

**Colonel N. J. C. Rutherford's account of his part, with the field hospital, at the Battle of Magersfontein during the Boer War. Written in pencil "on the battlefield"**

**Publication/Creation**

1899

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Presented by  
Col. J.N.C. Rutherford D.S.O

343  
RAM C 150  
R.A.M.C. HISTORICAL MUSEUM,  
QUEEN ELIZABETH BARRACKS,  
THE BATTLE BOOK, HAM, HANTS.  
MAJES FONTEIN (170)  
SOUTH AFRICAN WAR  
DECEMBER 10, 1899,  
WRITTEN ON THE BATTLE  
FIELD  
in A. F. S. POURET BOOK.

R.A.M. COLLEGE  
150  
PATH. LABORATORY



Mappe + Residence

Johnston's Ford

Lieut. Royal Army

Books

153

16

Medical Corps

Corby & Co., London.

(3000 list - 3-99)

Glencad

Letterkenny

Co Donegal

Ireland

Army Book 153.

MEMO.

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*This book is ruled to scale. The unit or side of each square represents 100 yards on a scale of 4 inches to one mile.*

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Special Envelopes [Army Form C. 398] are supplied gratis for use with this Book, and may be obtained from the War Office on requisition.

Name + Residence

J. Rutherford

Lieut. Royal Army

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153.

16.

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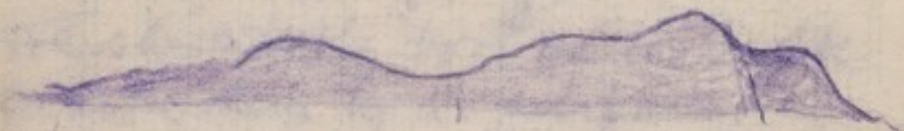
*This book is ruled to scale. The unit or side of each square represents 100 yards on a scale of 4 inches to one mile.*

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Special Envelopes [Army Form C. 398] are supplied gratis for use with this Book, and may be obtained from the War Office on requisition.

The Battle of Majestfontein

on the 10<sup>th</sup> of <sup>December</sup> (November) at 3<sup>00</sup>  
in the afternoon we saw the Highland  
brigade moving off from our camp  
at Mudders River, going in the  
direction of Majestfontein, or  
in other words, a Popple, or  
line of Popples in this shape



from the sheep end of this  
chain the Boer trenches ran  
in a semicircle down to  
the Mudders River (this we ~~marked~~  
afterwards). The plan of  
attack was as follows.

The Kameys to fire a  
few shells at the position

in the afternoon, the Highland  
Brigade to start off towards the  
right flank of the enemy's  
position, the Guards Brigade  
further to the right, a battery  
moving up in front. Then at  
~~night~~ the Highlanders were  
to make straight for the Boer  
trenches at the foot of the Koppe  
& take them by a surprise  
bayonet charge. At 12<sup>00</sup>

that night our Hospital started  
and a most miserable night  
it was, pitch dark & raining  
heavily, the distance we actually  
traversed that night was  
3 miles, yet we took 6 hrs  
to do it! My chief recollection

of that dismal march was of  
falling asleep on my pony at  
intervals + being wakened up  
by a cold rivulet of rain flowing  
down the back of my neck.  
Our progress was terribly slow,  
continual long halts, while  
the folks in front were finding  
out the way in the mucky  
blackness. Now a wasson  
would get stuck, + a long  
scene of shouting Cape boys,  
cracking whips + plunging  
mules, till the wheels were  
started again. I had  
one narrow escape from  
a nasty tangle, as I



rode along I felt something  
cold touching my cheek now  
+ again, thinking it was an  
insect of some sort flying past  
I took no heed, just then  
our Transport Conductor rose  
up, looming in the dark on  
his white horse just beside  
me, a loud curse, + the  
poor Conductor vanished, the  
cold thing rubbing on my  
cheek was the temporary  
telegraph were erected by the

Signature RE the unfortunate

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No.	Date
From	To
Place	Place
Despatch	Receipt
h. m. M	h. m. M

conductor just got it under  
the chin & was lifted off his  
mount, happily he was not  
hurt. As dawn broke we  
heard the tremendous crash  
of the big naval gun on  
our left, riding to the ridge  
on that side, I saw the  
Koppe of Magresfontein where  
the enemy were, & was  
just in time to hear & see  
the naval gun go, the whistle  
of the shell, the loud report  
of the bursting discharge on  
the Koppe & the immense  
cloud of greenish-yellow  
smoke getting up. This  
gun, of course, was

firing Lyddite. Far away  
on the right we could see  
some of our Field Guns blazing  
away & behind them the  
cavalry. No gun firing seemed  
to come from the Boer Poppo,  
but on the left of their position  
we could hear our old  
friend the Maxim-Morderfeldt  
with its "Bang, bang, bang."  
Our baggage train moved on &  
we were ordered to get in  
front with the other Field Hospitals  
(there are four here ours, the

Signature.....

