idle in camp because of the lack of horses. Mused Jack Heron: "I'm an old railroad man; I think I can run a train off the track as well as anyone else".<sup>26</sup> He joined the railways and was assigned various sinecures at stations in Johannesburg. Others were not as fortunate and were posted to small rural towns either to preserve civil order or to help rejuvenate a moribund rail system. Those who stayed on in the lines were not pleased with the recruiting for government positions as it meant more work for them. Gradually loneliness, isolation and boredom drove many men back to the regiment in the latter days

of the campaign.

As the campaign dragged on and especially during the months in Belfast the thoughts of the men turned increasingly to home. Rumours fed by men anxious to get home circulated through the camp daily. The lack of information on the state of the war provided a fertile atmosphere for the diffusion of wild rumours.<sup>27</sup> When medical examinations were held in Belfast in October the word went around that the regiment was being prepared for immediate return to Canada.<sup>28</sup> In countless letters over the months the troops wrote home informing family and friends that the war was virtually over and they would be sailing for home in weeks.<sup>29</sup> The weeks stretched into months and it became increasingly apparent that the daily news that De Wet and Botha had surrendered was mere rumour. Many were genuinely homesick and developed an appreciation of their country that only those who experience lifestyles elsewhere know.<sup>30</sup> A crisp Canadian apple became an object of great longing to a soldier in cold, deserted and expensive Johannesburg.<sup>31</sup> As their thoughts turned to home so did considerations of employment and many letters contained requests to watch for job opportunities for a returning veteran.<sup>32</sup>

An incident occurred in late September which caused considerable embarrassment for Colonel Lessard. A letter was addressed to Lord Roberts in which a group of Dragoons

expressed a desire to return home to their farms and their jobs. Having completed their responsibilities they wanted to be shipped directly back to Canada immediately and not via England. The letter was fairly belligerent in tone and was forwarded to Lessard for his perusal. He instituted an investigation and duly concluded that the letter was a fabrication.<sup>33</sup>

Not all members of the regiment thought of returning home immediately. Newspaper reports of the troubles in China encouraged some to consider volunteering for service in the Far East. The possibility of another medal and exciting action in place of the monotonous outpost duties was enticing.<sup>34</sup>

Others entertained thoughts of remaining in South Africa and establishing themselves in business. Some like Anderson who had had experience in the bicycle business in Canada had dreams of striking it rich while others wrote home asking relatives to keep an eye open for Canadian firms needing representatives in South Africa.<sup>35</sup> Some were attracted by cheap land in Rhodesia and there were also enticing inducements to join the police or the railways.<sup>36</sup> The Imperial Military Railways offered to pay the passages of wives or prospective wives of anyone who agreed to sign up. Dreams of instant wealth rapidly faded when the entrepreneurs paused in their castle-building to consider the relationship between pay scales

and the cost of living in South Africa. They realized that merely saving enough to return to Canada on the remuneration offered in many occupations would be very difficult.<sup>37</sup>

During the campaign the Dragoons came into contact with the native Africans in different ways. The belligerents had agreed that Africans would be used only in non-combatant roles and many served as drivers of the transport wagons. In this role they were often excitable and volatile, especially under fire. The men who joined the railways came in closer contact in a working relationship and it didn't take many of the Canadians long to adopt the superior attitudes of the local white population. They were quite content to leave the menial tasks to the Africans and expected to be waited upon by obsequious servants.<sup>38</sup>

Troops on patrol regularly visited African kraals, checking on spying, buying supplies or seeking curios.<sup>39</sup> Invariably the greeting was "Dutchmen no good, Englishmen good" in professing their support for the British cause. The Canadians were sufficiently astute to realize that the Boer commandos got the same greeting in reverse.<sup>40</sup> The Dragoons were always intrigued by the relative lack of clothing displayed by the Africans even in cold weather. As one soldier described it, all they wore were beads, bracelets and a broad grin!<sup>41</sup> A large number of

Africans were employed in the camps in a variety of chores. One employee at the Belfast camp was given instruction in reading by a group of Dragoons and his rapid progress was a source of great pride to them.<sup>42</sup>

Camp life also had its lighter moments. General Smith-Dorrien had donated a case of whisky to the regiment, but the sergeants collared more than their fair share. They invited some Gordon Highlanders over to their tent to enjoy the spoils. Nearby were two large baboons tethered to stakes by steel chains. Hilder and his colleagues loosened the guy ropes of the tent and each held a corner rope while McKelvie loosened one of the baboons and manoeuvred it to the entrance flap. He banged on the tent and when one of the sergeants asked who was there McKelvie answered "Another guest", and shoved the baboon in to the tent as the others released the corner ropes. The tent collapsed, the candles went out and the frightened baboon clawed his way through the men scratching the bare legs of the kilted Scots. Hilder's group were immediately on the scene and solicitously asked whether they could help the swearing sergeants raise their tent! In the confusion they were able to secure and spirit away two bottles of the precious 'Scotch'.<sup>43</sup>

Belfast provided the Dragoons with a base camp which made campaign life easier than the earlier marches with their ever-changing nightly bivouacs. The regiment had

shrunk to a quarter of the original complement because of disease, casualties and malingering. Despite the overwork, inclement weather, insects and camp chores life in the highveld camp had its enjoyable moments. A camaraderie flourished among the regiments in camp, stimulated by competitive sporting events and pranks and cemented under fire in the field and around the camp fires at night. Although some dreamed of action in China and others of accumulating a fortune in southern Africa most of the Dragoons were anxious to get home. They no longer harboured romantic notions of war, and jobs, farms, friends and family in Canada beckoned. However, unbeknown to the surviving Dragoons their tour of duty was rapidly approaching its climax and it would soon culminate on the rolling plains above the Komati river.

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- 2 Ibid., p. 205.
- 3 Heron to Maggie, 17 October 1900.
- 4 Anderson to Edith, 25 August 1900.
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- 6 Turner diary, 17 September 1900.
- 7 Heron to Maggie, 17 October 1900.
- 8 Heron to Andrew, 17 July 1900.
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- 11 Turner diary, 3rd August 1900.  
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- 17 Section on Thomas Best compiled from the following sources:  
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- 26 Heron to Maggie, 1 July 1900.
- 27 Heron to Andrew, 17 July 1900.  
Smith to Parents, 19 July 1900.
- 28 Heron to Maggie, 17 October 1900.
- 29 Anderson to Edith, 21 July 1900.  
Howard to Shepley, 30 July 1900.  
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- 30 Heron to Parents, 30 August 1900.  
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- 31 Heron to Sallie, 11 September 1900.
- 32 Smith to Parents, 19 July 1900.  
Anderson to Edith, 25 August 1900.
- 33 Public Archives. RG 9 II A3 Vol. 27.
- 34 Turner diary, 9 August 1900.  
Anderson to Edith, 25 August 1900.
- 35 Anderson to Bert, 28 August 1900.
- 36 Heron to Parents, 30 August 1900.

- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Heron to Maggie, 9 August 1900.  
Heron to Parents, 24 July 1900.
- 39 Anderson to Father and Edith, 19 June 1900.
- 40 Heron to Maggie, 17 October 1900.
- 41 Anderson to Father and Edith, 19 June 1900.
- 42 Heron to Maggie, 17 October 1900.
- 43 Hilder, Comrades All, pp. 101-102.

CHAPTER VII - THE BATTLE OF LELIEFONTEIN\*

General Buller's Natal army, including the Canadians of Lord Strathcona's Horse, joined up with General French's division south of Belfast in mid August. The combined force pounded General Botha's army at Bergendal and the Boers then split into smaller groups and melted into the rolling wilderness of the Eastern Transvaal. The British pushed along the railway to the Mozambique border hoping to capture President Kruger, but the old president had slipped across the border on the 11th of September and escaped to Europe on a Dutch cruiser. Two weeks later the British forces finally reached the Mozambique border but it was a hollow victory because the Boer units were regrouping and preparing for the third phase of the war --- a mobile war fought by small commandos.

General French had left the RCD's at the Belfast base under the command of General Hutton, while he moved on to Barberton and Carolina to subdue enemy units in those areas. At the beginning of October it was announced that Hutton's brigade was being broken up. In Column

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\* The engagement actually took place on three farms eight miles north-west of Carolina --- Leliefontein, Goedehoop and Witkloof. The final charge took place on Witkloof and the Boers named the encounter after the farm. The Canadians presumably named the battle after the farm on which they camped the previous evening.

Orders of the 17th of October he expressed his thanks to the imperial units who had served under him and who had conducted themselves in such a gallant manner.<sup>1</sup> In a separate letter to Colonel Lessard General Hutton complimented him on the proud record of the RCD's in South Africa and of the enviable reputation they had carved as mounted troops:

I cannot sail without sending you a few words of congratulation upon all the success which has attended your regiment while under my command in the late campaign.

It must be with real feeling of satisfaction that your Officers and yourself look back upon the result of the last seven months, and Canada has good reason to be proud of the manner in which your regiment has upheld the reputation of Canadian Troops.

It has been the lot of your regiment, composed as it is of representative detachments from nearly all the cavalry regiments in the Canadian Militia, to illustrate what the type of Colonial Mounted Rifles can accomplish in conjunction with Imperial Mounted Infantry, and when acting with Regular Cavalry.

Nothing can be more certain than the impossibility of raising Militia Cavalry, to the standard of Regular Cavalry, but it has been demonstrated and clearly proved that organised as Mounted Rifles, our Colonies can put into the field, a force of men of the utmost value. I devoutly hope that this force will be brought home not only to every man of the Dominion Militia Cavalry but also to the Canadian people, and Canadian public opinion.

You have had the inestimable advantage of serving under Colonel Alderson, and of learning what Mounted Troops when handled with judgement, skill and dash can do. It has been a constant pleasure to me to note how excellently your regiment has profited by its opportunities, and what real good service it has performed.

The loss in killed and wounded has been abnormally small, considering the number of engagements in which your regiment has been engaged, this fact under the circumstances is a guarantee in itself that the Officers have done well, and the men their part as fighting men.

I shall be glad if you will convey to your Officers and men my sincerest congratulations upon the success throughout the campaign and my hope for their happy return to their homes.<sup>2</sup>

General French had left Carolina in mid-October and the absence of a British force encouraged the Boer commandos to increase the frequency and intensity of their attacks on the railway east of Belfast. Insufficient imperial troops at the Belfast base prevented full-scale operations being undertaken against the Boers. Furthermore, British raids on farms failed to reduce enemy strikes on the railroad. General Horrace Smith-Dorrien assumed command of the Belfast base at the end of October. He was instructed by Lord Kitchener to undertake offensive action against the troublesome Boers and to clear the area between Belfast and Carolina of enemy combatants. In addition to the RCD's, 'D' Battery of the Royal Canadian Field Artillery was based at Belfast, and they were joined by the Canadian Mounted Rifles who had been camped further west along the railway line. On the morning of the 1st of November Smith-Dorrien called his regimental commanders together and explained the plans for the first major assault on the Komati river.<sup>3</sup>

The mixed column comprising mounted troops, artillery and infantry gathered at the Belfast station that evening in teeming rain. The force was divided into two columns which would follow different routes through the night and converge at Van Wyksvlei the next morning. The Dragoons marched off at 6 p.m. as advance guard to Colonel Spens' column. They headed south-west in cold,

clammy rain dropping pieces of phosphorus along the trail to prevent units of the column getting lost in the dark. The column struggled through mud and sleet showers until midnight when a halt was called because the scouts had lost the trail. No thought could be given to turning back because plans had been made to meet up with the other column which was struggling south some six miles to the east. A miserable group of men and animals sought warmth and comfort from the elements. Some lay on the ground and huddled together, others walked around to keep warm while the horses stood trembling as the water rolled down their steaming flanks. The column certainly didn't give the appearance of an effective fighting force as men stiff with cold tried to remount their horses in the morning. The procession of muddied animals and men toiled on and joined up with Smith-Dorrien's equally miserable column at Van Wyksvlei as pre-arranged. The lengthy transport column with five days provisions had taken the most direct route from Belfast and it linked up with the two columns.

The enemy laager lay three miles ahead at Witkloof. Although within easy striking distance of the Boers and adequately provisioned Smith-Dorrien realized that his force was ill-prepared to launch an attack on the enemy under the prevailing weather conditions. He issued orders for the force to retreat along the Carolina-Belfast

road to the safety of the base camp. As soon as the retirement commenced the ever-vigilant Boers, who were prepared for a British attack, fell upon the rearguard of the column and a steady action was fought most of the way back. The dress rehearsal for the rearguard duel on the Komati river a few miles south was taking place without the participants being aware. It was late afternoon when the column stumbled into camp shrivelled with cold and exhausted from fatigue and hunger. Warmed by the rum issue the weary men crawled between dry blankets to sleep away the effects and memories of the futile foray. The first large-scale attempt to force the Boers off the Komati had failed dismally.

Smith-Dorrien anxiously awaited an opportunity to renew the attack on the burghers of the Carolina Commando. Within a few days the weather had improved sufficiently to launch another assault. Reveille sounded at 1:30 a.m. on the 6th of November and within two hours the flying column had moved out of camp and headed south in the direction of the Komati river. The column was composed of approximately 1200\* men but with a ponderous baggage

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\* 250 mounted men made up of a squadron of 5th Lancers, the Royal Canadian Dragoons and the Canadian Mounted Rifles.

The guns comprised two twelve pounders of 'D' Battery of the Royal Canadian Artillery and two five-inch guns of the 84th Field Battery, and a section of 'pom-poms'.

The infantry comprised 900 Suffolks and Shropshires and a bearer company.<sup>4</sup>

column almost five miles long it was a misnomer to term it "flying". The specific objective was to destroy farms which the Boers had used as outposts and camps when they attacked the column on the earlier sortie and to clear the Boer laagers from Witkloof and Leliefontein.<sup>5</sup> These were believed to be the main bases for Boer raids on the railway. The Dragoons and the Canadian artillery shared in the role of advance guard as the column inched its way forward in the foggy darkness of the predawn. The Boers realized that the earlier abortive assault by the British would be repeated and the outposts on the forward farms were waiting for the column. At Eerstelingfontein the Boers launched their attack as the rising sun dispersed the early morning fog. The forward units of the burgher force were too small to halt the British column but by delaying the attackers they allowed the other elements of the commando time to prepare for the assault.

The British force forged ahead behind the combined fire of the artillery, the pom-poms and the mounted men who drove the Boers back from ridge to ridge. The advance units of the burghers had executed their task successfully and by stalling the British progression they had enabled their colleagues to evacuate the laagers west of the Komati river and head for the safety of Carolina. The delaying tactics also permitted Field Cornet Viljoen, leader of ward three, to entrench his men in the precipitous

# FARMS BETWEEN BELFAST AND CAROLINA



BELFAST

Blyvooruitsig

Eersteling Fontein

Van Wyksvlei

Goedehoop

Witkloof

Leliefontein

Burnside

Roodepoort

CAROLINA

SCALE

1:250,000

0 5 10 15 miles

and rocky krantzes and kloofs\* of Witkloof. It was an impregnable position extending from Witkloof to Leliefontein and with only heads and rifles appearing over the edge they were able to sweep the flat table land which the British would have to traverse.

As the serpentine column crossed Witkloofspruit and climbed towards the ridge it came under heavy Boer fire from the concealed marksmen along the edge of the escarpment. The Shropshires were sent forward in an attempt to dislodge the sharpshooters but the exposed nature of their position forced them to lie flat hardly daring to raise their rifles. A troop of RCD's were ordered to dismount and to move forward to assist the infantry but they were equally unsuccessful in deterring the Boer marksmen. Not until the Canadian artillery shelled the enemy positions with timed shrapnel was there any abatement in the raking mauser fire. When the five-inch 'cow guns'\*\* finally reached the ridge they unleashed a barrage of shells and although the fire was not very accurate the exploding shells rattled the Boers and took the pressure off the men in the exposed forward positions.

Smith-Dorrien decided that it was a propitious moment to commence a turning movement on the Boer left

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\* Cliffs and rocky ravines.

