

Private J. Jackson's

Diary

of the

Anglo Boer War

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The Call to Arms

'SPECIAL, WAR.' 'SPECIAL, WAR'. Such were the words that caught my ear one gloomy night in October 1899 as I wandered on my way home through the streets of Chichester. I knew what the words meant to myself and, as well, to thousands more and those sad hearts that would be left to weep in solitude and anxiety, some dear one to mourn, the touch of a vanished hand and the sound of a voice so dear.

As I walked on my way homeward, I pondered over the struggle just commencing in South Africa, where the Boer stood for his Independence and the Englishman his rights. The war cloud had risen the eve had been setting, the first shots exchanged.

I knew before many days I would get the summons to go and help swell the ranks that fought for English honour, and that before long I would have to leave all I held most dear to heart and soul. Alas for the circumstances that compel, at the call of duty a soldier must obey, he questions not the cause but cheerfully goes to uphold the honour of his Island birth.

I am going to try and write a rough outline of a soldier's life on active service or the thoughts of a private soldier. It may be just called a Diary.

Rejoining the Regiment

On the 12th November 1899, I received the summons to rejoin Her Majesty's colours.

I had not been very long on the reserve, just long enough to get married and settle down in life. I was doing well at the time and I was quite happy and so was my little Dutch. But alas for the short lived happiness. I believe it was the hardest nut I had ever had to crack. I reported myself on the 20th November at the Regimental Depot where I got fitted out, or rather partly so. Having passed my medical examination, I was ready to be drafted to the Regiment. So on the 21st November, I was sent with the remainder of the Reserve men to join the Regiment based at Aldershot. Leaving the little town of Richmond at 7 am we journeyed all day only making a short stop at York Station to get refreshments which the kind people of the old capital had provided for us which were very acceptable - especially the pint of beer per man. We then continued our journey. The people cheered us as we passed through the station. The lads kept shouting out that we would bring a lock of Kruger's whiskers when we came back. Alas for those that will never more return. God comfort the dear ones left behind. She may be only the wife of a soldier, a mother or a lover but a woman brave and true.

We arrived at Aldershot at 10 p.m. and then commenced our march on foot to Albura Barracks. While passing through one of the main streets someone, and that someone I am sorry to say was wearing the Queen's uniform, called out in a drunken bravado: 'What Militia is that?' Ah, I thought at the time, a rather queer Militia indeed. I know the men, or most of them, who had just been jeered at. They were men of experience, men whom I had served with for years, men who had only lately come back from the cold, rugged heights of the North West Frontier, where they had given a good account of themselves and if the day come again would do so once more - as perusal of this simple tale will show.

We arrived in barracks where we were told off to different companies. I think that night was the most miserable night I have ever spent in my life. There was a supper provided for us but I seemed not to have enjoyed it. I had an aching void. If you have had the same experience you will have an idea what my feelings were like.

On the 22nd we were going as hard as we could getting fitted in khaki and serge suits and different other things too numerous to mention, which all of us had to have before embarkation. On the 23rd there was a General Inspection. We all looked very well and very stout, considering that we were dressed in two suits of cloths. If that had anything to do with making the man, then I must say that we were fit for anything. General Kelly Kenny spoke very highly of us and was pleased with the turnout. I little thought then that the old G.H. would help to form Kelly Kenny's famous 6th Division, which coming events will show.

It was on the 24th November that the good old 'Tykes' traveled to Southampton to embark on S.S. 'Doune Castle' en-route for South Africa. We boarded at noon, got all our kit and equipment etc. Stored away in less time than people could imagine.

In less than three hours we were sailing down towards the Channel. The people gave us a good hearty send off, while the Band played Auld Lang Syne. There were several gentlemen connected with the Regiment came to bid the lads farewell and God's speed. Among them was good and well respected Colonel B--- whom, no doubt, we should have like to have taken with us. I dare say he would like to have gone had it been possible.