No.

Date

From

To

Place

Place

Despatch

h.

m.

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Receipt

h.

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Reversional 7. Hoptl. the Guards  
Brigade Hoptl. the Highland  
Brigade, and the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade one.)  
As we were moving up I saw  
a Highlander in front, reding on  
I came up with him + eagerly  
asked for news. Terrible bad  
news sei, he told me, the Highland  
Brigade was cut up this morning  
they marched up in close  
quarter column right up to  
within 200 yds of the Boer trenches,  
the enemy poured in a sudden  
fearful fire + half of them  
were shot, the remainder  
retreated" I came back with  
this startling news, which was  
received with scorn + I  
did not pay much attention

to it myself, as we moved close

to it myself, as we moved closer  
up towards the front, our news was  
very soon confirmed + here + there  
among the bushes ~~groups~~ of Jocks  
were sitting, many of them without  
their rifles, not knowing where  
their regiments were, hungry +  
thirsty, and completely demoralised.  
I spoke to a young Black Watch  
soldier + asked why he was  
sitting here + where was his  
regiment. "I don't know where  
the regiment is Sir, he replied,  
we all ran away this morning  
+ I haven't seen them since"  
We now got an order to halt  
which we did, + I was told to  
go up and assist at a dressing  
station under Colonel Hartley  
of the Cape Mounted Rifles.  
The wounded were coming w  
slowly <sup>in</sup> Highlanders. +

in most cases each suffering Jewel  
was borne carefully along by some 2 dozen  
burly fellow country-men, who were  
extremely pleased to get away from  
the firing & ~~escape~~ <sup>seized</sup> this opportunity  
of doing so, to get them back again  
was impossible. everywhere you moved  
clumps of these chaps were squatting  
under the bushes, no officers to be seen,  
later in the day a few officers came  
back & collected them with much  
difficulty, calling to them to form up  
under a ridge & they would get their  
grab, as an officer approached these  
fellows would rise up & skulk further  
back, till the Provost Marshall came  
riding around them & peacefully  
by treachery was able to get most  
of them to come together in some  
no Signature where these were the men

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No.	Date
From	To
Place	Place
Despatch	Receipt
h. m. M	h. m. M

who stampeded at the surprise  
disaster in the early morning &  
never went up to the firing line again.  
I worked for about an hour at  
the dressing station & then moved  
forward to a collecting station a  
mile farther on. Here the ambulances  
were & as wounded came in we packed  
them in & sent them back via  
dressing station to the hospital  
at Modder River. It soon became  
evident to us that wounded were  
out on the field & help was urgently  
required to bring them in. So I  
collected three stretcher squads &  
moved up to the firing line,  
meeting some Highlanders bringing in  
their own wounded. They directed  
us to a wire fence on the right  
of ~~one~~ of our field batteries.  
It was here many of our people

were hit in the morning as they  
tried to get through the fence in  
the semi-darkness, I found six  
Highlanders here, all a few yds from  
the fence, the first man I came  
on was wounded in both thighs & in  
both arms, but none of them were  
seriously, no dead soldiers to be  
seen here, while getting the men  
dressed & put on the stretchers, the  
battalion beside us broke out into  
fire, it was a fine sight to see the  
cool way the officers behaved,  
though everyone of them was liable  
to be hit by the Boer rifles.

They calmly surveyed the enemy's  
& trenches through their glasses,  
& gave the orders, & "bang bang bang"  
& went the six guns one after the  
other, the reports, the scream of the  
shells, the loud explosion as they struck  
the koppe and the echoes repeated  
the deafening roar was tremendous,



Then a maxim hidden in a bush just  
on my left started its infernal rattling.  
I couldn't understand this sudden  
outburst till glancing behind I saw  
a half battallion of the Gordons  
coming up in open order, quietly  
& steadily they came on, passed  
through the now silent guns &  
running from cover to cover  
made a steady advance, it was  
a splendid sight but the  
fate of it at once struck me,  
nearly 5,000 men, a whole Brigade,  
had attempted to take those  
trenches & failed, & now half  
a battallion was sent out to  
try & do. Their poor Colonel was  
wounded & died in Hospital  
next day. I got my wounded  
back till an ambulance  
met us & took them on.