\*\* Manufactured by Coventry Ordnance Works, hence the acronym 'cow'. Being pulled by oxen reinforced the use of the term.

flank. At 2 p.m. he sent a force composed of the RCD's, the Canadian twelve pounders, the pom-poms and two companies of Suffolks south-west over the high-ground towards Leliefontein. The flanking patrol engaged the Boer left in the ravine below a large dry waterpan and a fierce skirmish ensued. The confrontation continued for most of the afternoon and ended about 4 p.m. when the Boers relinquished their position and crossed over the Komati and retired towards Carolina. Lieutenant Morrison's two Canadian guns continued to shell the fleeing horsemen as they raced up the long sloping hill to Carolina vaguely visible on the horizon eight miles away. The Boer commanders were expecting the British to push through to Carolina and during the course of the day they had been evacuating farms along the Komati and sending convoys of wagons to Carolina ready to flee further south if necessary. The Boer positions along the edge of the river valley had enabled the convoys to escape unmolested by the British, and the same positions allowed the riflemen to beat a speedy retreat once their left flank was turned.

The column bivouacked that night in the area where the turning movement had been successfully completed. Three camp sites were chosen, one on Leliefontein and the other two on a neighbouring farm, Goedehoop. The camps were located close to a spruit that meandered down to the Komati and William Anderson was moved to describe it as

the prettiest place he had encountered in the country.<sup>6</sup> Not all the troops were able to enjoy the pleasant site for that evening the ambulance wagons headed back to Belfast loaded with the dead and wounded of the day's battle. The campsites on the high ground overlooking the Komati river had been selected to give the appearance that the British were poised to launch an attack on Carolina the next morning. Convinced that the British would continue their push south the Boer commanders ordered signal fires lit to summon reinforcements from neighbouring commandos.<sup>7</sup> The fires burned throughout the afternoon and into the night, flickering scarlet beacons visible for miles around beckoning the burghers.

After the fall of Pretoria the Boer commandos tended to be less mobile and usually stayed within their own districts.<sup>8</sup> During October and early November many of the Carolina burghers were at home with their leader's permission. As the British patrols seldom strayed far from the railway and because it was sowing time they were permitted to stay on their farms and plant their crops. Those who farmed midway between Belfast and Carolina were assigned the responsibility of manning the outposts and reporting on British troop movements. These were the forward units who harassed the British advances in early November and reported troop strength, supporting armaments and British plans to the commando headquarters based at

Leliefontein. Overall command of the Carolina commando was in the hands of General J. C. Fourie and he was assisted by Commandant H. R. Prinsloo. The commando comprised about 300 men and was divided into three wards each under a field cornet. When it became apparent that the British were planning major raids from Belfast towards the Komati river orders were passed to the field cornets to prepare the burghers in their wards for action.

During the evening of the 6th of November while the British were camped near the former headquarters of the commando at Leliefontein a council of the senior Carolina and Ermelo officers was held on Roodepoort just north of Carolina. They discussed the possible options open to Smith-Dorrien and concurred that in all likelihood he would continue his march south on Carolina the following morning. It was decided to launch an attack on the British camp at Leliefontein next morning to frustrate the anticipated assault on Carolina.<sup>9</sup> A tentative plan of attack was adopted: Fourie and Prinsloo would lead a frontal assault on the British, while the Ermelo commando under General Hans Grobler would undertake a left flanking movement and Field-Cornet De Lange would harass the British on the right flank. That night the Boer forces were bivouacked on a semi-circle around Carolina --- Grobler and the Ermelo burghers were on Steynsdraai, Fourie and ward one men camped on Roodepoort. Prinsloo was with

ward three on his farm Haverfontein; while the ward two burghers slept on Kwaggafontein.<sup>10</sup>

Sometime during the course of the 6th of November Smith-Dorrien had made a decision not to cross the Komati river and march on Carolina. He concluded that his force was too weak to risk an all-out confrontation with the Carolina burghers, and his concerns were confirmed when he received reports suggesting the Boers were planning to conceal men along the craggy banks of the Komati and ambush the British column.<sup>11</sup> The British camps were astir early on the morning of Wednesday the 7th of November and by 7 a.m. the column, led by the infantry and the heavy guns, began moving off in a north-easterly direction across the flat plain towards the Belfast road.

Commandant Prinsloo left his farm before sunrise and rode over to Barend Van Der Merwe's farm to collect the burghers of ward two. The combined force of approximately one hundred men rode down the grassy incline planning to link up with General Fourie's force in the valley as arranged the previous evening.<sup>12</sup>

Fourie roused his men early and shortly after sunrise the commando left Roodepoort and headed down the long sloping hill towards the Komati river. As they were about to cross the Boesmanspruit three miles down the hill Fourie trained his field-glasses on the British camp

and to his astonishment discovered that the British were breaking camp and retiring to Belfast. He had incorrectly anticipated that the British would march on Carolina, and realized that Smith-Dorrien had deceived him and had gained precious time in hurrying his column off to Belfast. General Fourie decided to make an attempt to cut off the British retreat and he sent his commando racing down the hill in a northerly direction to reoccupy the strategic positions the Boers had held on the previous day.<sup>13</sup>

General Smith-Dorrien had a small mobile force assigned each day and on the 7th of November the duty unit consisted of Colonel Evans' Canadian Mounted Rifles and two guns of the 84th Battery. When the British Commander noticed the Boers sweeping down the hill towards the river he ordered Colonel Evans to gallop east with the CMR and to occupy the commanding ridge overlooking the river.<sup>14</sup> The Canadians dashed two miles across the veld to the promontory which had been under Boer control the previous day. In an exciting race they reached the kopje first and opened fire on the Boers who were in the valley below. Fourie's burghers dismounted, took shelter behind the rocks and returned the fire. Shortly after the two fifteen pound guns arrived and shelled the remaining members of the commando coming down the hill.

Smith-Dorrien had espied Prinsloo's commandos moving down the eastern flank and suspected that they were

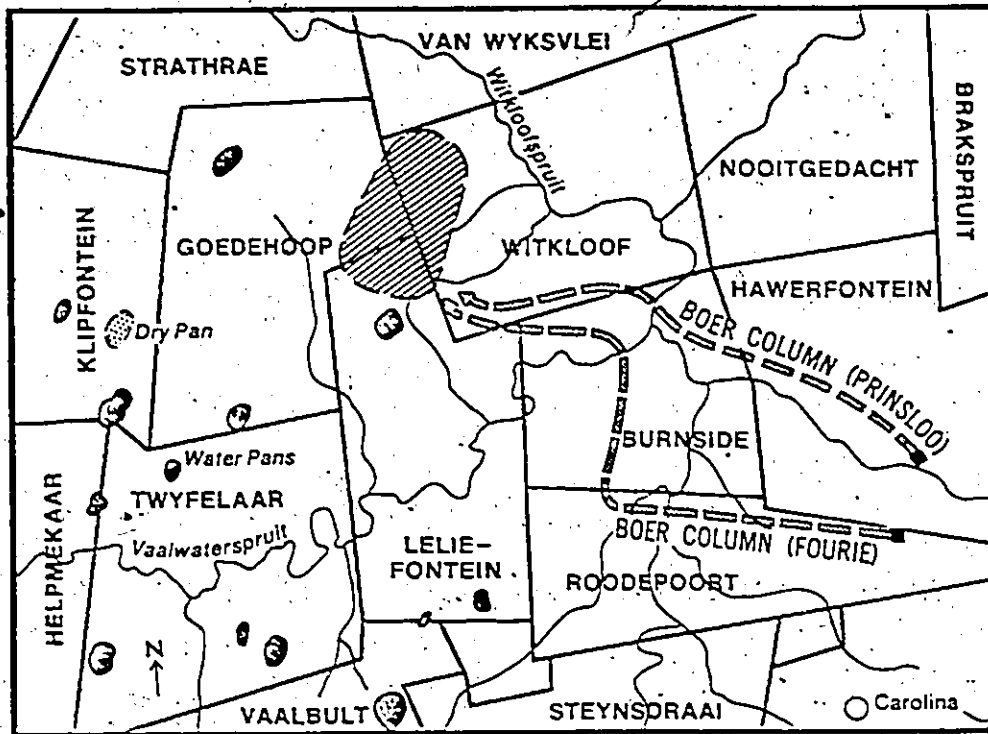
intent on reoccupying the rugged ridges of Witkloof and cutting off his line of retreat. He sent Colonel Spens and the advance guard to occupy the high ground at Van-Wyksvlei thereby protecting the right flank of the retiring column. Colonel Lessard and ninety Dragoons with Lieutenant Morrison's two guns were assigned the difficult task of covering the rear of the lengthy and slow-moving baggage column. While the cumbersome baggage column moved out of camp and trekked slowly across the dusty veld the Canadian rearguard sat on the grass discussing the gravity of the situation. They realized that they were weak in numbers compared with the length of the wagon train and they were keenly aware that the baggage column was always the achilles tendon of a British force.<sup>15</sup> They had the awesome responsibility of defending this vulnerable centipede against an aggressive foe who knew the terrain intimately.

As the last transports moved out of camp at about 9 a.m. the rearguard took up their positions. Lessard deployed his troops in a semi-circle extending one and a half miles across the rear of the departing column. There were three troops of approximately thirty men each and each troop was divided into two groups and the six units were strung out about 500 yards apart.<sup>16</sup> Morrison's two guns and the Colt under Sergeant Holland were placed in the middle of the rearguard. The method of conducting

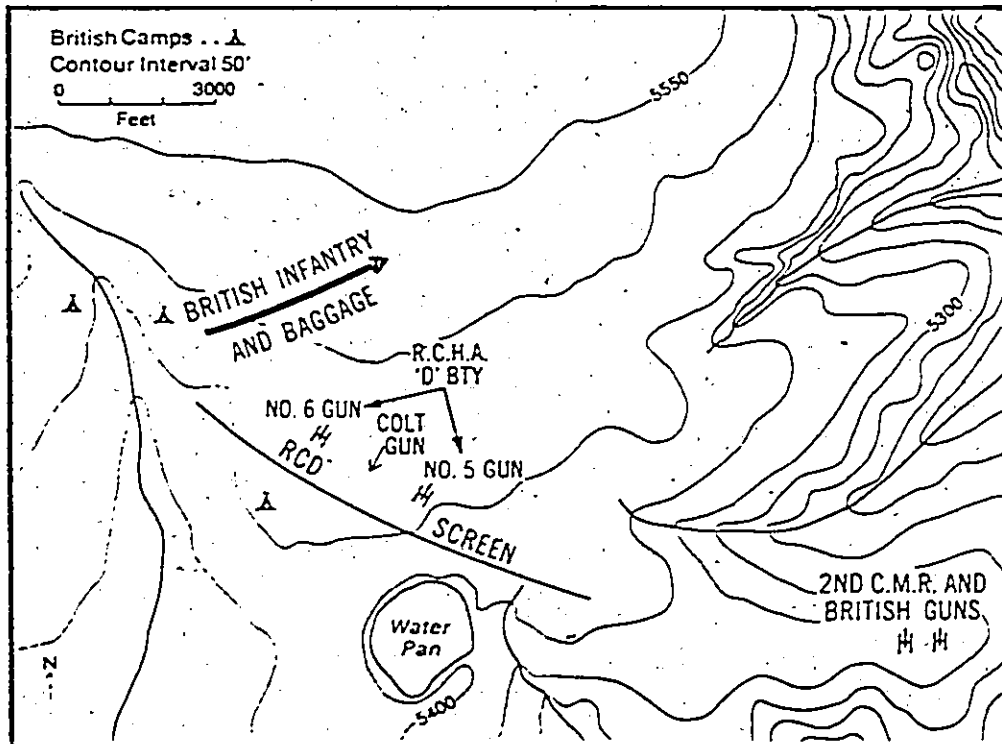
a withdrawal in the presence of the enemy is to hold a series of delaying positions with mobile troops and guns while the baggage column moves ahead as quickly as possible. The first four miles of the ground over which the column was retreating to Belfast was a grassy tableland with rolling, shallow ridges about a mile apart. While the transport column and infantry supports toiled over the next ridge the rearguard had to hold the ridge behind. As soon as the wagons and infantry passed over the ridge the rearguard would have to execute a rapid retirement to reach that ridge. It was a dangerous procedure because it left the artillery and mounted troops isolated behind the column and in close proximity to a daring enemy they ran the risk of being surrounded.<sup>17</sup>

As the rear of the convoy approached the first ridge Colonel Evans' CMB and the field artillery guns relinquished their hold on the promontory and hurried off in the wake of the column to take up a position as right flanking patrol a few miles ahead. This evacuation permitted Fourie and Prinsloo's men to swarm up on to the tableland in the immediate rear of the retreating column. The problems of the rearguard were compounded by the appearance of the Ermelo burghers creeping up out of the south-west. The Canadians went into action dismounted and prepared to delay the closing semi-circle of burghers with rifle fire and shrapnel. At about 10:30 a.m. when the baggage and

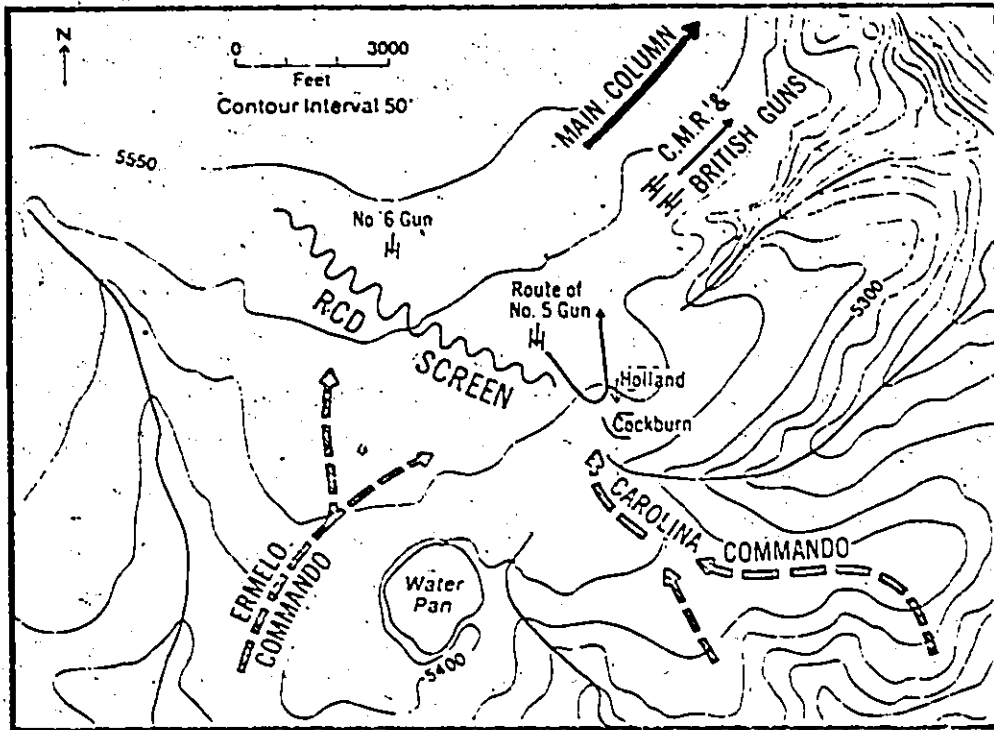
# LELIEFONTEIN - AREA OF OPERATIONS



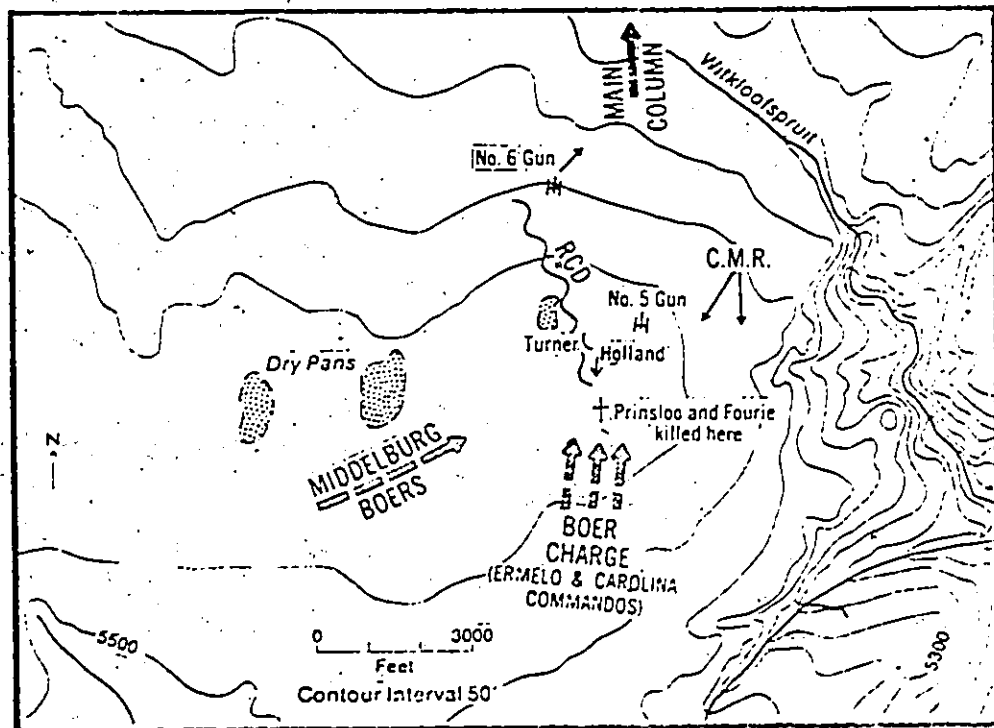
# LELIEFONTEIN - 9 a.m., 7 NOVEMBER 1900