The Voyage to South Africa

Our voyage out was very monotonous, every day the same as the last. We had a little practice in shooting at a barrel swung from the bow of the ship to enable us to get our hand in for the days to come. A certain portion of the day we had physical drill or, rather, trying to tie ourselves in knots. Very amusing work but rather trying for the old hands who had gone through the same thing years ago. I did not come to practice tumbling on board a rolling ship.

In the leisure hours, the troops portion of the ship resembled Monte Carlo. On all sides could be heard '15, 24, 31, 61, top of the house' and soon 'two to one on the lucky 7. Any more Gentlemen?' No more going down this time then up she comes then again then could be heard '1,3,4,5,6,7,8' until someone, holding the number called, claimed to be the winner. I am sorry to say that Sunday was no exception

So glided the days until the vessel arrived in Cape Town harbour on 15th December 1899. We stayed onboard all night expecting to be sent around to Durban next morning, which would have meant another three days sailing. Instead, orders arrived that the G.H. would disembark and proceed at once to De Aar. I believe it was owing to the reverse at Magersfontein. That was the first bit of news we had on arriving at the Cape...anything but cheering. The baggage was got off the ship smartly but after all the hurry we had to wait for several hours before we could entrain. It was a very hot day making it anything but pleasant having to stand about in the sun. . At last the orders came and into the train we got.

I saw very little of Cape Town, so can say very little about it. We had 500 miles to travel to De Aar, which we did in 48 hours. We passed through several places. All the towns, or rather I would call them villages, seemed to resemble each other. After seeing one town in South Africa, a person can say that he has seen the lot. The people seemed to be glad to see the British Tommy. Oh yes, we were very welcome. We arrived at De Aar on the 18th December without a hitch. We detrained and went into camp - 16 men to each tent - it was rather hot but such had to be endured. It is an awful place for sandstorms and, to make things worse, they always came on about dinnertime. No need for salt or pepper. We stayed in De Aar for 16 days, during which time we had the usual duties, such as outposts, or sometimes route-marching or attacking kopjes, which before long we had to do in earnest.

The Move to Battle

On the 3rd January 1900, orders arrived for us to proceed to Rensburg to join General French's command. We left De Aar at 9 p.m. in saloon carriages minus roofs and windows. There was hardly room to stand up or lie down. We were packed like herrings in a box. I was very glad when we arrived at Naauwpoort it gave us a chance to stretch our cramped limbs. It was no use grumbling. Battle trucks were no exception, we were put into anything or any available conveyance whether coal trucks or cattle trucks, it did not matter which.

After leaving Naauwpoort, we did not go direct to Rensburg but were detrained at Arundal where the Regiment went into camp for two or three days, finding outposts and keeping well out on the alert, knowing the enemy to be in the vicinity. I have little to mention about Arundal unless it be the water. I must say that it is one of the finest springs I have ever seen in South Africa, as cool as ice and as clear as crystal. It lies on the left of the railway line going up country, close by a farmhouse. Would that we could have always had the same water.

Arriving at Rensburg on the 8th, my Company went straight out on outpost. We could see the hills the Boer were occupying right to our front. The following morning, very early, French's cavalry went past us and had a smart encounter with the enemy. On their return, I noticed the horses, some of them badly wounded having been hit by the shells from the Boer guns.

Two days afterwards, my Company and another marched out in an easterly direction six miles to occupy a kopje called Porter's Hill, named after Major Porter of the RHA. This post got relieved by a fresh party every four days. The Boer position lay about 2000 yards away. There was a small kopje, about halfway between ours and their position, which was not occupied. I remember that one morning we got orders to search the bush wood round the enemy position with rifle fire and try and draw their fire while General French's cavalry worked round in the rear of their position.

While keeping up our firing, a party of the Bedfords, in of a devil-may-care Major who had come out to relieve us, made a feint attack on the kopje that stood between the two positions. While they advanced, we kept up our fire. They reached the hill. But when they commenced to retire, the Boers opened fire with the pom-poms, which caused the Beds to move at the double. It was rather amusing and more so to one of our men coming back from the hill with an empty camp kettle to our main position.