gathering a few more stretcher parties  
I made another move up, passed  
the ... towards the front

back till an ambulance  
met us + took them over.

gathering a few more straggler parties  
I made another move up, passed  
the guns + went towards the foot  
of the Koppe, many of our poor  
fellows lying about dead, all  
highlanders + all hit, or most of  
them in the back, of course at  
this part of the field it was the  
reloading men who were hit.  
The first lot knocked over were  
right up at the trenches. I  
picked up several here + there,  
using a glass to spy out among  
the bushes for wounded. ~~By~~  
by this means I saw a  
helmet apparently resting on

Signature.....

The ground marker for it was

No.

Date

From

To

Place

Place

Despatch

h.

m.

M Receipt

h.

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discovered an officer of the H. L. I.  
(Highland Infantry) sitting in  
a pit he had managed to  
throw up with his hands to  
protect him from the muzzled  
cannets, he was hit in the thigh.  
During all this time the naval  
gun was sending its Lyddite  
shells smash at the Koppe,  
which was descending in the  
extreme having used all by  
stretchers I moved off passing  
behind the guns again & then  
I discovered to my disgust that  
my horse who was being taken  
care of by a  $\frac{1}{2}$  company of  
Black Watch behind the  
bushes was gone & the  $\frac{1}{2}$   
company gone also! ~~the~~

Boers had started to shell us

Boers had started to shell us,  
+ dropped a few just along the  
fringe of bushes, so another reconnaissance  
took place further back. (I  
afterwards found the pony in  
camp about a week from the  
time of his loss). Well, I  
was very glad to get back  
to my Hospital + find some  
grab waiting, + as it was now  
too dark to do anything we  
turned in, + had a sleep, everything  
quiet during the night. Dawn broke  
+ with the first streaks of light  
the gun music began again.  
A Staff Officer came in + asked  
us to send out an ambulance.  
Major Baver + I took it out,  
halted it at the guns, the  
guns were now silent as

a flag of truce was sent out  
to stop hostilities for 2 hours.  
+ allow us to get in our  
wounded. This was all spoiled  
by not sending instant word to  
our naval guns who kept up  
their fire + the Boers, of course,  
replied. General Bullington  
asked us to leave our Ambulances  
at the guns to draw away  
Boer fire, which we did.

Bevor + I went off towards the  
right + soon found a wounded  
Highlander. This was the only  
one of our people we saw at  
this part of the field, (all  
the other wounded belonged

to the Scandinavian Corps.

to the Scandinavian Corps.  
fighting for the Boers.

11 of them we discovered   
lying wounded + I counted  
six dead, amongst the dead  
lay their Captain, a fine big  
bearded man, well over 6  
feet I should say + built  
in proportion, picturesquely dressed  
in corduroy, hornless jacket,  
white corduroy riding breeches +  
tan colored Wellington boots. all  
these Scandinavians were a  
Signature.....

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No.	Date
From	To
Place	Place
Despatch	Receipt
h. m. M	h. m. M

much better dressed + much  
finer looking fellows than the  
Boers I have seen. One poor  
beggar was lying right in the  
centre of thorn bush, his leg was  
hopelessly smashed + how the ~~poor~~  
miserable wretch ever managed  
to drag himself in I don't know.  
I do know that it took three  
of us all we could do to get him  
out of the bush + on a stretcher.  
The last man I had to carry  
with the assistance of a couple  
of Highlanders, during the transit  
rather a funny thing happened.  
The wounded man made a  
few complimentary remarks

about the good shooting of the

about the good shooting of the  
Highlanders, at which the  
big Jock opposite to me solemnly  
winked. Then the Scandinavian  
asked, "are the Boers going to  
advance now?" The Jock  
immediately propped him down,  
+ scowling very fierce at him,  
shouted, "They had better not  
you devil" + it took a few  
minutes to pacify him. We

packed 14 wounded into the  
ambulance + moved off to the  
Field Hospital, we found orders  
awaiting us to pack up + away  
back to Modder river as the  
whole force was to retire. The  
Boer guns now started + checked  
the retirement, bursting