LELIEFONTEIN - 11 a.m., 7 NOVEMBER 1900



LELIEFONTEIN - 2 p.m., 7 NOVEMBER 1900



infantry had crossed the first ridge and the rearguard began to retire the Boers became more aggressive and one group charged the rearguard firing from their saddles then wheeling around and retiring in a cloud of dust.<sup>18</sup>

The artillery retirement procedure called for one gun to limber up and beat a quick retreat to the next ridge while covered by the other gun and the mounted men. The rear gun would then follow leaving the men to hold off the attacking Boers. The resumption of artillery fire was the signal for the men to mount and ride towards the guns. Bent low in the saddles and in extended order they took off at top speed in a cloud of dust and assumed new defensive positions in front of the guns.<sup>19</sup> Good teamwork between the gunners and the mounted men enabled them to hold off the attackers. Co-operation between the two groups was improved by Morrison's decision to empty his ammunition wagons and fill the limbers\* with shells and send the slow-moving wagons off to join the column. The increased mobility greatly increased the effectiveness of the guns in covering the retirement.<sup>20</sup>

As the morning wore on the systematic withdrawal started breaking down as the troops became separated in the melee, and despite the efforts of the Canadian rearguard the Boers moved inexorably closer. On the right

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\* Ammunition-boxes on the gun carriage.

(eastern) flank Lieutenant Cockburn's group was in danger of being surrounded and Lessard ordered Morrison to take number 5 gun across and relieve the pressure. The gun-crew drove the weary horses across a mile of open veld to the right rear and went into action with shrapnel.

- Scenting success the Boers came on steadily and Morrison became increasingly concerned about his gun. On the left rear another threat was developing and Lessard rushed over to order Morrison to limber up and make his getaway before they were all surrounded. Realizing the importance of holding the enemy off to give the gun-crew time to limber up and escape Cockburn ordered his men to take up positions in the grass and behind anthills and hold them at all costs. Seeing the gun moving away the Boers on the right flank took off in pursuit oblivious of Cockburn's men in the grass. They rode in among them and in the confusion that followed the gun was able to escape. The group had played its part by delaying the Boers and since it was futile to continue fighting against a larger force they surrendered. The Boers removed the bolts from their Lee-Enfields and held them prisoners.<sup>21</sup>

Lessard took most of the available troops over to the left (western) flank to counter the latest Boer offensive. A number of Middleburghers under Louis Steyn had arrived to reinforce the western flank. Lessard was appointed by Smith-Dorrien to direct the retirement

and he played a crucial role in its successful execution. His masterly disposition of the troops at the outset enabled the column to get a headstart and when the Boer onslaught showed signs of fragmenting the rearguard he moved around encouraging the troops. As he galloped around the battlefield on his big bay horse he shored up weak places in the defence line and co-ordinated the fire of the defenders. Supervising a retirement in the face of a militant foe who knew the terrain was a formidable undertaking.<sup>22</sup>

Both guns were heading for the security of the main ridge as wave after wave of Boer charges relentlessly rolled back the rearguard. Cockburn's group had been captured, Lessard was fighting a desperate battle with most of the Canadians on the left flank while a handful of men including Holland and the Colt were holding the centre and protecting the guns. The artillery horses were jaded after weeks of hard work and inadequate rations and gradually slowed to a trot and then to a walk. To ease the burden on the horses the men were ordered to run next to them and to assist in the hauling of the guns.<sup>23</sup> Occasionally the guns would unlimber and fire at the attackers --- at first shrapnel and then case shot as they approached closer --- but with little effective impact on the Boers.

Many riderless horses were running aimlessly around the battlefield to add further confusion to the turmoil.

Most of these horses belonged to dismounted men whose animals took fright and stampeded when subjected to the Boer firing. The feverish pace of the action interfered with the customary practice of tending dismounted horses. Lessard was furious at the loss of the horses and actually sent mounted men to capture some of the bolting animals. A mounted infantryman hiding behind an anthill while his horse galloped away was of little use in protecting the retirement of the convoy. Corporal Price had lost his horse and was sheltering behind an anthill expecting to be captured when Private Knisley galloped over under enemy fire. Knisley told Price to climb on behind and carried him safely out of firing range where he was able to find another horse.<sup>24</sup>

As the guns struggled towards the ridge under yoke of struggling horses and sweating soldiers they were silent. It was too risky to stop and fire because they were in such a vulnerable position when unlimbered. Furthermore, the expected infantry support had evaporated. A tentative plan had been worked out in the morning whereby the infantry would conceal themselves and provide covering support for the retiring-rearguard. Once the extent and intensity of the Boer offensive became apparent the infantry headed for the ridge without firing a shot despite the exhortations of their commanding officer.<sup>25</sup> Morrison realized that with exhausted men and animals and

without escorts and infantry support he needed assistance. He ordered an accompanying trooper to ride across to Lessard on the left flank and request reinforcements. The messenger encountered Lieutenant Turner and informed him of the plight of number five gun. Turner hastily gathered a dozen men in hailing distance and ordered them to dismount in a shallow depression on top of the ridge and stall the Boer attack on the gun. Firing feverishly from behind anthills they held the Boers off and enabled the gun to cross over the brow of the hill. Realizing that his group was too small to stall the Boers for long, Turner, who by then was severely wounded in the left arm and neck, mounted and rode off to inform Lessard and to seek extra men.<sup>26</sup>

"Gat" Howard was in Pretoria on leave and Sergeant Holland had been placed in charge of the Colt in his absence. Throughout the morning the mobile machine gun had done sterling work in assisting in the retirement of the convoy. As the enemy closed in Holland had positioned himself just east of Turner's dismounted group and helped stem the onslaught on number five gun. The ubiquitous Colt had been in action all over the battle field covering the retirement and the horse was played out with exhaustion.

Earlier in the morning Colonel Evans' CMR had galloped some miles along the wagon convoy and had taken



LIEUTENANT R.E.W. TURNER, V.C.

up a flanking position on the right. They were busy covering the crossing of Witkloofspruit quite oblivious to the desperate battle a few miles in their rear when an order arrived from General Smith-Dorrien. The CMA were instructed to hasten back and to occupy the ridge over which the rearguard was retiring.<sup>27</sup>

The Boers had started the day determined to foil the expected British attack on Carolina by undertaking offensive action. All morning long they had sustained the assault on the rearguard. Although Carolina was no longer threatened the Boers pursued the column relentlessly, determined to capture the guns and supplies. They had acquired quantities of British twelve pound ammunition and needed the Canadian guns to use it.<sup>28</sup> At approximately 1:30 p.m. General Fourie made a fateful decision. The guns had reached the crest of the ridge and would start making the gradual descent to Witkloofspruit about a mile north under the protection of Colonel Evans' CMA, who were beginning to appear on the north-eastern skyline. It was the last opportunity to capture the two twelve pounders. With the Middleburg and Ermelo men occupying the attention of the western flank of the rearguard General Fourie decided on a final all-out assault. Mustering about one hundred of his men he gave the order and the Boers thundered towards the crest of the hill firing at the Colt and the retreating guns.<sup>29</sup> Holland,

realizing that his horse was too tired to outrun the Boers, continued firing at the approaching horsemen until they were within two hundred yards of the Colt and then quickly unscrewed the barrel from the carriage and galloped away with it.<sup>30</sup>

The Boer line raced for the ridge, led by General Fourie on his white horse 'Scot' with Commandant Prinsloo eighty yards to his left. With rifles blazing and jackets billowing it was a magnificent spectacle. The Boers were so intent on capturing the Colt and the convoy that they failed to see Turner's dismounted group of Dragoons until they were almost upon them. Fourie was the first to notice the concealed troops at fifty paces. He quickly dismounted but he had only time to fire one shot before he was hit in the mouth by a Canadian bullet and died instantly. Prinsloo was trying to warn the others when he was hit in the head and dropped to the ground. A number of the Boers were unaware of the deaths of their leaders and charged ahead determined to secure the Colt. They rode through the dismounted Dragoons and on discovering the concealed Canadians started firing on them from behind. When Sergeant Builder was mortally wounded the remaining troops realized it was futile to continue to resist. They had stalled the Boers and enabled the guns to escape and with their ammunition nearly exhausted they decided to surrender.<sup>31</sup>

A distraught band of burghers gathered around the bodies of their revered leaders, staring in disbelief as the corpses were wrapped in blankets. Some vented their anger on the colt gun carriage, demolishing it on discovering that the barrel had been removed. Others, stunned and saddened by the trauma and demoralised by the loss of leadership, continued a half-hearted harassment of the flanks of the retreating column. The convoy crossed the spruit\* without major opposition and moved on to the bivouac at Blyvooruitsicht. The following day the force continued the return march and a weary group of soldiers trudged across the railway line into Belfast to the cheers of a trainload of Tommies at the station.

A number of Dragoons had been taken captive during the rearguard action. They were well treated by the Boers and in a letter to the Commandant of the Boer forces General Smith-Dorrien expressed his appreciation for the humane treatment extended to the wounded and the prisoners. He also expressed regret at the destruction of property, explaining that it would have to continue until the Boers surrendered. The Canadians were released in the evening of the 7th of November and spoke highly of the morale of their Boer captors. They found them well educated, well armed, adequately provisioned and determined to fight to the bitter end.

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\* Stream.

The Boers showed a special concern for the wounded and provided first aid until the British ambulances removed them in the evening. Casualty figures for both sides were light.<sup>32\*</sup> This can be attributed to a number of factors: mounted men moving rapidly on a battlefield presented difficult targets and it was equally difficult for the riders to fire accurately. The retiring infantry and the guns were moving away and provided small targets. Not even the shrapnel was very effective because of the hasty firing of the weary gun crews. And finally the mounted men were protected by the horses forequarters and as happened repeatedly throughout the war it was the horses that suffered the heaviest casualties.

The blanketed bodies of the Boer leaders were taken from the battlefield to the laager at Roodepoort. The following day they were buried in separate ceremonies on the respective family farms --- Fourie on Welgevonden and Prinsloo on Haverfontein. A day later the three Dragoons killed in the rearguard action were laid to rest in the Belfast cemetery. \*\*

In his report on the action to the Chief Staff Officer at Middleburg, General Smith-Dorrien recommended a number of Canadians for a special mention. Five months

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\* The Boers lost two killed and five wounded.  
The Canadians lost three killed and eleven were wounded.<sup>33</sup>

\*\* Sergeant Builder, Lance Corporal Anderson and Corporal Filson.

later it was announced that Lieutenant Cockburn, Sergeant Holland and Lieutenant Turner had each been awarded the Victoria Cross for "conspicuous bravery during the action at Komati river on the 7th of November, 1900".<sup>34</sup> Lieutenant Morrison was awarded the Distinguished Service Order and Private Knisley the Distinguished Conduct Medal, but inexplicably there was no mention of Colonel Lessard in the list of decorations.

In terms of numbers the clash at Witkloof was not a major engagement. Both the British and Canadians greatly exaggerated the Boer forces to enhance their role in the affair. In actual numbers there were probably as many Canadians as Boers engaged in the confrontation.\* The impact of the action on the role of the Carolina Commando in the area was significant, however. The loss of the two leaders and the burning of twelve farms broke the morale of the commando and attacks on the railway from the Komati river diminished.

The engagement was also significant in the transition between the old and the new methods of warfare in South Africa. The mounted charges of the Carolina burghers heralded a technique that would be used effectively later, especially in the Western Transvaal.<sup>35</sup> The manner in which the Canadians conducted the rearguard was a

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\* 300.

classic example of covering a retiring column, and by their action they were able to save the infantry, the guns, and the supplies. The rearguard action of the 7th of November, 1900, on the heights above the Komati river was an all-Canadian event conducted by two guns of the Royal Canadian Field artillery, and the Royal Canadian Dragoons with assistance from the Canadian Mounted Rifles. The awarding of three Victoria Crosses for a single engagement remains an event unique in the annals of Canadian military history.

NOTES

- 1 Sessional Paper, No. 35 A, 1901.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 General Sir H. L. Smith-Dorrien, Memories of Forty-Eight Years Service (London: John Murray, 1925), pp. 251-252.  
The author makes an error in the date --- it was the 1st of November and not the 2nd. This is confirmed by The Times History and Lessard's report.
- 4 Smith-Dorrien, Forty-Eight Years Service, p. 255.
- 5 Ibid., p. 256.
- 6 Anderson to Edith, 9 November 1900.
- 7 Globe, 29 December 1900, p. 24. Jack Spur letter.
- 8 W. H. Ackermann, Opsaal Herinneringe aan die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog (Johanneburg: Voortrekkerpers, 1969), p. 312.
- 9 State Archives, Pretoria. The Carolina Papers, p. 20.
- 10 Anonymous Boer memoir in the author's possession.
- 11 Smith-Dorrien, Forty-Eight Years Service, p. 257.
- 12 Anonymous Boer memoir.  
F. J. Grobler, "Die Carolina Commando" (M. A. thesis, Potchefstroom University, 1960), p. 134.
- 13 Ibid., p. 135.
- 14 Smith-Dorrien, Forty-Eight Years Service, p. 257.
- 15 Morrison, With the Guns, p. 264.
- 16 Hilder, Comrades All, p. 92.
- 17 H. F. Wood, "The Battle of Leliefontein", The Legionary, June 1963, p. 10.
- 18 Grobler, Carolina Commando, p. 135.
- 19 Hilder, Comrades All, p. 93.

- 20 Morrison, With the Guns, p. 264.
- 21 Ibid., p. 266.
- 22 Ibid., p. 264.  
Hilder, Comrades All, p. 93.
- 23 Morrison, With the Guns, p. 268.
- 24 Regimental Diary, p. 7.
- 25 Hilder, Comrades All, p. 93.  
Morrison, With the Guns, p. 268.
- 26 Ibid.  
Turner diary.
- 27 Public Archives, CMR Staff Diary, 7th November 1900.
- 28 Grobler, Carolina Commando, p. 136.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 There are a number of versions of this celebrated incident, some highly exaggerated.  
Hilder and Turner were the most reliable witnesses and they agree with Holland that he galloped off with the gun. Ottawa Evening Journal, 12 January 1901, p.11.
- 31 Grobler, Carolina Commando, p. 136.  
Anonymous Boer memoir.  
Ackermann, Herinneringe, p. 302.  
~~Hilder article in an undated Springbok, p. 23.~~
- 32 Hilder, Comrades All, pp. 97-98.  
Smith-Dorrien to the Boer Commander at Leliefontein.  
Letter in the Museum of Military History, Johannesburg.
- 33 Grobler, Carolina Commando, p. 137.  
Public Records Office, London. Smith-Dorrien to Chief Staff Officer, 11 November 1900. 100 105 12 HN 08386
- 34 The London Gazette, 23 April 1901.
- 35 C. J. Scheepers, Ruitervuur (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1970), p. 131.