Baptism of Fire

Just as he was passing an opening between the two hills, a shell from the Boer guns dropped just behind him. Down went the camp kettle and off he went. Bacon was not in it. I think he must have broke the land record. Later when the Beds came along to relieve our party on the hill, shells were dropping all around the hill, but as luck would have it, never a one landed on the top, which was a good thing for us. It was the first time that some of our men had come under fire. They stuck it very well taking it in a cool manner. Although there was no getting out of it, I am glad to say there was no one hit.

Later in the day, we marched back to Rensburg in a deluge of rain talking about our first adventure with the Boers, a foretaste of what had to come. When we got back, we met with a lot of fresh hands, a batch of Militia Reserve and section D.

The Battle of New Zealand Hill

It was on the 15th January that we got the news at Rensburg about D Company having been attacked at Slingersfontein. They were holding a hill called Queensland Hill. Apparently, in the early morning of the 15th the Boers stormed our position determined to drive our men off the hill. They came within a few yards of the sangars. Our lads made a bold and fearless stand charging at the point of the bayonet. A party of the Queensland Mounted Infantry came up just in the nick of time to help our lads drive the dauntless Boers back. They were compelled to retire leaving their killed and wounded on the ground. Their loss being 50 killed and wounded, ours amounting to 5 killed and 5 wounded. The Captain in charge was wounded in several parts of the body. This ends the first victory for the good old G.H.

A few days later, General French - England's dear old safety valve - paraded the Regiment and expressed his thanks for the good work the men of the Regiment had done at Slingerfontein, speaking very highly of their splendid conduct. He said he thought them to be made of as good a material as their brothers in the other battalion in India who had distinguished themselves on the North West Frontier.

The Modder River

Thus the time dragged on until one day we received a smart order to proceed at once to the Modder River to join Lord Methuen's command. We were sorry that we had to leave General French, he did not work his infantry very hard being a cavalry general.

He preferred flying movements which in the days to come he made the Boers perform. We arrived safely at the Modder River after a tedious ride of 48 hours. On the way, we got such news as this - Cronje was waiting at Magersfontein with 26,000 men to give us a welcome, but as luck would have it, Bobs had arrived at Cape Town at the time and his far seeing eye saw a far better move of dislodging them than making a frontal attack on an impregnable position.

There had been one mistake made which caused a reverse. I don't wish to criticise - the best of generals are liable to blunders. No doubt the general in command had no other alternative than to do what he did at the time. Later, I believe, he was found fault owing to his inaction at the Modder River. I believe his reason for so doing was because he had not enough men. But he is not the only gentleman, who after having done his best, has got nothing but ridicule; not from the public themselves but from certain newspapers. It is a pity those wiseacres did not come out here instead of staying at home to grumble and find fault with a subject they know absolutely nothing about. If they had come out I am sure that they would have changed their opinions. I may here mention, had it not been for some of those gentlemen at home who call themselves Englishmen, but are Dutch at heart and who are rightly turned pro-Boer, I might have wrote this simple tale over my own fire side in peace and comfort at home in England, instead of having to write it on the far off lonely veldt. I, as a soldier, have nothing to thank those gentlemen at home who help to prolong the war by the wagging of libelous tongues.

To proceed with my tale, on the night of the 9th February, the Regiment received orders to hold itself in readiness to move early next morning on the 10th. Our stay had been short at the Modder River being about 4 or 5 days only. While I was there on night sentry, I would watch Cronje's flash light from Magersfontein. Could rivers have spoken, the Modder would have told a queer tale. By the order of Lord Roberts, the morning of the 10th February 1900 saw every soldier riding back on railway trucks to Graspan, at least with the exception of those who were left behind to guard the Modder River station. All the tents were left standing empty to make Cronje believe that the Rooineks were still at Modder. Arriving at Grasp, all the troops detrained and bivouacked for the night. It was there where General Kelly Kenny's famous 6th Division was formed consisting of two Brigades, the 12th and the 18th. The old G.H., making a unit in the gallant 18th with Colonel Stephenson of the Essex Regiment. Forming the old 18th were the 1st Yorkshires, Essex and Welsh and later the Warwicks. The 12th were made up of the Glosters, West Riding, Buffs and Oxfords along with the full compliment of cavalry and artillery. This was the 6th Division formed with Kelly Kenny at its head.

