

**Typed transcripts of two letters, 1899, from Holt to his wife, describing conditions under siege in Ladysmith. With explanatory notes by the donor**

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Notes by Lt.Col. H.B. Holt on Maj-Gen M.P.C. Holt's  
letter from Ladysmith to his wife.

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With reference to this letter - KELLIE, whose name frequently crops up in connection with a horse is Colonel Kellie Commandant Deolali Camp, whence my father left for S.African Wars.

Also at Deolali (mentioned on p. 10 of this letter) were Captains Welsh and Northcott. I think the former was Kings Own - later drowned in Rangoon. Northcott was Norfolk Regt.

Page 3. Dhanji (also on p.8) was MPH's Indian bearer.  
I think Phuller must have been the Syce.

Page 3. Northey (60th Rifles) later Gen Sir E. Northey -  
one time Govenor of Kenya.

"CLIVE" R.I.M.S. - MPH was MO i/c Trooping from India to  
S.Africa and back early in 1899.

"THEY" 60th Rifles.

Page 6 PMB is of course Pietermaritzberg. Mrs Mac was  
Mrs MacDonald - matron of Grey's Hospital.

Page 8. Letter by Runner - I wonder if it ever reached my  
Mother .  
Hillard was MPH's batch.

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Ladysmith  
9th Nov. '99.

It is now some days since all communications were cut. I forget the exact day and I have not my diary near just now. The Boers bombarded the Town every day more or less - but on Friday it got so bad that we had to think about the Hospitals. We had an awful afternoon, shells pitching all about us; but no real damage was done. I went to Bruce's Hospital (in the Town Hall) to see how he was getting on, when he asked me to go over to lunch with him, that day the proprietor of the Hotel had opened a new dining room at the back for residents, so we went there to lunch. Just as we had finished lunch a Shell came into a small cottage next the hotel, blew the whole side of the Cottage out and blew out all the contents of the room and passed into the dining room which was just then crammed through and through with people at lunch, it came at the window just near Bruce's usual place, it knocked Mininisce(?) who was lunching there with a man named Balfour, clean off his chair, but without hurting him, and knocked Balfour on the back of the head and he had his fingers (cut) with bits of glass. Nobody was touched beyond these two. It was really marvellous. After that they went on bombarding all the afternoon; a few people were hit and a good many houses. That day Charles Taunton was shot dead in a skirmish with the Boers outside the town. I went to dine with Currie and whilst there we began talking about the exposed position in the middle of the town of the hospitals. There was Bruce's Hospital consisting of the Town Hall and two separate Churches just behind. The Volunteer Hospital, No. 11, 12 and 24 Field Hospitals - also 26 & 18 F. Hospitals had that day been sent down by the Boers from Dundee with 94 wounded. These were all in round the Market Square. Then on top of the hill there were a lot of sick in the Convent just overlooking the Town Hall. In the end we all decided to ask Hyslop (who is Volunteer P.M.O.) Martin and Carter (11th F. Hospital) to get the P.M.O. to ask the General if arrangements could not be made to move the side all out of fire and clear of the town on to some neutral ground. So after dinner Hyslop went over with me - saw Carter who was willing, then Martin and whilst he was in our tent talking to Martin the P.M.O. came in. At first he did not seem to see it - but eventually he went to see the General and early the next morning Bateson (P.M.Os Secretary) went out to Joubert and in the end it was arranged that there would be an Armistice till midnight Sunday - in which time the sick and wounded with Hospital Establishments were to be sent some four miles out. We could not begin work till early Sunday morning and then the first train promptly ran off the line - that stopped all work till about 2 p.m. When we got the first trainful of sick off. Bruce objected very strongly at first - and I believe till quite to the very end - but I think there is no doubt but that it was the best plan, anyhow the rest of us were quite unanimous about the matter - Carter's (No. 11) and Donegan's (No 18) Hospitals were to be left in the town, and we were sent up to the old camp - all the troops being spread out all around the town. Most of the inhabitants went out under canvas with the Hospitals - I saw Miss Thompson, she is nursing, when I was putting our side people into the train.