them indiscriminately among  
our people. I saw one drop  
smack into a clump of our  
cavalry, but it did not burst  
& no harm ensued. That  
return march to Modder River  
was a dismal procession, 300  
highlanders had volunteered  
to carry back dead & wounded,  
& all along the road were  
parties of four with a steel  
figure rolled in a blanket on  
the stretcher. The ambulances  
bearing the body of poor  
General Wauchope was in  
out ~~the~~ train of waggons,  
the body had been discovered

in the morning by the Presbyterian  
chaplain, and due to the trenches

The body had been  
in the morning by the Presbyterian  
chaplain quite close to the trenches,  
the Boers had objected to him  
putting the corpse in the ambulance  
as they said, & rightly, that  
wounded should be put there,  
not dead, he proposed putting  
the body outside & they agreed  
to this, got rope & assisted in  
lashing on the port General's  
body to the outside of the  
waggon. On arrival at  
Middel we pitched camp &  
took in our divisional troops.

Signature.....

No.

Date

From

To

Place

Place

Despatch

h.

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Receipt

h.

m.

M

wounded + the Scandinavians  
I had great talks with  
them + liked them very much,  
fine, straightforward fellows, not  
like most Boer prisoners  
wounded who whine about their  
poor families + tell you they were  
forced to fight, these fellows  
told us boldly that they hoped  
to get well + if they could get  
exchanged would come out +  
fight again.

Pt J. Murphy, No. 5758

Kings Own Yorks Light  
Infantry

Fainted this morning at stakes.

unconscious..

22 May

all transport officers  
to report on arrival in Camp.

March on Rueboul

6 am 14<sup>th</sup> Bd. Riv.

March

Signature.....

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No.	Date
From	To
Place	Place
Despatch	Receipt
h. m. M	h. m. M

wounded + U C

Jam 12 tins

Matches. 24 boxes

Biscuits. lunch tins 400

Bacon

Tea lbs 5.

Cocoa + milk paste

Mustard

Lime juice  $\frac{1}{2}$  dozen

Stores

Stores

Jam

~~Bread~~

Tobacco

Cigarre + Pipe:  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb.

One tin

Matches

Milk

Biscuits

Bacon tinned

Tea 5-lbs

Cocoa milk paste

(For P.M.O)

Biscuits

Milk

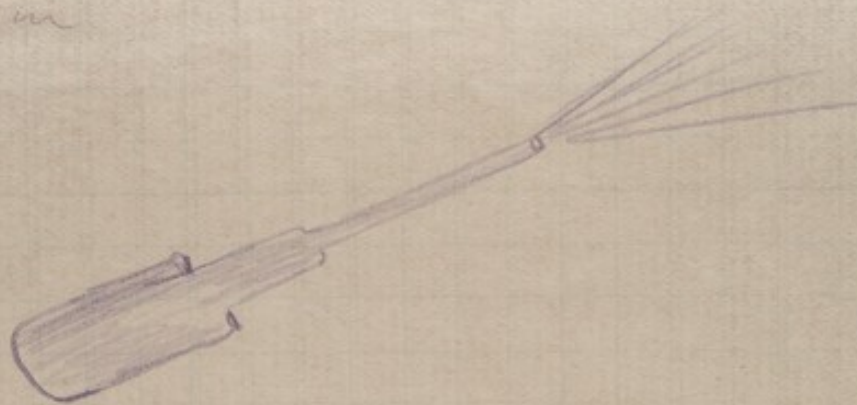
Mustard

Lime juice  $\frac{1}{2}$  dozen

Books D.C. 2 3

One tin milk Cigarettes + Papers

pen



Signature

No.

Date

Name

To

Place

Place

Receipt

Receipt



*Signature*.....

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<i>No.</i>				<i>Date</i>			
<i>From</i>				<i>To</i>			
<i>Place</i>				<i>Place</i>			
<i>Despatch</i>	<i>h.</i>	<i>m.</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Receipt</i>	<i>h.</i>	<i>m.</i>	<i>M</i>



Signature \_\_\_\_\_

No. \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

From \_\_\_\_\_

To \_\_\_\_\_

Place \_\_\_\_\_

Place \_\_\_\_\_

Dispatch \_\_\_\_\_

A. \_\_\_\_\_

n. \_\_\_\_\_

M. \_\_\_\_\_

A. \_\_\_\_\_

n. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



*Signature*.....