Soon the morning of the 11th February 1900, the troops left Graspan on Lord

Roberts march to Bloemfontein, with Lord Roberts in the van. Thus our hardships commenced - long marches, hard fighting and little water to drink. We carried 150 rounds of ammunition weighing heavily on the stomach, besides carrying a blanket on the waist belt. Thus, we marched forth to cut off General Cronje's retreat.

The first day the troops marched to Ramadam, on the 12th we crossed the Free State border; the invasion had begun. For seven days the troops marched night and day getting a little sleep when possible. I believe that we suffered the most from thirst. It seemed to be crime to look at the water, should we have the misfortune to pass any. For being thirsty and perhaps passing close to the water and not being allowed to touch it made it more hard to bear. God knows how we lived through those days.

Klip Drift

I shall ever remember the night of the 14th of February, when we marched all night to Klip Drift after marching all day, of course. It had to be done; Cronje had to be caught. The night was wild stormy and dark. The thunder rolled, the lightning kept flashing. Orders were issued that everyone had to keep silent; we were close on the heels of the Lion of South Africa. We marched in column of brigade with a short interval between each file. The rain came down in torrents, wetting us through and through. As the lightning flashed, it showed up the men more like spectres stealing along, than anything else. Presently, someone would fall down a hole big enough to bury him, but not a murmur not again. He would get up and march on through the wild night again. The order would come 'Halt, lie down!' Weary and worn out, my head would fall back on my haversack. I would be dreaming of home. 'Rise up!' would bring me back to living reality and on again through the dreary night. At last, the critical point was passed; Klip Drift reached.

It is 2 am , we lie down and sleep the few remaining hours before daylight. Day break arrives and we get up off the cold damp ground and patiently wait the sun's appearance. So that we might get our cloths dried. Of course, they always got dried same as they got wet on our backs.

General French always operated in front with his cavalry brigade. It was at Klip Drift where he surprised and captured the Boer laager. I noticed a lot of Boer prisoners, some had been taken while bathing in the river. The safety valve, General French had charged right through the Boer laager making them fly. As I mentioned previously that he was the one to make the Boers perform the flying movements.

All the next day, my Regiment was on outpost duty until 9 p.m. when once more we continued the march all night with the exception of two or three hours rest early the following morning, when once more we followed the trail of Cronje marching until 3 p.m. On reaching Brand Valley Drift, a halt was made. On the 17th we all got a good feed of grapes, also milk, rice, chicken and duck. These were had from a deserted store. This was the best feed we had since the commencement of the march. Alas it was the last feed that many a poor man would have. It was the eve of a battle and many a man who had seen the sun set would never see another. God help the dear ones in far away dear old England who on the following morn would be left to mourn some dear one who had fell in the fight; perhaps a husband, son or brother. Some one would fall but none of us knew who.

The Battle of Paardeberg

I shall never forget the night of the 17th February. We formed up and started off on the march again marching in a zigzag fashion the whole night long. During the night we could hear shots fired. We knew that we were close on the Boers. No man was allowed to speak above a whisper or to close his eyes.

Just before day dawn, Lord Kitchener came along. We had just passed between two small kopjes. At the time I heard him say that the Boers were breaking in a south easterly direction. The Division turned right about and in less than half an hour our guns had opened fire. The Boers were firing very rapidly away to our left rear. The 18th Brigade was brought to a halt. The critical moment had arrived. We were wheeled to the left and extended by companies of each regiment. My regiment the old G.H. being in the centre attack.

We then advanced in line of skirmishing order. The troops had no sooner started to advance than the Boers opened fire on us. We returned their fire by section volleys. As one section fired, another made a dash forward towards the enemy position. The shells came thick and fast. In fact, it was like a hail storm but a leaden hail storm which carried death in its track and caused many a brave man to bite the dust never more to rise. It was hard to see our dear comrades fall but knew whose turn it might be next from early morn to dark at night. From early morn to dark at night the awful struggle continued between our army and the Boers.