I have a letter not yet posted to you that was finished before I went to bed the day before the line was cut - they cut it during the day, so that the evening mail could not go. Since then I have not written anything. I think I told you in it all about the fight on Monday week at Lombard's Kop. Since we have been up in Camp again we have all been busy building a Shelter by the river bank for patients - trying to make it Shell proof - it is not finished yet. Until today our corner has been quite free of shells - but early this morning at about  $\frac{1}{4}$  to 5 they began sending shells over our tents - so we skipped out of bed and lowered our tents in a few minutes - put our patients in the Shelter which is not quite finished and then



most of us went over the river and climbed up the rocks for cover, which we get in sort of little caves under some enormous stones. Then three guns came and planted themselves just behind where our tents were lying on the ground and began blazing away at the Boers. Of course they drew the Boer's fire into our Corner and shells were flying along the river just beside our caves all the morning almost without stopping - one dropped in the river just opposite where Porter and I were sitting and splashed up the water to a great height. It is an odd thing how little damage shells sometimes do - not a man or a horse was struck near us, though they fell in amongst the 18th Hussars - the Battery and our Mules and Oxen. Still when a bit of Shell does touch you it is very bad. I hear a Colour Sergt. of the Liverpools was literally blown to pieces by one today - still this may not be quite true though I have seen a good many men very badly knocked about by them. I think I told you Poor Grey was shot on Monday week and died the following day. Pope and his people in No. 11 'Commandeered' Bester's (a very disloyal Dutchman) house for their own use and dug a pit by the side of it, roofed it over with sleepers and balks of timber and mud as a Shelter, but they put all their four horses into the stable, the result was that on Monday a shell went into the Stables, burst there, killed Carter's and Pope's horses, and I believe Cameron's was not expected to live. Forde tied his up in the garden and it was not touched. Not only have they been shelling our part of the Camp, but judging from what one could hear of big gun and rifle fire, and from what we hear from other people the Boers tried an attack on no less than three points. On one spot on the other side of the Camp they were driven off and retired somebody said (I think it was Raymond) 5 miles. Then they came within 800 yards on our side but were shored off by the 60th. I believe they tried to get in on the other side of the town but all were unsuccessful. Still it is very hard to find out sometimes what is happening except in one's own immediate neighbourhood.

Reilly of my batch is here - he came with the Rifle Brigade - I saw Harrison the other day looking very well - Codrington, who came out for duty with the Indian Commissariat is now posted to a Squadron of the Imperial Light Horse, so he will have something better to do than serving out stores etc.

We have been working so hard the last 4 days, heaving stones and sand - selves, dhooly wallahs and all (only the Assistant Surgeons are too superior to do any heavy work). We are quite stiff and quite glad to spend the day lying up under the stones. My arms are so stiff I can hardly use them. It has been fairly hot all day - but cool under the stones.

Piccione and Kellie's horse are all right. I have not done anything with Kellie's since he was so seedy beyond walking exercise everyday. Now that we are shut up in Ladysmith there is no sale for horses unless you are entitled to Govt. rations, as it is impossible to buy any forage. I think old Carter might like him, now that his is killed - he would suit Carter in every thing except height - he is a long way to climb upon and Carter is a small rotund person. Next time I see him I will ask him if he wants him.

I don't think there is anything more to say tonight - but this is the first day's "loaf" we have had for some time so I thought I would begin a letter which will be posted when we are relieved - though as far as we can find out that is unlikely to be about another 10 days at the best.



10 November.

Last night I slept on a ledge of rock high up above the river - because yesterday morning they began firing shells just over us, and as they had been dropping shells all about our camp all day it was just as well to be out of their way and not have to turn out at 4 a.m. to drop tents. So I rolled up the tent and all my gear and slept in the open in comfort and safety. The first thing I saw in the morning was Dhang's\* head peering over the rock with a cup of tea. As luck would have it we had a peaceful day and which was just as well because we had to move our camp to a place where we can put up some tents for sick with some degree of safety. There was no firing till later in the afternoon, which began just after a sharp thunderstorm with a few hailstones. You might tell Kellie that his horse was again breathing very short today and I showed him to a Vet who said he has Chronic Emphysema and Asthma, and that I can't say he is 'Sound'. I am afraid this will rather get in the way of my selling him - still he might suit old Carter who will never want to go out of a walk - first time I see him I will tackle him about it. Piccione is very fit - so much so that he is a bit troublesome - he has not been able to get much work the last 5 days or more and is not likely to while we are shut up here.

There is no definite news of our being relieved yet - only rumours and plenty of them. I have heard nothing from Bruce lately, and there does not seem much chance of getting out there. The greater part of any day was spent in dismantling our bridge over the river for the sake of the planks and sandbags - and also the "shelter" we had made for the sake of the iron pipes and sandbags of which it was built - so I suppose we shall have to set to work to build a new one if it is possible.