CHAPTER VIII - HOMEWARD BOUND

There was little activity at the Belfast camp for almost a week after the rearguard action. The Boers were conducting an effective guerilla campaign north of Belfast and using farms and villages as bases they were striking at British posts and at the vulnerable railway line. General Smith-Dorrien sent word to the combatants that unless they surrendered or ceased their attacks he would destroy the villages and farms.<sup>1</sup> When the message was ignored, Smith-Dorrien ordered a column out to sack farms and villages in the Steelpoort Valley which were suspected of harbouring men and materiel. The force was similar in composition to that which marched on Leliefontein with the exception of the infantry. Those who had lost their equipment and horses during capture didn't accompany the column, but 'Gat' Howard was back with an additional colt machine-gun.

The force moved down into the Steelpoort Valley north of Belfast and systematically set about destroying farms. "It was the first touch of Kitchener's iron hand, and we were the knuckles," wrote Lieutenant Morrison, who was in charge of the Canadian artillery.<sup>2</sup> Any women or children were removed from the farm houses and after being thoroughly ransacked by the troops the houses were burned or blown up. The column moved on taking along

cattle and sheep and leaving the womenfolk staring either in tearful disbelief or blazing defiance at the smouldering ruins of their homes. It was distasteful work for the Dragoons but they justified it as a necessary means of terminating the war. Not only the enemy farms but also the village of Witpoort and the town of Dulstroom were demolished by the troops in an effort to force the Boers to capitulate. The 'burning trek' lasted five days and the weary column arrived back in camp during the afternoon of November 17th.

A few days after the Leliefontein action the men had learned that they would be returning home within a month. Once back in camp after the foray into the Steelpoort Valley preparations for departure were started. Equipment was cleaned and packed and inspections were carried out by Colonel Lessard. The Gordon Highlanders, who had special links with the Royal Canadian Regiment following the actions at Paardeberg and Klipriversberg, entertained the Royal Canadian Dragoon officers one evening. General Smith-Dorrien, who had also commanded the Royal Canadian Regiment earlier in the campaign, paid special tribute to the Canadians prior to their departure.

Major-General Smith-Dorrien cannot allow the Royal Canadian Dragoons and the left section, "D" Battery, Royal Canadian Artillery and the Canadian Mounted Rifles, to leave his command en route for Canada without thanking them for the grand

work they have performed for him in the Belfast Flying Column.

In eight of the last nineteen days they have been engaged with the Boers, and have proved themselves splendidly brave and mobile mounted troops, and it has afforded the major-general much pleasure to have been able to send through General the Honourable N. Lyttleton to the Field Marshal Commander-in-Chief detailed accounts of their splendid feats of arms and to have been able to bring to the special notice of the Commander-in-Chief five officers and seven non-commissioned officers and men for distinguished conduct in the field during these operations.

In wishing them all 'good-bye and good luck' he has no words to express how great a loss they will be to the flying column. He can merely say that he would choose no other mounted troops in the world before them if he had his choice, and he sincerely hopes the day may come when he may have them again under his command. 3

There was a large turnout at the Belfast station on the 23rd of November as the Canadians heaved their gear onto the flat cars and coal trucks and clambered aboard. As the train pulled out of the station the Royal Irish band struck up "Auld Lang Syne" and the Gordons gave three rousing cheers --- the homeward journey had begun at last! It was an uncomfortable trip in open trucks along a line still under attack by the Boers. They stopped at Vaalbank Colliery overnight since trains still didn't travel at night and arrived in Pretoria the following day.

A number of Canadian soldiers were in hospital in Pretoria recovering from wounds and disease and the Dragoons were able to visit colleagues such as Turner, Elmsley and Roberts. Much of the time was taken up by

the usual camp chores as well as handing in equipment and the issuing of new clothing. The horses and saddles had been handed over to the imperial command at Belfast and a number of these horses had been shipped over from Canada with the Dragoons. That they survived the arduous campaign is an indication of the care given them by the troops.

The Pretoria stopover lasted five days, and on the 1st of December the Dragoons boarded the train for Cape Town. There were more friendly farewells and a complimentary letter from General Alderson to accompany them on the final leg of their journey on African soil. Alderson, who commanded the Royal Canadian Dragoons for most of their tour of duty, wrote to Lessard:

I have just come back from the station where I went to see your people off . . . and I should like to write and tell you how very sincerely sorry I am that they will so soon cease to belong to the Mounted Infantry Brigade. For just seven months we have soldiered together and each succeeding month my feeling has been 'the more I get to know them the better I like them'.

We in the regular army, are brought up with cut and dried ideas and red tape, and I should like to say how much I appreciate the ready way in which, those of your people who have not been so brought up, have fallen in with my ways.

I have only put in a very brief order in Brigade Orders about your going, as I do not think that Orders are quite the place to express one's sincere feelings, but I hope you will make what use you like of this letter, and that you will let all your people know how very sincerely for myself and for the Brigade I regret their going (though I am glad for their sakes) and also how thoroughly I appreciate all the excellent work they have done.

I have always been proud to speak of them as, and write home of them as 'My Canadians'. 4

Another frustrating delay, however, confronted the Canadians. A heavy thunderstorm, so typical of the Witwatersrand, had washed out two railway bridges and the men were subjected to a two-day wait on the train. Eventually the authorities ordered the train to Irene station, where the men detrained and marched a few miles across the washouts and boarded another train. They spent that night at Elandsfontein on the outskirts of Johannesburg, and the next day they travelled on to Kroonstad.

The former capital of the Orange Free State revived pleasant memories for the Dragoons since they had spent ten days there in May recovering from the difficult drive north from Bloemfontein. The return to Kroonstad was less pleasant, however, for a small group of men. After a meal of bread and cheese washed down with rum they became violently ill with high temperatures. The sick soldiers were removed from the train further down the line and hospitalized at Smaldeel. There was no obvious cause, but, as was customary in war-time, Hilder and the other invalids accused the enemy of lacing the cheese with arsenic. After a milk diet the men recovered rapidly and hid aboard a train bound for Cape Town. On disembarking from the train they met Tom Best of the Y.M.C.A. and he took them off to a breakfast of ham and eggs at a nearby restaurant. The group was in time to

view the Grand Tattoo in honour of Lord Roberts and the following day they went down to the docks to wave farewell to him as he sailed back to England.<sup>5</sup> 'Bobs' was revered by the Canadians in South Africa, and they were sad to see him leave.

The rest of the contingent arrived the following day from Worcester where they had been ordered off the train while en route to Cape Town. A convention of Cape Afrikaners was taking place in Worcester and as a deterrent to any thought of rebellion the British authorities placed the Canadians on the hills surrounding the town. The attempt to overawe the Afrikaners only further embittered them and the Canadians found it an unpleasant experience.<sup>6</sup>

On the 13th of December the Dragoons paraded through the streets of Cape Town with other colonial troops. The mayor addressed the Australians and Canadians and commended them on the sacrifice they had made coming to South Africa, and specifically referred to the incipient insurrection they had helped avert in the Cape. Colonel Drury of the Canadian Artillery replied on behalf of the 1,800 colonials and after singing "God save the Queen" the troops marched off to the docks accompanied by three regimental bands. The Canadians boarded the Koslin Castle and at 4 p.m. she cast off to the enthusiastic cheers of thousands of spectators on the wharf and the



*Illustration by [illegible] from the [illegible] of the [illegible]*

CELEBRATING ON THE EVE OF DEPARTURE

sirens of ships and sailed out of Table Bay into the Atlantic.?

Nearly four hundred Dragoons had landed in Cape Town eight months earlier, but only slightly more than half were returning home on the Roslin Castle. Twenty had been buried in African soil and others lay ill and wounded in hospitals from Cape Town to Pretoria. A large number were back in Canada already as they had been invalided home during the campaign because of ill health. Others had been enticed to join the Transvaal police and the military railways, and a group stayed on to fight with 'Gat' Howard's Scouts. 'Gat' had been appointed to command a mobile unit of six Colt guns and one hundred men for a six-month period.

The Roslin Castle steamed towards Canada with a complement of forty officers, seven nurses and nearly eight hundred men of the Royal Canadian Dragoons, the Canadian Mounted Rifles and the Royal Canadian Artillery. The vessel displaced 10,000 tons and with auxiliary sails she was capable of averaging twelve miles an hour in good weather. She was very buoyant because she was not heavily loaded and consequently she pitched alarmingly in the rough weather during the latter part of the voyage. The men were comfortably accommodated in hammocks and the food compared favourably with that on the "Milwaukee".

The return voyage was a leisurely affair compared with the outward voyage; there were no horse duties, no

physical conditioning sessions and only minimal routine duties. Lieutenant Morrison described it as "a superlatively lazy life," but admitted that the life of leisure meant that time passed rather slowly,<sup>8</sup> and boredom was widespread among the troops. There was a fairly active social life on board ship because of the presence of the nurses. A dance was held but because of the ratio of nurses to men there was little chance of the non-commissioned ranks getting an opportunity to dance!

However, it was possible for them to indulge in serenading the ladies at midnight! There was considerable musical talent among the men and weekly concerts were given by the different corps. At the final concert a special appeal by Lieutenant McCrae resulted in a collection of over one hundred dollars for the Sailors' Widows and Orphans Fund. Regular church services were conducted each Sunday by the chaplains. The sports event was not as well supported as that on the outward voyage because of the physical condition of the men. The lack of spirit can also be gauged by the failure to organize a 'crossing-the-line' ceremony on the 23rd of December.

A number of men had returned with pets, baboons, monkeys and mongooses being the most popular. Baboons generally have nasty dispositions and Hilder described how he was sleeping on the deck one night when he was grabbed around the ankle by an unfettered animal. He

dashed off and only escaped because the baboon became entangled in blankets and hammocks. The unfortunate animal was bundled up in a hammock and still spitting and snarling was dropped overboard. Another baboon accidentally fell overboard, but it was more fortunate and managed to grab onto a porthole and haul itself back inside the ship.<sup>9</sup>

Far more concern was shown for the health of Colonel Evans' dog than for the fate of the baboons. "Spud" had been through both the Yukon and South African campaigns with his master. He developed pneumonia on the return voyage and not even the medical talent of three corps could save him and he was buried at sea.

The weather was pleasant during the first part of the voyage and the Roslin Castle was able to average just under 300 miles per day. However, as the vessel sailed north of the equator the weather began to deteriorate and Christmas Day was spent ploughing through turbulent seas. The chaplain was forced to shorten the Christmas service and only a few brave souls arrived to try the plum pudding.<sup>10</sup> A brief respite from the choppy waves was provided by the fueling stop at St. Vincent in the Cape Verde Islands. The ship reached harbour on the 27th of December and spent the next day coaling. Only the officers were permitted shore-leave, but the men did learn of the honours awarded for the action at Leliefontein.

Perhaps it was natural that discontent should surface among those who were not mentioned. Hilder questioned why there was no mention of those killed or wounded or taken prisoner.<sup>11</sup>

The Roslin Castle slipped out of St. Vincent harbour early in the morning of the 29th of December and after changing course to the north-west headed out into the north Atlantic towards Halifax.

During the early part of the voyage a number of men had reported ill with enteric fever. They were placed in the ship's hospital and were cared for by the nurses, but the scourge that took more lives than bullets had not yet completed its toll of the Dragoons. On the 1st of January, 1901, Sergeant Inglis died from the disease. Reverend Cox, the Anglican chaplain, conducted the burial service on the quarter deck, and as the men watched in saddened silence four fellow sergeants gently raised the shrouded corpse over the stern rail and slid it into the sea.<sup>12</sup> Only two days out of Halifax Lieutenant Sutton also succumbed to the dreaded illness. He had not missed a day on the campaign because of ill-health, and shortly before departure from Cape Town he had cabled his wife that he was in fine health and would like her to meet the ship in Halifax. It was tragically ironic that he should fall ill one day out of Cape Town. It was decided to keep his body on board for burial in Canada.<sup>13</sup>

The Roslin Castle reached Chebucto lighthouse early in the evening of the 8th of January and the pilot came aboard to guide the vessel into the harbour. It was a pleasant surprise for the Dragoons to discover that it was John Hayes, who had piloted the "Milwaukee" out of Halifax ten months earlier.<sup>14</sup>

At 7:30 p.m. the Roslin Castle entered the harbour area and anchored at the quarantine station. The tugboat "Argus" carrying the health officials sidled up to the transport and the officials climbed up a dangling ladder onto the deck. The necessary papers were signed after a cursory inspection of the ship.

Lieutenant Sutton's body was placed aboard the "Argus", and the tug turned around headed for shore to deliver the body to the Naval Hospital. The "Argus" passed another tugboat the "A. C. Whitney" carrying friends and relatives to the Roslin Castle, and fearing Mrs. Sutton was aboard the Captain of the "Argus" tried to persuade the other tug to turn around on the pretence that there was disease on board the troopship. The message was misunderstood or ignored and the "A. C. Whitney" moved up beside the Roslin Castle with an excited Mrs. Sutton among the passengers. Reverend Sinnett assumed the painful task of breaking the news, and he scrambled down the ladder to the tug to inform Mrs. Sutton of her husband's tragic death so close to home. It was

a heartrending scene according to the representative of the Montreal Star; stunned by the shattering news Mrs. Sutton fainted and had to be rushed ashore.<sup>15</sup>

In sharp contrast to the grief of the Sutton tragedy was the elation and ecstasy of the meetings that took place between friends and family and returning soldiers. Those who had been fortunate enough to obtain rides on the tugboats swarmed over the ship seeking out loved ones, and embracing others in joyful abandon. The moment of homecoming had arrived and the anticipation of the troops combined with the exuberance of the well-wishers produced an atmosphere of exhilaration that permeated the ship. A temporary separation took place as friends and relatives returned to the city on the tugs and the task of paying off the men got underway.

Colonel Vidal and Colonel MacDonald of the Militia Department had the responsibility of settling the soldiers' accounts, and they came aboard with \$100,000 in government cheques. The men had been in the pay of the British government until the 22nd of December and thereafter until the 8th of January their remuneration was the responsibility of the Canadian government. The paying-off and discharge procedure continued on board the ship until the early hours of the morning and few of the soldiers enjoyed much sleep that night.<sup>16</sup>

The Roslin Castle spent the night at anchor and at 8 a.m. next day three signal guns from the citadel

announced that she was moving up to the pier. This was the signal for the public throngs to start moving down to the wharf. The large, enthusiastic crowd was reminiscent of the departure of the "Milwaukee", but the atmosphere was different; where there was a sense of foreboding, there was now excitement, relief and rejoicing at the return of the troops. A twenty-one gun salute boomed out over Citadel Hill as the Roslin Castle moved up the harbour and was eased into number three pier by the tugs. The band of the Royal Canadian Regiment was on the wharf playing "Home, Sweet Home" and "The Maple Leaf", and the regiment also formed the guard of honour for the occasion. At 10:30 a.m. the gangplank was lowered into position and Colonel Drury, followed by Colonel Lessard and the nurses, officers and men filed down onto Canadian soil again. By noon all were ashore and after a quick inspection on the dockside they marched off in leisurely fashion through falling wet snow to a luncheon reception at the armouries. Ten men were still suffering from enteric fever and they were carried off on stretchers to the military hospital.\* The march to the armouries was also reminiscent of the departure in February --- there were military bands, cheering crowds waved flags and decorations festooned the buildings. So informal was the parade that eager bystanders carried the Lee-Enfields for the soldiers.

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\* All ten survived.

The Armouries had been gaily decorated and 125 waiters were present to serve the returning heroes. In the same hall where they had their final inspection in February the Lieutenant-Governor welcomed the contingent back to Canada and made special mention of the deaths at sea. After Colonel Drury had replied the men mingled with the visitors, who had watched the luncheon from the galleries, or headed off to the nearest bank to cash their cheques. They had received an average of \$100.00 each, and in addition they also had quantities of sterling and gold which they exchanged for Canadian currency. It was rumoured that \$200,000 of Transvaal gold had been brought back to Canada by individuals, but this was never confirmed and the Halifax banks changed only a fraction of that amount in gold.<sup>17</sup> Many of the contingent spent the afternoon shopping for items they had been denied during the campaign, especially new clothing.