Beyond where flowed the Modder River, the Boers were deeply entrenched. They held one bank of the river, us the other. It was a fight for water, and many a brave man lost his life in attempting to get water and many a man, after being wounded, died for the want of a drink. We suffered terribly from thirst. My lips were swollen, my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth. There were men who drank their own water. God above knows how we suffered as we fought on until the shades of evening ended the struggle for the day and enabled us to retire back to a safe distance where we laid down on the veldt, exhausted, worn out and suffering from thirst. Many a man would have given five pounds for a drink of water.

That ever to be remembered night. I could not rest myself, I seemed I must either have drink or die. The pale moon was just rising. It would be rather late on in the night and as I watched the queen of the night rise, I thought how true the song - the moon shone on the dead and dying. Alas, the awful and sad reality of that night, I felt as if I was going mad. I got my rifle and as I had to have water picked up two canteens and a water bottle or two. I stole away down to the river. On my way I passed over the ground that the AGSH had fought over. Many a poor man I passed that would never move or see the heather clad braes of his native heath. One poor man lay severely wounded. I stood by his side as he asked for water. Oh the heart break, I had none. He seemed to wander, caused through the suffering and agony. His mind had perhaps gone back to his native hills of Bonnie Scotland and perhaps some winsome lassie waiting with patience and anxiety for the dear one lying

wounded and bleeding far away on the lonely veldt. How my heart ached. Don't be ashamed when I own up to my eyes being moist. But hark, I hear the cautious tread of footsteps coming near. It is the stretcher bearers looking for the wounded. I knew that my poor comrade-in-arms would soon be in good hands and taken to where he would be treated with care.

I proceeded on to the river. I did not know but that I would walk right into the hands of the Boers, but I was determined not to go back until I got the water. I reached the Modder in safety and crawled down the embankment to the water. It was to me the same as what land is to a shipwrecked sailor dipping the canteen into the river time after time. I thought that I was never going to stop drinking. I could hear the Boers talking on the other side of the river. I expected to hear a shot ring out at any moment. Being moonlight, I thought they might see me, but whether they did or not I thought myself lucky. So, filling the two bottles and canteen I crept away.

I took the nearest way back to where I had left my company as I thought, but instead I lost my way. The moon was shining very brightly and I could see forms moving silently to and fro looking no doubt for the wounded. Presently, the silence was broken as the words; 'Halt! Who comes there' rang out clearly in the midnight air. Answering to the challenge, I advanced not knowing whether it was friend or foe. It turned out to be one of our outposts. After explaining who I was I got directed to where my company was lying. Arriving safely, I found that the men had received a half a pint of water per man. The few remaining hours before daylight, I tried to snatch a slumber.

The first streak of dawn saw the troops formed up to fight over the same ground once more and advancing in line of skirmishing. Our rifles rang out defiance once more but were not answered by the Boers. Presently the order to cease fire. Cronje had been granted an armistice to enable him to bury his dead. The troops were withdrawn to a safe distance where we laid down to await events. We heard that Cronje had suffered 900 killed in the first days fight. Our losses being 1000 killed and wounded, the majority wounded. My regiment suffered 44 killed and 198 wounded. 1 officer killed and 9 wounded, including our Colonel. During the day, word came that Cronje had surrendered. Up went our helmets and a differing cheer broke the silence of the lonely veldt. Alas for the deception, word once more came that Cronje would fight to a finish. No sooner said than a shell from one of our 4.7 inch guns went into Cronje's magazine sending it flying in the air.

It would be about 5 p.m. on the 19th February when Cronje's magazine was destroyed. After that the 18th Brigade was formed up and extended in skirmishing order to dislodge the Boer force holding a hill two miles south east of Cronje's laager, afterwards called Kitcheners Hill. Advancing, we were soon under fire. One regiment made a detour to the right gaining possession of some low hills to the right of the Boer position. This was a point in our favour, but darkness overtaking us we got orders to retire, except for the troops who had gained possession of the foot hills.