12 November, Sunday.

I have not much to tell you today. There was a little firing yesterday in which so far as I can find out very little mischief was done beyond killing a couple of mules that were standing in an Ambulance in a yard behind the P.M.O's Office. Today being Sunday there has been no firing. I saw Northey today - looking very well - and quite a different being from what he was on the "CLIVE". He has grown a beard and at first I did not know him - he and Cumberland are the only two out of all those on the ship with us who are neither killed, wounded or missing. They have lost from one cause or another 16 officers since the war began - Mrs K is at Cape Town.

I saw Pope today - looking very sorrowful - he does not like the war at all - not that any of us like shells flying about. We were busy during working hours making our new Shelter. It is pretty hard work but gives us plenty of exercise. Piccione is very fit and Kellie's horse improving again, and was quite skittish but his wind is still very short.

There is some talk of our being relieved about Thursday next, but I think it will take more than that to enable us to advance - we hear that Buller has relieved Kimberley and should soon be marching on BLOEMFONTEIN. Wonder how much truth there is in it. We hear such a lot of rumours that are generally contradicted next day, that it is impossible to believe anything. I must shut up now and go to bed.



19th November (Sunday)

The week has passed very much as usual more or less shells sent at us every day, and our guns seem to answer less freely than they did at first - probably they are saving their Ammunition - twice during the week the Boers fired at us during the night - not a nice thing to be woken up by shells passing over your head in the dark. Several days were wet during the week, followed as usual by hot sunny mornings.

Martin has had a bit of a go of dysentery but is better now and he was able to sit on his pony and walk down town today with me. We had to try and get some things for the Mess - scarcely any shops open now - and then only for an hour or so during the day at uncertain times; and there is scarcely anything to be bought and what there is, is mostly very dear.

I am keeping very fit - thanks probably to working part of the day like a navvy at the shell proof shelter we are building - every day we do some more to it, trying to make it safer and stronger - Today I went to the Railway to try and get some sleepers and rails to work into it and managed to get a little -

Shopping when you can do any is a most extraordinary affair - you go into a shop, wander about, pick up what you want and put it all together - go behind the Counter or into the stores behind the shop and see for yourself what there is that is any use. Butter and biscuits are not to be bought for money - none in the place. They seem very slow about relieving us. There is a great deal of discontent that nothing is being done - we merely sit down and get shelled more or less all day, and yet many people think there are not so many Boers round us after all as it is supposed the greater number have gone down to ESCOURT to oppose the relieving force - and we are told it may be one or even two months before they get here - Discontent is a very mild word for the feeling and it is certainly thought that some effort might be made to collar some or other of the guns that worry us all day. Another shell went into the Royal Hotel yesterday - entered by the roof, went down the staircase, out of the front door knocked a hole in the pavement and took both legs off a poor old Civilian doctor - a Naturalist. He died the same evening. Shepherd, the Maritzburg baker, told me about it today - otherwise there have been extraordinarily few casualties from their beastly shell fire. We had our turn yesterday afternoon - several pieces dropping in amongst our tents, but nobody was touched. A large piece fell within a few inches of Martin's servant who was lying down just behind the Mess tent where we were all sitting at tea. It rather startled us as we were not expecting anything of the sort then. A few more came not quite so near and then we had peace till middle of the night when they began again.

29th November.

Nothing much has happened the last 10 days beyond firing more or less every day bar Sunday. Several times they have sent shells near us, but this morning two evidently sent at a strong wall we are building dropped over us between the tents and our shell proof shelter. They did no harm beyond making us all take cover for an hour or so.

The flies here are abominable - they worry everybody all day long, especially on warm days. All sorts of silly rumours have been spread from day to day, but at last it seems certain they are making a move in our direction. We could hold out comfortably for another month. But we are pretty well sick of being shelled every day - very seldom anybody is hit - on an average one a day. It is really



extraordinary how little damage they do. Yesterday with a new big gun they have put up they fired amongst others a couple of shells just over our heads at Northey's Camp, just the other side of the river, but did not touch anybody. Just made them all take cover down by the river for an hour or so. The shells passed very near us overhead and we all thought the first one was coming for us, but it went on another 100 yards to Northey. They are beginning to fire at all our positions from the reverse side which is a bit disconcerting. They still fire at the town in fits and starts but do no harm beyond knocking holes in buildings. Most people have burrows in the ground, or strong shelters of some sort. Still some people have to go about for various purposes - An Indian was killed by a shell yesterday that went through McNalty's Store the other side of the river some 200 yards beyond Northey's Camp. They have sent a good many at the Commissariat Store (McNalty's) but beyond hitting two oxen one day have not touched anybody till yesterday.

The days do not pass so very slowly because we have been busy every day building either the shelter or the wall. The latter was put up to cover the sick tents, and the former for anyone who can get to it. It is partly underground and is very cool and consequently a good loafing place. As a rule I am out in the sun with the dhooly bearers building and I much prefer it to doing nothing, besides it keeps one fit.