The Dragoons had made many friends during their earlier stay in Halifax, and they had an enjoyable time renewing old acquaintances. So enjoyable was the reunion with old friends in Halifax that many of the Dragoons missed the first official train which departed that evening! Some of the officers and men had planned to spend the first night in Halifax and take later trains. An ugly incident with Transvaal origins took place that evening at the Halifax Hotel where the officers were

staying. In July at Bankfontein Station Captain Wynne, the Quartermaster of the regiment, had spoken rather disparagingly to two troopers. The two men warned Wynne that the remarks would not be forgotten, and they waited until the return of the regiment to Canada to carry out their threat. They followed him into the elevator at the hotel, having first bribed the elevator boy to stop the elevator between floors. Guests and officers on both floors could hear the loud verbal threats hurled at Wynne but were helpless to intervene. Fortunately there was no physical contact between the men and the two Winnipeggers departed having made their point.<sup>18</sup>

From Cape Breton to Victoria communities were preparing to welcome home their heroes in similar fashion to their departures. Numerous committees were formed to organize homecoming celebrations to honour the troops.

The Maritime troops were the first to reach home and large crowds were waiting at the stations to greet them. The Cape Breton boys were welcomed home with a turkey supper and the next day all businesses and schools in Sydney closed until noon while a public reception was held at the County Court House. Each returning soldier received an engraved silver watch.<sup>19</sup>

The Quebec City welcome was more muted because of Lieutenant Sutton's death. Many of his South African colleagues including Colonel Lessard were in the crowd of

5,000 which attended his funeral at the Basilica. The coffin was draped in a union jack and covered with wreaths, flowers and his uniform. It was placed on a gun carriage for the final trip to the cemetery and followed by a saddled but riderless horse.<sup>20</sup>

The first of the troop trains reached Montreal in the early hours of the 11th of January and a large crowd of friends and relatives, and cab-drivers anxious for business, was waiting. Many of the Dragoons had missed this train in Halifax and arrived on a later train in the morning. The men had to change trains in Montreal and transfer to special trains for Ottawa, the west and southern Ontario.

The Montreal Soldiers' Wives League had been active during the course of the war and they arranged a welcome home supper for 800 guests at the Victoria Rifles Armoury. A sumptuous meal was prepared and it was followed by the usual speeches and then instrumental and vocal musical and finally dancing until midnight. The stage was artistically decorated and was dominated by a twelve feet facsimile of a statue of Queen Victoria soon to be erected on Parliament Hill. Other organizations such as the Masonic Lodge of Antiquity also organized special welcomes for members among the returning troops.<sup>21</sup>

At all major centres along the railway line to Toronto there were welcoming crowds. Platforms were crowded at Brockville, Gananoque and Belleville and at Kingston one of the largest crowds ever assembled there turned out to honour the returning city sons. While they were undoubtedly impressed by the size of the turnout they must have been disappointed by the influence of the local temperance organization since non-alcoholic beverages only were served at the reception! In Ottawa flags and bunting decorated the city and the troops were welcomed home by General O'Grady-Haly and the Mayor.

There was confusion at the Toronto station because the London and Guelph train arrived first and the crowd surged across the tracks unaware that the Toronto troops were arriving shortly after. Some supporters didn't catch up with the Toronto soldiers until they were half-way to the Armouries! The men were lifted shoulder high by enthusiastic well-wishers and carried out to Front Street where they were placed on gun carriages for the trip to the Armoury. The joyful confusion continued at the Armoury and the Mayor had great difficulty delivering his speech because of the noise. One of the most moving incidents of the evening occurred when a returning trooper saw his baby daughter for the first time.<sup>22</sup>

While the celebrations were taking place in the east the western troops were heading towards the prairies

and the Pacific coast. They were joined at Sudbury by George Bellamy, one of the real 'characters' of the regiment. He had left his troop six months earlier and had found his way back to Canada via England where he had been selected to represent Canada at a colonial troop inspection. On learning that there were no volunteers from Sudbury he decided to stop off there and wait for his colleagues. The townsfolk adopted him as their local boy and treated him as a returning hero. Bellamy just revelled in the adulation!<sup>23</sup>

The western contingent reached Winnipeg on Sunday the 13th of January, 371 days since leaving Hilder noted in his memoirs. An enthusiastic crowd was waiting to welcome them at the station, and accompany them along main street to Grace Church. Unfortunately the procession was marred by a runaway horse which injured three people in the crowd. After the special welcoming service the troops paraded to the Drill Hall led by a group of supporters carrying Major Williams shoulderhigh. At the luncheon the Mayor presented a civic testimonial to the men and Premier Roblin welcomed them home. A measure of the importance of the returning veterans in Winnipeg was the number of dignitaries who spoke publicly at receptions. The following evening the men were entertained again and the main speakers were the Chief Justice and the Lieutenant-Governor.<sup>24</sup>

Once the parties were over thoughts turned to the harsh realities of earning a livelihood. Some would remain in military service, others would return to their farms and for a lucky few their jobs had been reserved for them by their employers. However, for the majority it meant seeking new employment. The prospects appeared to be promising for, in welcoming the soldiers home, the Globe spoke in optimistic tones of opportunities awaiting the returning men and their qualities:

We have a vast country to be developed; the courage, the intelligence, the industry, which have been displayed by our men on the field are the qualities which are necessary for its development.25

NOTES

- 1 Morrison, With the Guns, p. 274.
- 2 Ibid., p. 278.
- 3 Worthington, Spur and Sprocket, p. 36.
- 4 Public Archives, Lessard's official Report, Appendix 5.
- 5 Hilder, Comrades All, p. 107.
- 6 Manitoba Free Press, 10 January 1901, p. 1.  
Morrison, With the Guns, p. 292.
- 7 Globe, 12 January 1901, p. 22.
- 8 Morrison, With the Guns, p. 299.
- 9 Hilder, Comrades All, p. 113.
- 10 Montreal Star, 9 January 1901, p. 10.
- 11 Hilder, Comrades All, p. 114.
- 12 Ibid., p. 115.  
Halifax Morning Chronicle, 9 January 1901, p. 1.
- 13 Ibid., 10 January 1901, p. 7.
- 14 Montreal Star, 9 January 1901, p. 10.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Halifax Morning Chronicle, 9 January 1901, p. 1.
- 17 Ibid., 10 January 1901, p. 7.
- 18 Hilder, Comrades All, p. 119.
- 19 Montreal Star, 11 January 1901, p. 12.
- 20 Halifax Morning Chronicle, 12 January 1901, p. 2.
- 21 Montreal Star, 14 January 1901, p. 3.
- 22 Ibid., 12 January 1901, p. 24.  
Globe, 12 January 1901, p. 13.

- 23 Hilder, Comrades All, p. 116.
- 24 Manitoba Free Press, 14 January 1901, p. 1.
- 25 Globe, 11 January 1901, p. 4.

CHAPTER IX - CONCLUDING SUMMARY

The war dragged on for another year and a half after the Dragoons left Cape Town. Kitchener revised Roberts' strategy and introduced extreme measures to subdue the Boers. He constructed lines of blockhouses linked with barbed wire and with mounted columns making 'drives' across the veld he tried to corner and crush the elusive commandos. Farms were destroyed to deny Boers bases for supplies and the women and children who were displaced by the 'scorched earth' policy were placed in concentration camps. The Boer leaders were able to avoid Kitchener's net, but their forces and their morale were gradually worn down by the British offensive. Peace was finally signed in Pretoria on the 31st of May, 1902.

The Royal Canadian Dragoons were a small regiment in a vast British army. They were part of British columns and under British control and leadership, and care must be taken when isolating the role of the Dragoons not to exaggerate or distort that role. It must be seen in the context of the overall British war effort.

During the course of the campaign the regiment covered approximately three thousand miles of rugged African terrain by train, horse and sometimes on foot --- an area extending from the Cape peninsula to close to the Mozambique border. The major roles performed by the

Dragoons included combat, scouting, patrolling, searching farms, escorting convoys, outpost duty, and reconnaissance and intelligence work. It was probably in the field of combat and scouting that they made their greatest contribution to the war effort.

The initial training in Halifax, although characterised by zealous enthusiasm, was inadequate, and the men were not properly prepared for the Boer brand of warfare. The inadequate training was illustrated by the close-order formation under fire at Leeukop and mounting with cocked rifles at Brandfort. However, the qualities of the troops enabled them to adapt very quickly to the physical environment and to Boer methods of warfare.

The men received their baptism of fire and sharpened their skills on the rapid march north through the Orange Free State. The regiment played a prominent role in a number of major engagements during their eight month tour of duty. At Klipriversberg they held the centre enabling General French to circle around and take Johannesburg, and a week later they helped rescue French at Kalkheuwel Defile. The Dragoons assisted French in holding the northern flank in the important battle of Diamond Hill and for the next few weeks played a major role in defending Pretoria from Boer commando attacks south-east of the city. The climax of the campaign occurred at Witkloof in the Eastern Transvaal where the

remnants of the regiment held off the Boer attack on Smith-Dorrien's column. The fierce rearguard action displayed the degree to which the Dragoons had mastered their lessons learned during the South African campaign. The impressive list of honours awarded in the rearguard action was testimony to the bravery of the respective individuals, but it was also recognition of the contribution made by the whole regiment.

It was perhaps natural that members of the regiment and Canadian war correspondents would exaggerate the RCD role in their letters and despatches, but there were genuine expressions of appreciation and admiration from individual British leaders such as Roberts, French, Smith-Dorrien, Alderson and Hutton. Although the Royal Canadian Dragoons constituted only a very small percentage of the total British forces they nevertheless played an important part in a variety of different roles and acquitted themselves ably.

One of the most anguished aspects of the war was the slaughter of animals, especially the horses. The Canadian horses withstood the rigours of the campaign remarkably well, but despite careful attention from the men the mortality rate was still high. The heavy Canadian saddles were not satisfactory and contributed to the suffering of the horses. Except for the clothing the other equipment was satisfactory. The Canadian-made clothing was inferior

and had to be exchanged for British uniforms before the start of the campaign. Canadian wagons and tents proved to be well suited to conditions in South Africa. The Dragoons were satisfied with their British Lee-Enfields, and never had need to use revolvers or bayonets. The most useful firearm proved to be the Colt machine-gun under 'Gat' Howard's control.

The initial enthusiasm, engendered largely by loyalty to the empire and by the desire for adventure, was sustained well into the campaign by the majority of men. However, after the fall of Pretoria a sense of disillusionment began to pervade the regiment and this was reflected by the increased incidence of malingerers and the increased applications for service in the police and the railways. War had lost its romanticism and exhilaration, and weather, disease, rations, and the hazards of combat combined to produce a growing desire to return home. This was a natural reaction to a tense and dangerous campaign and in no manner detracts from their contribution to the war effort. To a large degree this contribution derived from a combination of qualities common to members from the dominions of the empire. These qualities that enabled the Canadians to rival the Boers included resourcefulness, daring, independence and tenacity. The regiment was guilty of its fair share of looting and crime, although the exact extent is unknown because defaulters records were destroyed in an enemy attack.

A special camaraderie shaped by the war developed among the Canadians, and relations with British and other imperial colleagues were generally very amicable. And even with the Boer civilians there was usually an understanding and a cordiality and for Boer combatants there was always a grudging admiration and respect for their courage and acumen, but naturally also an underlying hostility.

The impact of the war is impossible to measure, especially on a small group of men, but it was probably in the field of tactics practised and perfected by the Boers that the Dragoons learned most. By volunteering for service in the South African War they participated in a major transition phase in the history of warfare --- from the rigid battle formations practised for centuries to an era of mobile attack, trench warfare and artillery bombardment.

APPENDICES

- I The Regimental Designation
- II The Regimental Badge
- III The Oath taken on Enlistment
- IV Officers and Other Ranks
- V Casualties
- VI Honours and Awards
- VII Chronology
- VIII Socio-economic Composition of the Troops
- IX Returning Soldiers

APPENDIX I

THE REGIMENTAL DESIGNATION

When the raising of the second contingent was being considered only one body of rough-riders and mounted police was contemplated and it was decided to name them the Canadian Mounted Rifles to avoid criticism that one regiment was being favoured. General Hutton, then General officer Commanding in Canada, was a proponent of mounted infantry and also favoured "Mounted Rifles" in preference to a cavalry title. In the haste of despatching the contingent the designation 1st and 2nd Battalions Canadian Mounted Rifles was adopted although the former unit was composed of a core of RCD officers and men.<sup>1</sup>

Colonel Lessard only learned of the designation when the regiment arrived in Cape Town. He immediately cabled the Queen and requested that the royal title be given back especially as the regiment was fighting for the Crown in South Africa. He also pointed out that the Canadian artillery and infantry had retained their distinctive royal titles. The Dragoons were also denied their colours and the distinctive badge granted by Her Majesty.<sup>2</sup>

Lord Roberts expressed himself in favour of renaming the regiment especially as it would improve morale and Lessard cabled the Militia Department informing the Canadian authorities that Roberts had recommended changing

the name.<sup>3</sup> Shortly before the Dragoons moved to Belfast Lessard received a telegram from the Canadian Staff Officer in Cape Town: "Leave has been granted you to be known as the RCD".<sup>4</sup> A few days later official confirmation was received in an extract from Army orders of the 21st of August:

"In view of the representation that nearly all the officers and a large proportion of the men serving in the unit known as the 1st Battalion, Canadian Mounted Rifles, belong to the Royal Canadian Dragoons,<sup>5</sup> the unit will in future be designated the 'Royal Canadian Dragoons'."<sup>6</sup>

Not all members of the regiment were enthusiastic about the name change. Turner made a curt entry in his diary that he thought the issue was absurd and had told Colonel Lessard!<sup>7</sup>

1 Montreal Star, 9 June 1900, p. 20.

2 Lessard's Official Report, p. 1.  
Interview with Lessard in The Goat, N.D.

3 Montreal Herald, 4 June 1900, p. 1.

4 Regimental Diary, 23 August 1900.

5 This is inaccurate as only half the officers were RCD and less than one quarter of the men.

6 Regimental Diary, 27 August 1900.

7 Turner Diary, 5 September 1900.

APPENDIX II

THE REGIMENTAL BADGE

It was during the skirmishes along the ridges south-east of Pretoria that the 'legend' of the regimental badge originated. Documentary evidence to confirm the incident is lacking and there is no mention of it in the correspondence and reports from Heron, Hilder, Turner and Lessard. The earliest written reference occurs in R. C. Fetherstonhaugh's A Short History of the Royal Canadian Dragoons published in 1932, although the regiment had applied for permission to wear the springbok badge as far back as 1908.<sup>1</sup>

Larry Worthington describes the reputed incident in an interesting manner in her book.

A light breeze rippled the tall brown grass of the South African veldt. Only an occasional patch of stunted trees broke the monotony of the flat landscape, empty as far as the eye could see save for a herd of springbok --- a small red antelope indigenous to the country. It was July, 1900, and the South African War was ravaging the land. The British 1st Mounted Infantry Brigade had withdrawn and halted after clashing with the Boers at Oliphantsfontein. The Royal Canadian Dragoons, part of the Canadian contingent supporting the British, were acting as rear guard.

In a small outpost protected by a rocky kopje a troop of tired Dragoons relaxed in the warm sun. But the keen-eyed sentry, crouching behind a rock and squinting against the glare, did not relax. His attention was fixed on the springbok which had ceased grazing and appeared nervous. The sentry signalled the troop leader.

"Those deer," he said quietly, "Something's bothering them, sir. The grass seems to be moving but it's not the wind."

The officer raised his field glasses and took a long look.

"Boers!" he breathed, and handed the glasses to the sentry.

"Boers!" confirmed the trooper. "The grass is alive with them!"

"Watch them," said the officer. "I'll have the troop stand to!"