Marching back to the ground we had previously left we got a meal of some tough meat, half cooked and served up in greasy water. Having got through the meal in less time than it takes to tell we were once more formed up and marched back in the

direction of the hill.

After marching for half an hour a halt was called and the order given to fix bayonets. I thought at the time we were going to storm the Boer position on the hill, but such was not the case. Instead we got the orders to rest where we were for the night. I thought we should have to take the hill at daybreak but as the dawn appeared we were marched back to the former ground. Here we lingered for the day at the same time Cronje was getting surrounded gradually. As night came on we were once more on the move. Lord Roberts working the oracle on the following morning 21st February, Cronje fired his last shell passing over my Regiment the old G.H. Later on the troops advanced on the hill held by the Boers and drove them off, I believe, without a single man being hit. The old G.H. been told off to hold it. It then got the name Kitchener's Hill, which will always live in the memory of the men who helped to take it and held it with the height of credit.

It was there where we hung on for fourteen days living on two biscuits per man a day scarcely anything else besides with hardly ever a dry thing to our backs and no place to lay our weary heads as it was raining on and off all the time. On the morning of the 23rd February, just at day break, we got attacked by a force under De Wet. In less time than it takes to tell, each company of the Regiment had doubled to its own respective position amongst the rocks giving the Boers a smart and hot reception. For six hours, the fight went on when finally the Boers were driven back leaving their fallen behind and 87 prisoners captured. Our losses being 8 killed and about 30 wounded including 3 officers wounded. Thus had Cronje's last hope been cut off and the old G.H. proven its sterling worth.

The night before the surrender of Cronje, we were all sitting about the rocks, except those actually on duty, when a general officer and several more came along. Coming up to some of us, he asked us how we were getting on. Someone replied that we were getting on all right only our stomachs were rather empty. He made answer and said 'I am only on quarter rations'. But his appearance belied his words. After telling us to keep a smart look out for Cronje and give him a good reception should he offer to break through in our direction, he rode away.

About 1.30 am on the morning of the 27th, Cronje made his last attempt to break through. As the rifles rang out breaking the silence we were awoken and doubled to our places and waited in readiness for coming events, which never happened. Cronje was as fast as a rat in a trap. We remained in position until 5.30am when orders came to retire back to our well trodden allotted space where we were served with a meal called breakfast consisting of two hard biscuits which had to serve for three meals - about three and a half ounces in each biscuit. I forget what colour the coffee was like. No doubt, we should have made good greyhounds ourselves, but we were after bigger game. Just then the news came that the game had been bagged; Cronje and his force of a little over 4000 men had surrendered, including Miss Cronje.

The March to Bloemfontein

We remained at Paardeberg until 2 am on the morning of the 7th March when the 6th Division once more commenced its march to Bloemfontein. Hurried along on the march until the afternoon of the 10th, when once more we came in contact with the Boers. They were in a strong position on a range of hills in the form of a half moon behind stone walls which are the Boers' delight. Each regiment was halted and each man got a half pint of water from the water cart. Half an hour after getting the drink we were under fire from the Boers deadly Mauser. I well remember the words my old chum P--- said to me: 'Jack, the biggest enemy I have is thirst.' About one hour later he fell shot through the heart, poor lad. Alas the dear one left at home to mourn the one now lying beneath the lone veldt.

I shall always remember the afternoon of the 10th March 1900. My company was engaging the Boers from the crest of a hill with the Boers well in view to the front of us about 1000 yards away. The company kept up a very brisk fire, the captain using his rifle the same as the men. The remainder of the regiment was engaged to our right. Our captain was the only officer with us and a better example we could never wish to have, having kept up the fire for a long time. While the Boers fire slackened, we left the crest of the hill and came the foot.