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<i>No.</i>				<i>Date</i>			
<i>From</i>				<i>To</i>			
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<i>Despatch</i>	<i>h.</i>	<i>m.</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Receipt</i>	<i>h.</i>	<i>m.</i>	<i>M</i>

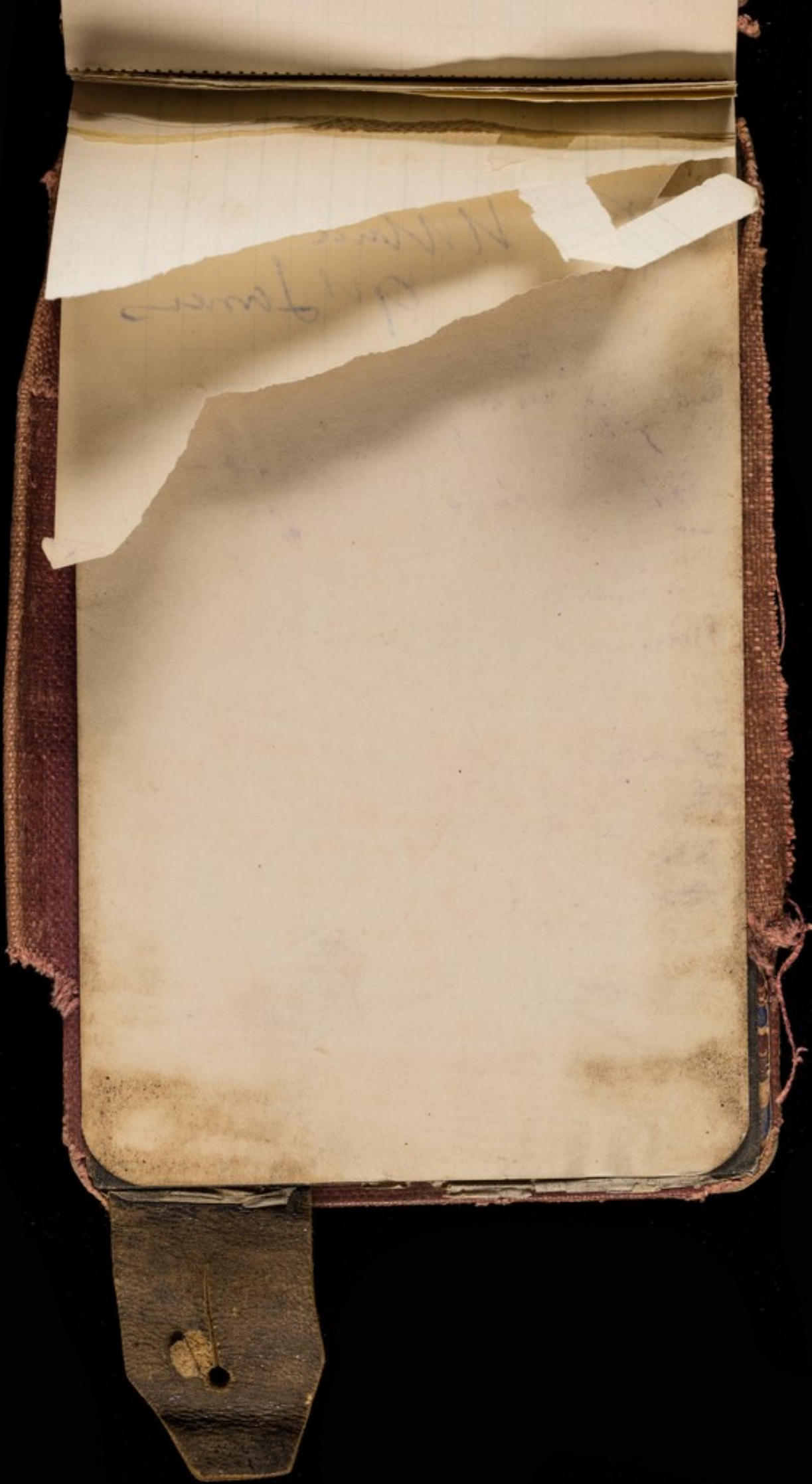
	Age	Relig	Occupation
H. Sargent	24.	Cof E.	Wrooper
J. M. Reed	27	Presb.	Wrooper
H. Reiley	24.	Cof E	Wrooper
J. S. Gees	17.	scotch.	Wrooper.
J. H. Grey	21.	Cof E	---
E. Franklin	19.	Cof E.	---

A

*Signature*.....

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<i>No.</i>				<i>Date</i>			
<i>From</i>				<i>To</i>			
<i>Place</i>				<i>Place</i>			
<i>Despatch</i>	<i>h.</i>	<i>m.</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Receipt</i>	<i>h.</i>	<i>m.</i>	<i>M</i>



PE H. W. Mace  
9th James