Soon every man was in place, every rifle levelled, every safety catch off. To the casual eye the veldt was still empty, but to the waiting men the grass before them twitched and quivered with movement. Then suddenly the moment came. With a guttural shout more than fifty Boers broke cover a hundred yards off, and twenty Canadian rifles opened rapid fire. In a matter of seconds it was all over. A few Boers fled but most lay dead in the long grass that had concealed their approach. But for the springboks' warning the post would have been wiped out.<sup>2</sup>

Although the incident is of questionable veracity the choice of an African antelope for the regimental badge is appropriate because it symbolizes the recognition by the Dragoons of the importance of environmental factors during the campaign.

- 1 Greenhouse manuscript, Chapter VI.
- 2 Worthington, Spur and Sprocket, frontispiece.

APPENDIX III

OATH TAKEN IN THE PRESENCE OF THE ATTESTING OFFICER

I, Thomas Albert Gifford

swear that I will well and truly serve our Sovereign Lady The Queen in the Canadian Volunteers for Active Service, until lawfully discharged; and that I will resist Her Majesty's enemies, and cause Her Majesty's peace to be kept on land and at sea, and that I will in all matters appertaining to my service faithfully discharge my duty, according to law, So help me God!

I, Thomas Albert Gifford

hereby declare that I am willing to serve wherever Her Majesty The Queen may direct in the Volunteers for Active Service under the provision of the Militia Act of Canada so far as it applies, under the Queens Regulations and orders for the Army and the Army Act, for a term of 6 months or 1 year if required, or until sooner lawfully discharged or dismissed at the rate of pay fixed for the Permanent Corps of Canada, until landed in South Africa, and after disembarkation to serve in Her Majesty's Regular Forces, at the rates of pay fixed by the Royal Warrant for the pay of the British Army, and I have accordingly taken the oath of allegiance.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ (Volunteer)

\_\_\_\_\_ Attesting Officer

Toronto, 2 February 1900

APPENDIX IV

OFFICERS

Lieutenant-Colonel F.L. Lessard  
Major V.A.S. Williams  
Major W. Forester  
Captain H.S. Greenwood  
Captain C.St.A. Pearse  
Lieutenant H.L. Borden  
Lieutenant J.E. Burch  
Lieutenant H.Z.C. Cockburn  
Lieutenant J.H. Elmsley  
Lieutenant A.L. Howard  
Lieutenant A.H. King  
Lieutenant F.H. Sutton  
Lieutenant R.E.W. Turner  
Lieutenant R.M. Van Luren  
Lieutenant C.T. Van Straubenzie  
Lieutenant F.V. Young

Captain C.M. Nelles (Adjutant)  
Captain J.H. Wynne (Quartermaster)  
Surgeon-Major H.R. Duff (Medical Officer)  
Lieutenant C.F. Harrison (Transport Officer)  
Veterinary-Major W.B. Hall (Veterinary Officer)

Regimental  
Number

Rank

Name

17	Private	H.R.G. Agassiz
223	"	E.B. Allan
281	"	C.C. Allen
254	Sergeant	H. Allison
48	Private	D. Allam
101	"	C.E. Anderson
57	"	C.H. Anderson
49	"	W.L. Anderson
230	"	W.E. Anderson
102	"	W.J. Anderson
413	"	B.R. Armstrong
209	"	A.E. Ardiel
302	"	A.F. Arnold
434	Sergeant	R.H. Arnold
369	Private	A.E. Ault
265	"	S.C. Baker
22	"	E. Baldwin
365	"	P. Barton
59	"	E. Bates
145	"	J.R. Baxter
45	"	A. Beaton
421	"	B.M. Beckwith
36	"	L.M. Beers
433	"	W.H. Bell
326	"	G.R. Bellamy
25	Corporal	J. Bennett
370	Private	F. Berg
415	"	F.E. Bettle
334	"	A.B. Bing
161	"	W.G. Bishop
351	Sergeant	W. Bissett
103	Private	A. Bouchard
299	"	D.E. Boulton
40	"	N. Bowman
307	Sergeant	J. Bradner
60	Private	W.Q. Bragg
294	"	W.E. Brand
61	"	A.W. Brown
104	"	F. Brown
164	"	I.B. Brown
313	"	J.J. Brown
105	"	N.D. Builder
106	"	S. Burnett
34	"	F.W. Burritt
160	"	A. Butler
62	"	W.A. Butterfield
63	Corporal	M.J. Callahan
372	Private	H.P. Cameron
186	"	G. Campbell
228	"	T.E. Campbell
7	Armoury Sergeant	D.J. Carroll
301	Corporal	A. Carter

<u>Regimental Number</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Name</u>
305	Private	G. Carter
11	Corporal	J.W. Cartwright
108	Private	E. Chambers
387	"	J. Church
64	"	J. Clark
310	"	J.S. Clarkson
183	"	G.H.A. Collins
222	"	S. Cline
65	"	C. Cooke
66	"	C.W. Cooper
312	"	C.E. Cope
110	"	W.E. Cordingley
216	"	D.J. Crone
371	"	H.M. Cummins
295	"	C.V. Currie
4	Sergeant	P. Dalton
289	Private	E.S. Danby
261	"	W. Dawson
271	"	W. Dean
303	"	J.C. de Balinhard
226	"	C.O. De Lisle
96	"	A. De Rochejocquelein
385	"	E.C. Dill
296	"	M.H. Dix
363	"	J.A. Dixon
157	"	W. Dougall
288	"	H.S. Douglas
38	"	D.H. Doust
414	"	F.L. Doyle
298	"	T. Drought
270	"	L. Drummond
111	"	J.T. Duguid
44	Saddle Sergeant	J.F. Dunning
67	Private	R.J. Dunsmoor
252	Sergeant	W.A. Dyer
68	Private	E. Eagleson
158	"	W.V. Elliott
274	"	F.J. Elmhirst
19	"	G. England
182	"	W.L. Evans
112	"	S.J. Farrell
26	"	E.A. Filson
272	"	J.W. Findley
69	"	E. Fitzgerald
165	"	G.E. Fleming
214	"	G.A. Forbes
364	"	J. Fowler
217	"	J.E. Fraser
359	"	J.R. Fraser
54	Sergeant	H.F. Fuller
273	Private	J.M. George
9	"	T.A. Gifford

<u>Regimental Number</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Name</u>
18	Private	G.N. Glendenning
207	"	W.M. Glover
184	"	W.S. Gold
1	R.Q.M.S.	J. Graham
173	Private	G.E. Graham
280	"	A.W. Gray
114	"	E.C. Gurnett
381	"	T. Hagen
166	"	A.J. Hall
14	"	A. Hallett
169	"	W.J. Hampton
115	"	F. Harbottle
116	"	J.W. Harman
29	"	J.L. Harper
56	Sergeant Farrier	C.F. Harraden
118	Private	F. Hartman
324	"	J.J. Harvey
430	"	J.F. Hawkins
318	"	W.J. Hawkins
278	"	D.S. Hayden
352	Sergeant	G.F.H. Hayward
282	Private	W.R. Head
142	"	A. Henry
15	"	J.B. Heron
329	Corporal	J.D. Herriot
156	Private	H.A. Hiam
70	"	J. Hibbitt
328	"	A.E. Hilder
163	"	A.E. Hillyard
268	"	B. Hobbs
71	"	W. Hodgson
176	"	E.J. Holland
354	Corporal	W.J. Holliday
297	Private	A.Y. Hood
72	"	J.A. Hopkins
229	"	H. Horner
357	"	C.N. Hoy
406	"	F.W. Hubbard
119	"	J. Hubbard
55	Sergeant	G. Hudson
73	Private	N. Hughes
177	"	W.A. Hull
52	S.Q.M.S.	B. Hunt
276	Private	P. Hyzy
74	"	A.G. Inglis
5	Sergeant Trumpeter	L.J.S. Inglis
311	Private	J.S. Irvine
220	"	M. Janes
379	"	W.J. Jay
23	"	J. Jefferson
24	"	P. Jenkins
120	"	T.J. Johnson
170	"	R.G. Johnston

<u>Regimental Number</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Name</u>
28	Private	J. Jordan
292	"	J. Kavan
317	"	J. Keillear
388	"	W. Kelly
293	"	W. Key
367	"	A.R. Kingsley
185	"	W.A. Knisley
75	"	C.H. Koehler
178	"	A.F. Landels
76	Corporal	S. Latremouille
430	Private	F.W. Lawson
420	"	A. Leavitt
263	"	T.E. Linden
267	"	A. Little
411	"	J.M. Lobban
417	"	J.H. Lockhart
208	"	F.F. Loosemore
42	"	H.H. Loosemore
258	"	J.W. Lord
218	"	D. Lougheed
93	Corporal Shoe-Smith	A.J. Lovegrove
77	Private	J.W. Low
122	"	H.H. Lyon
427	"	E.P. Mallory
416	Corporal	R.F. Markham
325	Private	T.H. Marriott
204	"	J.C.S. Marsh
152	"	H.N. Marshall
375	"	J.C. Massie
211	"	W.R. Maycock
85	"	J. Mayne
331	"	E.T. Merchant
30	"	F.F. Metcalfe
423	"	H. Metzler
46	"	J.R. Middleton
227	"	F. Miles
435	"	L.R. Miller
78	"	W. Mitchell
13	"	W.E. Molaskey
376	"	H.D.E. Moody
418	"	A.H. Moorhouse
422	"	D.A. Morrison
431	"	F.S. Morrison
123	"	W.J. Morrison
124	"	W.T. Morrison
404	"	E.A. Mortimore
79	"	W.B. Muir
175	"	L.W.R. Mulloy
205	"	J.A. Munroe
262	"	T.R. Macafee
401	"	J.J. Mc Caffry
143	"	P. McCarthy
266	"	G.A. McClintock

<u>Regimental Number</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Name</u>
125	Private	J.B. McCulla
424	"	J.R. McCulley
47	"	F. McCusker
203	"	A.A. McDonald
80	"	J.W. McGahey
181	"	C.E. McGee
330	"	S.J. McGregor
425	"	A.L. McIntosh
309	"	A.C. McIntosh
31	"	F. McIntosh
426	"	R. McIntyre
126	"	F. McIlry
81	"	M. McIver
333	"	J.D. McKay
315	"	A. McKelvey
127	"	D.M. McKibbin
337	"	W. McLlellan
253	Sergeant	W. McLeod
251	S.S.M.	A. McMillan
407	Private	L.C. McMillan
128	"	G.A. McRae
358	"	C.R.B. Newton
429	"	J. Nilant
39	"	J.J. O'Brien
202	Corporal	M. O'Connell
308	Private	C.K. Othen
378	"	C.C. Owen
-	R.S.M.	J.C. Page
95	Private	F.H. Pake
43	"	G.D. Palmer
284	"	H. Palmer
432	"	J.H. Parks
402	"	A.J. Pawsey
130	"	W. Pearce
219	"	F.C. Peck
180	"	R.J. Pelton
383	"	A. Pickworth
353	"	H. Pope
131	"	J. Potts
172	Corporal	P.R. Price
151	Sergeant	E.L. Purdon
362	Private	J.G. Rae
275	"	D.L. Ramsay
21	"	A. Ratcliff
285	"	L.A. Rea
386	"	G. Reid
382	"	W.J. Reid
215	"	R.H. Reynolds
53	Sergeant	W. Rhoades
132	Private	A.M. Richardson
225	"	G. Richardson
-	"	J. Richardson
257	"	T. Ridley

<u>Regimental</u> <u>Number</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Name</u>
327	Private	A.H. Roberts
361	"	P.F.C. Roberts
368	"	G.M. Robinson
189	"	R.R. Robinson
188	"	R.S. Robinson
174	"	H.E. Roche
260	"	W.D. Rodger
287	"	E.P. Rose
136	"	A.E. Ross
366	"	R.E. Russell
322	"	B. Ryan
419	"	J.T. Ryan
410	Sergeant	R.H. Ryan
316	Private	W.C. Ryan
384	"	A.E. Ryerson
409	"	E.A. Sanford
159	"	C.D. Scott
138	"	D. See
107	"	W.C. Semple
212	"	C.E. Shaw
373	"	I. Shea
82	"	T.P. Shipp
6	Farrier Q.M.S.	G.J. Simpkins
291	Private	J. Simpson
304	"	J. Sinclair
2	Transportation Sergeant	A.K. Skinner
179	Private	N.J. Slater
187	"	D. Smart
133	"	G. Smith
134	"	H. Smith
86	Sergeant	W.T. Smith
405	Private	W.H. Snyder
3	S.Q.M.S.	J.R. Sparks
27	Private	J. Sparks
168	"	D.M. Spence
323	Sergeant Farrier	J. Spencer
109	Private	W.B. Spink
135	"	R.W.E. Spicer
255	Corporal	H.S. Square
83	Sergeant	E.A. Steer
374	Private	J.S. Sterrett
84	"	C. Stevens
428	"	H.I. Stevenson
35	"	M.E. Stewart
244	"	A.F. Stonor
155	"	W.P. Sully
12	"	H.J. Taylor
153	"	W.H. Terrill
162	"	E. Thompson
264	"	J. Thompson
286	"	S.H. Thompson
403	"	T.A. Thompson
88	"	F. Thornton

<u>Regimental Number</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Name</u>
314	Private	J. Threadkill
87	Sergeant	L.A. Till
201	Private	W. Tilley
377	"	T.F. Todt
137	"	W.J. Townley
213	"	E.H. Tripp
171	"	A. Trusler
269	"	A. Turner
41	"	A.W. Turner
283	"	M.H. Tylor
20	"	C.P. Vanevery
412	"	W.E. Venning
89	"	J. Vine
90	"	A.H. Vizard
144	"	J.H. Walker
320	"	F.W. Wallace
91	"	E. Wandby
306	"	W.H. Ward
32	"	D.I. Warren
256	Corporal Shoeing-smith	J. Warriar
167	Private	P. Wasson
50	"	E. Watts
139	"	W.J. Wheatley
408	"	H.B. White
380	"	J.W. White
259	Corporal	F.M. Whitlow
51	S.S.M.	J. Widgery
206	Private	L.R. Wigle
210	"	M.S. Wigle
319	"	T. Wilkinson
154	"	A.G. Willoughby
92	"	W. Winyard
321	"	J.T. Wood
277	"	R.A. Woods
221	"	W. Wright
355	"	G.E. Wurtele
140	"	F. Wyatt
141	"	D.D. Young

Private T.R. Hill (234) transferred from Roberts Horse  
31st May, 1900.

Private W.L. McWilliam (338) transferred from Roberts Horse.

Private J.M. State (336) enlisted in Cape Town.

APPENDIX V - CASUALTIES

<u>Name</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Place of Death</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>	<u>Nature of Casualty</u>	<u>Buried At</u>
W.J. Anderson	Corporal	102	Leliefontein	7 November, 1900	Killed in Action	Belfast
A.B. Bing	Private	334	Johannesburg	7 June, 1900	Enteric Fever	Braamfontein
H.L. Borden	Lieutenant	-	Witpoort	16 July, 1900	Killed in Action	Rietvlei *
W.E. Brand	Private	294	Bloemfontein	9 July, 1900	Enteric Fever	Bloemfontein
N.D. Builder	Sergeant	105	Leliefontein	7 November, 1900	Died of Wounds	Belfast
J.E. Burch	Lieutenant	-	Witpoort	16 July, 1900	Killed in Action	Rietvlei *
D.J. Crone	Private	216	Johannesburg	4 August, 1900	Enteric Fever	Braamfontein
E.A. Filson	Corporal	26	Leliefontein	7 November, 1900	Killed in Action	Belfast
W.J. Hampton	Private	169	Noupoort	12 June, 1900	Enteric Fever	Noupoort
C.F. Harrison	Captain	-	Wynberg	10 June, 1900	Enteric Fever	Wynberg

\* Re-interred at Braamfontein (Johannesburg)

<u>Name</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Place of Death</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>	<u>Nature of Casualty</u>	<u>Buried At</u>
N. Hughes	Private	73	Cape Town	8 January, 1901	Enteric Fever	Cape Town
W.A. Hull	Private	177	Kroonstad	6 June, 1900	Enteric Fever	Kroonstad
B. Hunt	Q.M.S.	52	Johannesburg	16 June, 1900	Enteric Fever	Braamfontein
L.J. Inglis	Sergeant	5	"Roslin Castle"	1 January, 1901	Enteric Fever	At Sea
A.R. Kingsley	Private	367	Kroonstad	15 May, 1900	Pneumonia	Kroonstad
E.T. Merchant	Private	331	Johannesburg	12 June, 1900	Enteric Fever	Braamfontein
C.C. Owen	Private	378	Karee	30 April, 1900	Suicide	Karee Station
C.St.A. Pearse	Captain	-	Pretoria	17 October, 1900	Tuberculosis	Pretoria
D.L. Ramsay	Private	275	Cape Town	28 March, 1900	Peritonitis	Cape Town
A. Ratcliff	Private	21	Boschpoort	23 September, 1900	Killed in Action	Belfast
T.P. Shipp	Private	813	Pretoria	27 July, 1900	Enteric Fever	Pretoria
D.M. Spence	Private	168	Boschpoort	23 September, 1900	Killed in Action	Belfast
F.H. Sutton	Lieutenant	-	"Roslin Castle"	6 January, 1901	Enteric Fever	Quebec
W. Winyard	Private	92	Kalkheuwel	4 June, 1900	Missing, presumed dead	Unknown



CANADIAN GRAVES



APPENDIX VI

Honours and Awards.