Meanwhile, there were three lines of troops in skirmishing order in front of my company. We had been firing over their heads all the while they being on the veldt about sixty feet below us, making it safe for us to fire. We had no sooner got to the foot of the hill than a mounted officer galloped up asking 'what Regiment is this?' Captain E----- answered 'The Yorkshire Regiment, sir' adding 'one company of them sir.'

We knew the words to follow: 'You have got to advance on the Boer position'. We knew there was another Paardeberg in front. Nothing daunted, with a shout from the Captain 'Come on!', the handful of men led by a brave man went forwards into the leaden hail fighting every inch of the ground and encouraging the other troops to come on. Finally, the steel coming to the fore, the Captain and his small band charged right into the Boer laager where a good number of Boers threw up their hands and surrendered, the remainder of the Boers having retired amidst the screeching of our shells. The sight of the laager was past description; dead and wounded lying where they had fell mostly from the effects of our shrapnel. Our loss being 3 killed and about 20 wounded in the fight. The Captain had a piece knocked off his rifle with a bullet and also one through the sleeve of his coat. If ever an officer deserved a DSO, he did. Once more, I came through Scot free.

Just as the sun was setting, we marched back to where we had to camp for the night but darkness overtaking us, we had a great deal of trouble in finding our headquarters. We managed to find it after marching for about 3 hours. We received once more a half pint of Adam's wine to finish up the day. The wounded were sought for and brought in during the night. Thus ended the fight off Direfontein.

On the following morning, the Division passed on to Bloemfontein without any further opposition. On the night of the 13th, we arrived within 5 miles of the capitol of the Orange Free State. This would be about 12 o'clock at night. It was raining very heavily at the time and everything we had was wet through. The night was also very cold and dark. There was no sleep for the worn out soldiers. We had no thought that we were so close to Bloemfontein. The buglers were formed up for practice. It did our hearts good to hear them sounding once again, the first time for 31 days. The buglers were going to head us into the capitol.

After marching for half an hour we came in sight of the town, which made a pretty sight, as pretty as the name which means fountain of flowers. The division was brought to a halt and each regiment formed into column of route. I must mention that we all looked what we were: a ragged and worn out lot. Yet each heart seemed gay and every head held erect, though the stomach was empty. The men most tattered were put into the centre of each section of fours although there was very little choice between any man. We were all more or less a good representative of a rag and bone shop. Although being ragged and worn out with hunger, every man felt proud marching through the streets of the Free State capitol. As a newspaper stated later, the troops marched past with splendid pride in rags. Tommy was welcomed on every hand by those true to Britain's cause and on every hand could be seen rosettes of the dear old colours, red white and blue.

After marching through the town and out once more onto the veldt, we marched for about two miles out where we went into camp minus tents. We rigged our blankets up to make shelter, some like gypsies only we had nothing to make the pot boil. Next morning we received four ounces of bread per man being told we should receive the remainder of the day's rations later on. It never came off which was the case many a time.

During the afternoon of the 15th, four men per company were allowed passes into town. It was not long before every house both private and public was turned into a bake house and many a shilling passed from Tommy's hand into that of the Dutch. I have known men wait until the bread was baked putting it into sacks and have burnt their backs carrying it back to camp and it has been eaten before it was cold because the men were that famished. The march from Graspan to Bloemfontein was a splendid record march. Within the month, Kimberley was relieved, Cronje captured, the investment of the same at Paardeberg was the means of withdrawing the Boers from around Ladysmith, finally ending with the relief of the same. Bloemfontein was taken and occupied which broke the neck of the war.

Skirmishes around Bloemfontein

The 18th Brigade remained at Bloemfontein until the 4th April 1900 when we moved to Springfield about eight miles to the south east of Bloemfontein, the Warwick Regiment having joined the Brigade in the meantime. During our stay at Springfield it was very wet. There was no shelter apart from what we provided with our blankets. Generally, we were out on outpost duty, the Boer being in the vicinity. This place was like another Kitchener Hill with the exception that we got a little more food and did not get attacked. On the 22nd April the Brigade moved out the Basutoland border. There were several small engagements during the eight days we were out. General French captured General Grobber's convoy during two operations.

At the end of the month the Brigade returned to Bloemfontein where we all received a new suit of cloths each also one shirt per man. They were sadly needed. The G.H. received a hundred men of section D, just out from England joined us just in time for the march to Pretoria. The 18th Brigade was now taken from the 6th Division, joining hands with the Guards Brigade forming the 11th Division under General Pole Carew.

The March to Pretoria

On the 1st May 1900, the 11th Division left Bloemfontein on Lord Robert's march to Pretoria, marching the first day to Karree Siding, a distance of 22 miles, without any opposition from the enemy. It was a very trying march for the men who had only just joined us, it being a very hot day. On the 3rd, the Division marched to Brandfort coming in contact with the Boers. They showed very little resistance as they are playing a running game now.

After leaving Brandfort, the column marched to the Vet River where we came in for a lot of shell fire from the enemy which was kept up until dark. The Boer shells proved very inefficient which was a lucky thing for us. We all expected a big fight there next morning, but when the troops advanced we found that the Boers had vanished. I must say here that General French was operating in front of the Division - the safety valve and a terror to the Boers. The Division reached Kroonstad on the 12th May. We all expected a big fight here being told there were 20,000 Boers holding the place. French had a cut in before the Division got up, forcing the enemy to retire. The troops marched through the town in column of fours. There was no need to hide the rags this time, the suits were only 12 days old. There was the usual amount of cheering and displaying of colours. Everyone seemed to be British. I don't know whether it was the case before T. Atkins got there, the Boers wrecked the railway bridges and rails as they retreated, leaving plenty of work behind.

We stayed several days here working day and night making a deviation. We were on half rations. To help do the work, of course, there were plenty of supplies about a hundred miles behind no doubt. It was a good way of gaining time. We must wait for supplies and then do another bacon over the veldt to wait once more. Our march to Johannesburg was about the same distance as it had been from Bloemfontein to Kroonstad.

Johannesburg fell on the 31st after a bit of hard fighting. My Regiment forming a unit in the operations. The 11th Division marched through Johannesburg the same as the other places. The same amount of cheering and colours but Mr Atkins cared nothing for it. The Kaffirs seemed to enjoy the sight and seemed as if they had been getting ready for the coming event. They had been having what we had not tasted for months. We marched through Johannesburg to a place 7 miles off where we received a belly full of nothingness.

On the 5th of June, Pretoria fell after about 5 hours fighting; my Regiment being well to the front in this place which was thought to be impregnable and which is surrounded by forts. It fell in a very short time, our 4.7 guns working the miracle. We all thought the capture of Pretoria would finish the war, but our hopes were not to be realised. Mr Kruger had fled with the treasure leaving his poor old lady chargeable to the parish. The day Pretoria fell was my birthday. I had two biscuits for my days rations, one I gave away for a pipe of tobacco. I don't know which was the best, the biscuit or the tobacco, but I preferred the weed.

The Skirmish at Diamond Hill and Belfast

The 18th Brigade was engaged at Diamond Hill for two days, finally driving the Boers further back. This was on the 9th and 10th June 1900. After Diamond Hill the old 18th Division saw no more big engagements until the 25th, 26th and 27th August when the Boers made a determined stand at Belfast. This was the best stand they had made in the Transvaal. The Japs being nearby, cut up to a man and where our artillery was compelled to use case shot. My Regiment, the old G.H. forming a unit in the three days fight and holding a critical point. The Boers were absolutely routed.

Fever at Komati Poort

After that came the guerrilla warfare. The 18th Brigade marched on to Nelspruit in the bushveldt where it was broken up and sent to different places. Everyone of the regiments in the 18th Brigade getting a turn at the fevers in that stricken place, Komati Poort. In the Crocodile Valley where we all had our share of malaria and enteric, a scourge which has killed more men than Boer shot or shell ever did.

So ends my experience of the march from Graspan to Komati Poort and previous experiences of 1899 to 1900.

Thus ends the hard trials of the campaign.