Victoria Cross

Lieutenant H.Z.C. Cockburn  
Lieutenant R.E.W. Turner  
Sergeant E. Holland

Companion of the Bath

Lieutenant-Colonel F.L. Lessard.\*

Distinguished Service Order

Lieutenant R.E.W. Turner

Distinguished Conduct Medal

Private L.W.R. Mulloy

Distinguished Service in the Field

Private W.A. Knisley.\*\*

Members of the regiment were eligible for the following clasps on the Queen's Medal:

Cape Colony  
Diamond Hill  
Johannesburg  
Orange Free State  
Transvaal

\* Lessard was awarded a CB not a CMG.

\*\* Unconfirmed suggestions that the name is Kinsley.

Militia Order 97 of 1901.

APPENDIX VII

Chronology

21 February, 1900	Departed Halifax.
21 March	Anchored in Table Bay, Cape Town.
25 March	Docked at Cape Town.
4 April	Departed Cape Town.
5 April	Arrived at Stellenbosch.
8 April	B squadron left Stellenbosch.
9 April	A squadron left Stellenbosch.
12 April	B squadron reached Springfontein.
14 April	A squadron reached Springfontein.
15 April	B squadron left Springfontein.
16 April	A squadron left Springfontein.
21 April	B squadron arrived in Bloemfontein.
22 April	B squadron in action at Leeukop.
24 April	A squadron camped at Fisher's Farm.
30 April	B squadron arrived at Fisher's Farm.
1 May	March north begins.
3 May	Action near Brandfort.
5 May	Crossed the Vet river.
10 May	Crossed the Zand river.
12 May	Reached Kroonstad.
16 May	Flying column to Bothaville.
20 May	Departed Kroonstad.
25 May	Crossed the Vaal river.
28-29 May	Battle of Klipriversberg.

3 June	Ambush at Kalkheuwel defile.
6 June	Reached Pretoria.
11-12 June	Action at Kameelfontein.
17-19 June	Expedition to Klip Kop.
7 July	Action at Oliphantsfontein.
11 July	Action along the ridge.
16 July	Borden and Burch killed at Witpoort.
23 July	Eastward advance started.
27 July	Reached Middleburg.
28 July to 24 August	Based at various posts along the railway line between Middleburg and Belfast.
25 August	Arrived in Belfast.
8 September	Flying Column to Kaapse Hoop.
23 September	Spence and Ratcliffe killed.
7 November	Battle of Leliefontein (Witkloof).
23 November	Left Belfast by train.
24 November	Arrived in Pretoria.
3 December	Left Pretoria.
12 December	Arrived in Cape Town.
13 December	Departed Cape Town.
27 December	Reached Cape-Verde Islands.
8 January, 1901	Roslin Castle arrived in Halifax.

APPENDIX VIII  
SOCIO-ECONOMIC COMPOSITION

In his pioneering prosopographic study of Canada's involvement in the South African War, Professor Carman Miller\* has shown that British-born volunteers enlisted in numbers out of proportion to their percentage of the Canadian population at the turn of the century. Furthermore, they tended to enlist in greater numbers at times of British adversity in South Africa, while Canadian-born volunteers increased their participation during times of British success in South Africa.

Professor Miller has grouped the Royal Canadian Dragoons, the Canadian Mounted Rifles and three batteries of Canadian artillery as a contingent for his study. The writer has isolated the Royal Canadian Dragoons and has compiled a socio-economic profile of the regiment excluding the officers. Statistical data has been obtained from the attestation papers in the service files\*\* of the South African War veterans in the Public Archives. The service files of the officers are not part of the veteran's collection, but this is not necessarily a weakness since a separate analysis of the officers should be conducted for comparative purposes. The statistical study includes all

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\* Carman Miller, "A Preliminary Analysis of the Socio-Economic Composition of Canada's South African War Contingents." Social History, November, 1975, 219-237.

\*\* RG 38 I A.

the RCD non-commissioned officers and privates (350) and covers the following personal details: nativity, religion, age, marital status and occupation.

The study is based on the assumption that by identifying the volunteers and their interests one will be better able to assess their motives. Recruiting patterns derived from objective quantitative data might well differ with the intentions and motives expressed by the volunteers. Two approaches have been used in this tentative attempt to determine whether recruiting patterns among the RCD shed any light on motives for enlistment:--- a comparison has been drawn with the first contingent (Royal Canadian Regiment) and the RCD themselves have been classified on the basis of nativity.

Nativity

Royal Canadian Dragoons	Canadian-born	British and Empire born	Others
	62.0% (217)	36.9% (129)	1.1% (4)

Religion

	Roman Catholic %	Methodist %	Presbyterian %	Anglican %	Baptist %	Others %
<u>RCD</u>	7.2	14.9	20.1	52.3	3.5	2.0
Canadian-born	8.8	20.5	24.0	38.4	5.6	2.8
British-born	3.9	4.7	14.7	76.0	-	.8

	<u>Age</u>					
	15-19 %	20-24 %	25-29 %	30-34 %	35-39 %	40 and over %
<u>RCD</u>	1.5	56.4	26.7	8.4	5.5	1.5
Canadian-born	1.4	63.7	25.1	6.0	3.7	-
British-born	1.6	44.2	29.5	12.4	8.5	3.9

Canadian-born volunteers average age:- 24.6 years.

British-born volunteers average age:- 26.7 years.

34.9% of the Canadian-born volunteers were older than 25 years.

54.3% of the British-born volunteers were older than 25 years.

	<u>Marital Status</u>			
	Single %	Married %	Widowed %	Children (Total and ratio)
<u>RCD</u>	91.3	7.9	.9	63
Canadian-born	93.5	5.6	.9	1 : 7.2
British-born	87.6	11.6	.8	1 : 3.9

	<u>Occupation</u>			
	White Collar %	Blue Collar %	Service %	Primary %
<u>RCD</u>	29.2	25.7	23.0	22.2
Canadian-born	38.1	28.8	11.2	21.9
British-born	14.1	20.3	43.0	22.7

Major Occupations (scaled rankings)

	Farming %	Soldiers %	Clerks %
<u>RCD</u>	18.5	15.7	13.1
Canadian-born	18.4	4.2	15.6
British-born	18.6	35.2	9.0

Nativity

	Canadian-born %	British and Empire born %	Others %
1st Contingent	71.2	24.6	4.2
Canadian population	86.9	7.8	5.1

Religion

	Roman Catholic %	Methodist %	Presbyterian %	Anglican %	Baptist %	Others %
1st Contingent	15.4	13.3	20.3	42.5	3.5	4.9
Canada	41.7	17.2	15.8	12.8	5.9	6.6

Age

	15-19 %	20-24 %	25-29 %	30-34 %	35-39 %	40 %
1st Contingent	.8	57.8	26.0	9.1	1.8	.4
Canada	-	30.6	25.9	22.7	20.7	-

Occupation

	White Collar %	Blue Collar %	Service %	Primary %
1st Contingent	35.9	37.4	15.5	9.1
Canadian males	11.3	29.0	9.1	50.2

Miller, "Preliminary Analysis", Social History, November, 1975., 219-237.

White Collar

Professional	Sales/Clerical	
Student	Salesman	Merchant Tailor
Teacher	Travelling Salesman	Draughtsman
Doctor	Clerk	Inspector
Law Student	Store Clerk	Bill Collector
Professional Engineer	Traveller	Grocer
Dentist	Bookkeeper	Agent/life insurance
Medical Student	Commercial traveller	Surveyor
	Chemist	Stenographer
Proprietorial	Messenger	Law Clerk
	Bank Clerk	Agent
Merchant	Druggist	Civil Servant
Gentleman		Accountant
Owner/florist/outfitter		
Hotel/restaurant keeper		
Business owner manager		

Blue Collar

Skilled:		Un/Semi-Skilled:
Artisan	Brickmaker	Black/Tinsmith
Baker	Machinist	Carpenter
Printer	Stone Mason	Book Binder
Cooper	Shoemaker	Marble Polisher
Miller	Painter	Mechanic
Butcher	Photographer	Brewer
Saddler	Tailor	Wheel Wright
Electrician	Glass Worker	Watch Maker
Plumber	Cheese Maker	
		Factory worker
		Labourer
		Stevedore
		Cotton Worker
		Mill hand
		Bridge worker
		Packer

Service

Protective	Transportation/ Communication	Personal	Misc.
Soldier	Conductor	Gardener/Servant	Barber
Police	Line/Brake/Trainman	Waiter/Barman	Reporter
Fireman	Coachman	Janitor	Horse Trainer
	Driver	Cook	Actor/Artist
	Telephone/Telegraph		Jockey
			Veterinarian

Primary

Agriculture	Mining	Fishing	Trapping	Lumber
Farmer	Miner	Sailor/	Hunter/-Trapper	Lumberjack
Farm Labourer	Prospector	Mariner		Shantyman
Rancher				Teamster
Ranch Labourer-				
Cattleman/Cowboy				
Stablehand				
Dairyman				

Based on Carman Miller's division, Social History, November, 1975, 219-237.

R.C.D. Occupations (excluding officers)

<u>White Collar</u>	<u>Blue Collar</u>	<u>Service</u>	<u>Primary</u>
Clerk (44)	Labourer (16)	Soldiers (55)	Farming* (71)
Student (11)	Blacksmith (9)	Driver (6)	Miner (7)
Druggist (6)	Carpenter (7)	Coachman (4)	Sailor (2)
Engineer (5)	Printer (5)	Fireman (2)	Teamster (4)
Commercial Traveller (4)	Saddler (5)	Cook (2)	
Salesman (4)	Painter (5)	Policeman (1)	
Surveyor (4)	Machinist (4)	Conductor (1)	
Doctor (3)	Shoemaker (3)	Lineman (1)	
Merchant (3)	Butcher (2)	Telephone Operator (1)	
Storekeeper (3)	Electrician (2)	Telegraph Messenger (1)	
Medical Student (2)	Tailor (2)	Janitor (1)	
Gentleman (2)	Cigar-maker (2)	Barber (1)	
Agent (2)	Steam-fitter (2)	Carter (1)	
Teacher (1)	Potter (1)		
Dentist (1)	Baker (1)		
Lawyer (1)	Plumber (1)		
Bookkeeper (1)	Bricklayer (1)		
Civil Servant (1)	Photographer (1)		
Exporter (1)	Glassworker (1)		
Customs Officer (1)	Cheesemaker (1)		
Broker (1)	Tinsmith (1)		
Musician (1)	Mechanic (1)		
Professional Athlete (1)	Brewer (1)		
	Watchmaker (1)		
	Toolmaker (1)		
	House Decorator (1)		
	Silver Plater (1)		
	Cutter (1)		
	Lather (1)		
	Moulder (1)		
	Confectioner (1)		
	Dyer (1)		
	Builder (1)		
	Pattern-maker (1)		
	Stove-mounter (1)		
	Mill-hand (1)		
	Foreman (1)		

\* includes farmers, farm hands, ranchers and roughriders.

A distinctive pattern emerges when one compares the socio-economic composition of the RCD with the 1st Contingent.\* This pattern is reinforced when one classifies the Dragoons by country of birth.

Canadian-born recruits in the RCD drop off significantly when compared with their counterparts in the 1st Contingent. The Boer successes in the first two months culminating in the victories of Black Week seemed to convince Canadians that the trip to South Africa was no longer a "gigantic picnic".<sup>1</sup> Canadian commitment began to disappear in the face of adversity. On the other hand British-born volunteers among the Dragoons showed a dramatic increase.

The significant increase among British-born recruits is accompanied by a major increase in Anglican participation. This is not surprising as the Anglican Church in Canada was foremost among the Protestant churches as an agent of imperialism.

The Dragoons were on the average an older and more mature regiment than the 1st Contingent. One could perhaps anticipate older, more mature recruits in times of British adversity, and younger men in search of adventure during periods of public enthusiasm and British success. The British-born Dragoons were on the average two years older than their Canadian-born colleagues. It is significant that over half the British born recruits were older than

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\*. The 1st Contingent was recruited in mid-October, 1899, and the RCD in late December of the same year.

25 years, while only one third of the Canadian-born Dragoons were of similar age.

An older, British-born Anglican emerges as the archetypal recruit in late 1899. The statistics on marital status appear to confirm this trend since there were proportionately more married men among the British-born recruits. The ratio of children to men was also greater --- there was one child for every four British-born volunteers and only one child for every seven Canadian-born volunteers.

When occupational statistics are compared with the 1st Contingent an appreciable reduction in White and Blue Collar participation among the Dragoons is evident. Both these categories were dominated by Canadian-born volunteers, while the other two categories, Service and Primary, were dominated by British-born recruits and they both experienced dramatic increases. There was an overwhelming preponderance of British-born among the soldiers of the Service sector, and it appears that they were the true "soldiers of the Queen" --- those who rallied to the flag during adversity. Occupational statistics seem to confirm Miller's "adversity-adventure" thesis that British-born enlisted in times of adversity, while younger Canadians volunteered for adventure.

A distinctive pattern of commitment and concern for Britain emerges from the recruiting trends of the early months of the war. As the mother country floundered into

a military morass in southern Africa the 'typical recruit' that responded to the call for volunteers was British-born, older and more mature, a soldier, Anglican and more likely to be married with children.

Canadian-born recruits declined as the romantic notions of war were destroyed by Boer victories. The younger Canadian Dragoons were dominated by white-collar employees and students, both groups more likely to be attracted by the excitement of war than other occupational groups,<sup>2</sup> and more susceptible to imperial literary propaganda. Obligations seemed to melt away in the face of adversity, in contrast to the commitment of British-born members of the regiment.

1 Quoted in N. Penlington, "Ontario's Contribution to the South African War", Ontario History, XLII; 4 (1950): 173.

2 Miller, "Preliminary Analysis", Social History, November, 1975: 234.

The foregoing study of the socio-economic composition of the Royal Canadian Dragoons is exploratory and its conclusions are tentative. The analysis is not exhaustive and a number of areas require further development; for example, distinguishing between farm-owners and farmhands has important implications for a study of this nature. Furthermore, the use of the 1st Contingent as a control group and the assumption that nativity was a crucial factor may be questioned. Nevertheless the results do permit a tentative speculation about recruiting patterns.

The South African War is a topic that offers considerable opportunities for historical analysis. The use of objective quantitative data can help resolve some of the methodological problems and historiographical controversies and might well alter the conventional perception of the major forces and issues. I have listed below a number of questions, issues and problems related to Canada's involvement in the war that should be subjected to quantitative analysis.

1. Are there general laws explaining why men have volunteered so readily in times of conflict? How valid is the old adage "God, Gold, Glory and Government"\* in analysing the response of the Canadians to the appeal for volunteers for the South African War?

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\* -Symbolizing missionary zeal, wealth, adventure, and 'Queen and country'.

2. To what degree do the motives and interests of the volunteers shed light on three closely related historiographic problems --- the nature of the late 19th century imperialism in Canada, the participation of Canada in the South African War and the cabinet decision to finance a contingent of volunteers?
3. It might be possible to determine to what degree public opinion in October, 1899, was shaped by the demagogues and the media and to what degree it was the culmination of forces that had developed over a long period and which were brought bubbling to the surface by external catalysts.
4. A comparative prosopography of the officers within the Canadian contingents and with other groups, such as the British officers might reveal interesting information regarding leadership.
5. Various propositions can be tested by relating the Dragoons to other control groups within the contingents that fought in South Africa. Comparisons can be drawn by isolating groups such as the infantry, the artillery, the mounted men and the South African Constabulary. The Canadian nurses might even be used as a female control group, albeit a small group. An interesting quantitative analysis could be done on the French-Canadian volunteers.
6. Further comparisons can be drawn between the socio-economic composition of contingents from Australia and New Zealand and the Canadian units. One can extrapolate

beyond the confines of the South African War to consider Canada's involvement in the Sudan campaign of 1885 and the two world wars.

7. Parallels can be drawn with Richard Price's\* pioneering work on British working-class attitudes to the Boer War. While social stratification was different in Canada from that in Britain, interesting comparisons can be made regarding roles, status and the attitudes of socio-economic groups towards the war.
8. In the political sphere, a comparative and quantitative analysis using the works of Richard Price and Professor Robert Page might establish parallels between the troops, the "Khaki" election in Britain in 1900 and the Canadian general election of the same year.
9. Religion played an important role in the ideological evolution in English-Canada in the late 1800's and a recent publication\*\* offers an opportunity to link the regional distribution of the Canadian troops with the geographical representation of the Orange Order across Canada.

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\* Richard Price, An Imperial War and the British Working Class, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1972). Price contends that there was a connection between social class, patriotism, employment and volunteering. He argues that the British working man was motivated by jobs and not by the patriotism and imperialism that inspired the middle-class white-collar group.

\*\* C.J. Houston and W.J. Smyth, A Historical Geography of the Orange Order in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980).



# MILITIA ORDERS, 1901.

No. 9.

HEAD-QUARTERS, OTTAWA.

Friday, 11th January.

Discharged from further service in South Africa.

1. The transport "Roslin Castle" arrived at Halifax on the 8th instant, with the following troops on board:—

	Officers.	W.Os.	N.C.Os. and men.	Total.
R.C.D.....	7	1	201	209
R.C.F.A. Staff ..	5	1	7	13
"C" Battery.....	4		122	126
"D" " ..	5		123	128
"E" " ..	5		127	132
C.M.R.....	15	1	168	184
Details, including 7 nurses ..	10		28	38
	<u>51</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>776</u>	<u>830</u>

## NAMES OF OFFICERS.

### ROYAL CANADIAN DRAGOONS.

Lieut.-Colonel F. L. Lesard, (In Command).  
 Major V. A. S. Williams.  
 " W. C. Forester.  
 Surgeon-Major H. R. Duff.  
 Veterinary-Major W. B. Hall.  
 Capt. C. M. Nelles, (Adjutant).  
 " J. H. Wynne, (Quartermaster).

Mr. Best, Representative of Y.M.C.A.

The N.C.Os. and men were discharged from further service in South Africa as hereunder:—

### ROYAL CANADIAN DRAGOONS.

No.	Rank and Name.	P. O. Address.	Date of Discharge.
	R.S.M. J. C. Page.....	Winnipeg, Man.....	13-1-01.
1	R.Q.M.S. J. Graham.....	" ..	" ..
35	Far.Q.M.S. M. E. Stewart.....	Niagara Falls, Ont.....	10-1-01.
53	S.Q.M.S. W. Rhoades.....	Toronto ..	" ..
4	S.S.M. P. F. Dalton.....	Winnipeg, Man ..	13-1-01.
389	" N. Medhurst.....	Toronto, Ont.....	10-1-01.
3	" J. R. Sparks.....	Winnipeg, Man.....	13-1-01.
252	S.Q.M.S. W. A. Dyer.....	" ..	" ..
7	Arm. Sergt. D. Carroll.....	" ..	" ..
2	Trans. Sergt. A. R. Skinner.....	Toronto, Ont.....	10-1-01.
54	Sergt. H. Fuller.....	" ..	" ..
234	" H. Allison.....	Winnipeg, Man.....	13-1-01.
55	" G. Hudson.....	Toronto, Ont.....	10-1-01.
56	Far. Sergt. C. Harrenden.....	" ..	" ..
44	Sergt. Sadlr. J. F. Dunning.....	Ottawa, Ont.....	" ..
151	Sergt. E. L. Purdon.....	" ..	" ..
307	" J. Bradner.....	Brandon, Man.....	13-1-01.
83	" E. A. Steer.....	Toronto, Ont.....	10-1-01.
30	" F. F. Metcalfe.....	Kingston ..	" ..
235	" H. C. Baldwin.....	Toronto ..	" ..

No.	Rank and Name.	P. O. Address.	Date of Discharge.
369	Sergt. A. E. Ault	Aultsville, Ont.	10-1-01.
303	" J. C. deBalinhard	Brandon, Man.	13-1-01.
416	" R. F. Markham	St. John, N.B.	8-1-01.
312	Far. Sergt. C. E. Cope	Carberry, Man.	13-1-01.
172	Sergt. P. R. Price	Peterborough, Ont.	10-1-01.
176	" E. J. Holland	Ottawa	"
259	Corpl. F. M. Whitlow	Winnipeg, Man.	13-1-01.
202	" M. O'Connell	London, Ont.	10-1-01.
329	" J. D. Herriot	Souris, Man.	13-1-01.
174	" H. E. Roche	Ottawa, Ont.	10-1-01.
263	" T. E. Linden	Winnipeg, Man.	13-1-01.
210	" M. S. Wigg	Kingsville, Ont.	10-1-01.
406	" F. W. Hubbard	Canning, N.S.	8-1-01.
71	" W. Hodgson	Toronto, Ont.	10-1-01.
59	" E. Bates	"	"
185	" W. S. Gold	Montreal, Que.	9-1-01.
323	" S.S. J. Spencer	Oak Lake, Man.	13-1-01.
49	Pte W. L. Anderson	Ayr, Ont.	10-1-01.
57	" C. H. Anderson	Toronto, Ont.	"
101	" C. E. Anderson	"	"
223	" E. B. Allan	Windsor, Ont.	"
230	" W. E. Anderson	St. John, N.B.	9-1-01.
281	" C. C. Allen	Winnipeg, Man.	13-1-01.
302	" A. F. Arnold	Yorkton, N.W.T.	"
22	" E. Baldwin	Oakland, Ont.	10-1-01.
40	" N. Bowman	Brantford	"
60	" W. Q. Bragg	Toronto	"
25	" J. Bennett	St. Catharine's, Ont.	"
62	" W. I. Butterfield	Toronto	"
103	" A. Bouchard	Quebec, Que.	9-1-01.
106	" S. Burnette	Toronto, Ont.	10-1-01.
161	" W. G. Bishop	Montreal, Que.	9-1-01.
164	" I. Brown	Colborne, Ont.	10-1-01.
299	" D. E. Doulton	Russell, Man.	13-1-01.
313	" J. J. Brown	Clarksburg, Ont.	10-1-01.
365	" P. Barton	Montreal, Que.	9-1-01.
370	" F. Berg	"	"
430	" B. M. Beckwith	Halifax, N.S.	8-1-01.
18	" G. N. Clendenning	St. Catharine's, Ont.	10-1-00.
64	" J. Clark	Toronto, Ont.	"
65	" C. Cooke	"	"
66	" C. W. Cooper	"	"
108	" E. Chambers	"	"
110	" W. Cordingley	Davisville, Ont.	"
183	" G. H. A. Collins	Cummings Bridge, Ont.	"
186	" G. Campbell	Gainsbridge	"
222	" S. Cline	Orwell	"
228	" T. E. Campbell	Orangeville	"
372	" H. P. Cameron	Colborne	"
231	" H. Cowgill	Toronto	"
111	" J. F. Duguid	"	"
261	" W. Dawson	Winnipeg, Man.	13-1-01.
270	" L. Drummond	"	"
288	" H. S. Douglas	"	"
298	" T. Drought	Morris, Man.	"
385	" C. Hill	Toronto, Ont.	10-1-01.
414	" F. L. Doyle	Moncton, N.B.	8-1-01.
271	" W. Deac	King's County, N.S.	"
19	" G. England	London, Ont.	10-1-01.
274	" F. J. Elnhurst	Winnipeg, Man.	13-1-01.
69	" E. FitzGerald	Toronto, Ont.	10-1-01.
272	" J. W. Findley	Winnipeg, Man.	13-1-01.
359	" J. R. Fraser	Lancaster, Ont.	10-1-01.
364	" J. Fowler	Montreal, Que.	9-1-01.
280	" A. Gray	Winnipeg, Man.	13-1-01.
9	" S.S. T. A. Gifford	Toronto, Ont.	10-1-01.
14	" A. Hallett	St. Catharine's, Ont.	"
15	" J. B. Heron	Toronto	"
29	" J. E. L. Harper	Brockville	"
70	" J. Hibbit	Toronto, Ont.	"

No.	Rank and Name	P. O. Address	Date of Issuance
115	Pte F. Barbotte	Toronto, Ont.	10-1-01.
116	" J. W. Harmon	"	"
118	" F. Hartman	"	"
142	Corpl. S.S. A. Henry	"	"
297	Pte. A. Y. Hood	Winnipeg, Man.	13-1-01.
282	" W. R. A. Head	"	"
318	" W. J. Hawkins	Gladstone, Man.	"
328	" A. E. Bilder	Winnipeg, Man.	"
381	" T. Hagen	Toronto, Ont.	10-1-01.
234	" F. R. Hill	Quebec, Que.	9-1-01.
311	" J. H. Irvine	Winnipeg, Man.	13-1-01.
220	" M. Jones	London, Ont.	10-1-01.
120	" T. Johnson	Toronto, Ont.	"
185	" W. A. Knisley	Selkirk, Ont.	"
317	" J. Keilliar	Gladstone, Man.	13-1-01.
292	" J. Kavan	Winnipeg, Man.	"
218	" D. Loughheed	Montreal, Que.	9-1-01.
77	" J. W. Low	Toronto, Ont.	10-1-01.
122	" H. B. Lyon	"	"
208	" F. F. Loosmoore	"	"
417	" J. H. Lockhart	Moncton, N.B.	8-1-01.
420	" A. Leavitt	St. John, N.B.	"
411	" F. W. Lawson	Amburst, N.B.	"
46	" J. R. Middleton	Toronto, Ont.	10-1-01.
78	" W. Mitchell	"	"
79	" W. Muir	"	"
85	" J. Marne	Winnipeg, Man.	13-1-01.
123	" W. J. Morrison	Toronto, Ont.	10-1-01.
124	" W. T. Morrison	"	"
205	Tptr. J. A. Munro	London, Ont.	"
211	Pte. W. R. Naycock	Leamington, Ont.	"
227	" Miles	"	"
376	" H. D. E. Moody	Toronto, Ont.	"
423	" H. Metzler	Moncton, N.B.	8-1-01.
422	" D. A. Morrison	St. John, N.B.	"
431	" F. S. Morrison	"	"
80	" J. McGabey	Toronto, Ont.	10-1-01.
81	" M. McIver	Winnipeg, Man.	13-1-01.
31	" F. McIntosh	Brockville, Ont.	10-1-01.
47	" F. McCusker	St. Catharine's, Ont.	10-1-01.
126	" F. McPry	Toronto, Ont.	"
143	" P. MacCarthy	Ottawa, Ont.	"
203	" A. A. MacDonald	Kingsville, Ont.	"
309	" A. C. Mackintosh	Brandon, Man.	13-1-01.
401	" J. J. McCaffry	Brockville, Ont.	10-1-01.
407	" L. C. McMillan	Springhill, N.S.	8-1-01.
424	" J. R. McCulley	Chatham, N.B.	"
425	" A. L. McIntosh	St. John, N.B.	"
315	" A. McElvie	Gladstone, Man.	13-1-01.
337	" W. McLellan	Newcastle, N.B.	9-6-01.
338	" A. McWilliam	Quebec, Que.	"
336	" E. Mullock	"	"
358	" C. R. B. Newton	Orillia, Ont.	10-1-01.
429	" J. P. Nilant	Sussex, N.B.	8-1-01.
308	" C. R. Othen	Brandon, Man.	13-1-01.
43	" G. D. Palmer	St. Catharine's, Ont.	10-1-01.
180	" R. J. Pelton	Billings Bridge, Ont.	"
219	" R. C. Peck	Jeannettes Bridge, Ont.	"
402	" A. J. Pawsey	Halifax, N.S.	8-1-01.
132	" A. Richardson	Toronto, Ont.	10-1-01.
353	" H. Pope	Quebec, Que.	9-1-01.
223	" C. E. Parry	Toronto, Ont.	10-1-01.
383	" A. Pickworth	"	"
188	" R. S. Robinson	"	"
189	" R. R. Robinson	Consecon, Ont.	"
225	" G. Richardson	London, Ont.	"
260	" W. D. Rodger	Winnipeg, Man.	13-1-01.
316	" W. C. Ryan	Portage la Prairie, Man.	"
285	" L. A. Rea	Winnipeg, Man.	"
361	" P. F. C. Roberts	Montreal, Que.	9-1-01.

No.	Rank and Name	P. O. Address	Date of Discharge
366	Pte. R. E. Russell	East Angus, Que.	9-1-01.
368	" G. M. Robinson	Como, Que.	"
382	" W. J. Reid	Holland Landing, Ont.	10-1-01.
386	" G. Reid	"	"
27	" J. F. Sparks	Kingston, Ont.	"
107	" W. C. Semple	Tottenham, Ont.	"
179	" N. J. Slater	Ottawa, Ont.	"
132	" G. Smith	Toronto, Ont.	"
138	" D. Sec	"	"
155	" W. P. Sully	Montreal, Que.	9-1-01.
159	" C. D. Scott	"	"
212	" C. E. Shaw	London, Ont.	10-1-01.
224	" A. F. Stonor	London, Ont.	10-1-01.
304	" J. Sinclair	Yorkton, N.W.T.	14-1-01.
428	" H. I. Stevenson	St. John, N.B.	8-1-01.
374	Tpr. J. Sterritt	Sault Ste. Marie, Ont.	11-1-01.
336	Pte. J. M. State	"	"
12	" H. J. Taylor	Guelph, Ont.	10-1-01.
88	" F. Thornton	Toronto, Ont.	"
153	" W. H. Terrill	Wellington, Ont.	"
283	" M. H. Tylor	Winnipeg, Man.	13-1-01.
377	" T. F. Todt	Quebec, Que.	9-1-01.
403	" T. A. Thompson	Oxford, N.S.	8-1-01.
152	" E. Thompson	Toronto, Ont.	10-1-01.
201	" W. Tilley	Cottam, Ont.	"
41	" A. W. Turner	Peterborough, Ont.	"
20	" C. VanEvery	Mimico, Ont.	"
238	" G. Thompson	Toronto, Ont.	"
90	" A. H. Vizard	"	"
50	" E. Watts	Winnipeg, Man.	13-1-01.
139	" W. J. Wheatley	Toronto, Ont.	10-1-01.
140	" F. Wyatt	"	"
144	" J. Walker	"	"
167	" P. Wasson	Norwood, Ont.	"
221	" W. Wright	London, Ont.	"
236	" S.S. J. Warrian	Winnipeg, Man.	13-1-01.
306	" W. H. Ward	Brandon, Man.	"
319	" T. Wilkinson	Darlington, Man.	"
355	" G. E. Wurtele	Sorel, Que.	9-1-01.
380	" J. W. White	Toronto, Ont.	10-1-01.
91	" E. Wandby	"	"
141	" D. D. Young	"	"

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2. Newspapers
3. Books

B. Unpublished Material

1. Manuscripts
2. Official Records

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