The last three days I have had a little of the prevailing complaint, either from bad water or something else, but am better today. We have had to stop work today. The wall is pretty big, 30 ft. long by 14 ft. thick by 7 ft. high of stone. Surrounded on all sides by 5 ft. or so of rammed earth and now we are covering it over with turf so that it ought to be almost invisible.

We have had to cover all our tents with red mud to make them less visible, certainly white is a very bad colour. Well rubbed with red mud they are scarcely visible against the red stones which cover the hills mixed with a good deal of green.

We have very little hospital work. The men seem very healthy, and all bad cases are sent out to Bruce at Intombi Spruit.

We all wish the railway could be opened so that we could get some news from the outside world. Nothing but rumours have reached us till yesterday when we were told that there had been a fight at Mooi River and the Boers were driven back to COLENSO. Certainly on Monday night there was a fire somewhere down there. I saw the reflection in the sky and called Martin out of his tent to see it - he had gone to bed. And then the next day (Tuesday) we were told officially that the Boers had burned COLENSO, so it looks as if there is some truth in it all - hope so. I wish I could hear if you and the chicks are all right, I suppose there will be some letters waiting to be sent up as soon as the line is opened, but it seems a very long time being done. When they do open up and drive the Boers back there is bound to be a big rush, as no doubt we shall all be pushed on after them as rapidly as possible so that I may not get them for several days or even a week or so - still it can't be helped. They must be kept on the run once they are started if all goes well. Besides heavy gun firing the Boers keep on sniping at our outposts pretty well all day - never touch anybody that we hear of, and very often our people put up a dummy or a helmet for them to fire at - and it always draws them.

I hear they go and talk to the Tommies at Intombi Hospital and most of them say they are sick of the business, but I suppose they don't see their way to giving in, and most of them don't intend to at any price.



13th December.

There is so little to write about and one day is so much like another with the exception of there being more or less firing on one day as compared with another that it is hard to know what to write.

Prices are of course going up now things are beginning to get scarce. We hear more news from outside now - for the first few weeks we heard positively nothing - Clery's Column is said to be making their way along slowly and we have heard about Methuen's fights and also that Gatacre has got the Boers position at STORMBERG - a list of casualties up by KIMBERLEY has been published and I was very sorry to see Northcott's brother's name - it will be a bit of a blow to F. Northcott in more ways than one. It is to be hoped the Boers will be wiped out this time and that no soft heartedness, or Little Englanderism, will prevent their being left in a position to do further harm.

We have heard that a ship has gone ashore by the Cape and lost all the horses, guns, ammunition, stores, etc. It is a great loss just now.

I went out to Intombi Spruit to see Bruce last Monday week. He seems unfortunately to be in hot water with everybody. He has a very bad manner and manages to quarrel with nearly every-body. Mrs Bruce is out there. Both looking very well.

We have no butter now for the past 3 or 4 weeks, and I have not tasted Cow's milk since I left India. These are not hardships because we get very little exercise, otherwise we get plenty to eat so far.

The P.M.O. had been holding an inspection of our Hospital yesterday evening at 5 p.m. usually a pretty busy firing time, and as the dhooly bearers were unpacking one of the wagons that had been left where some Boers could see them a shell was sent at them and dropped short of them bang into the Hospital Camp. We all got covered with bits of dirt and stone. One dhooly bearer had a bit of stone driven into the eye, and I am afraid he will lose the sight of it. Porter and Young Martin were sitting at my tent door, and Porter got a rap on the back with a piece of copper that "takes the rifling" as they say, but no further harm was done. It just shows that a shell may drop into a crowd (there must have been no less than 30 or 40 people just round where it fell), and yet do very little harm.

I hear we can get helios through to P.M.B., so I will try and get one in tomorrow to Mrs Mac., to ask her to write and let you know I am all right. I would ask her to wire all the way, but you might be a bit startled to get a wire, after knowing we are shut up for so long and having heard nothing. Anyway I believe all casualties have been wired down and published, so you will know there is nothing much the matter with me - as a matter of fact we are all very fit. So far I am the only one who has not been "sick" yet. I can almost hear you say "Don't buck too soon".

We still continue to have remarkably few casualties, except when they make rushes for guns at night. One night some Imperial Light-Horse went out and blew up two of the Boer's guns and brought in a third one. They had, I believe, no casualties. Then a week later some of the Rifle Brigade went out and blew up another, but they lost a good number of men. 13 killed and some 30 wounded hardly worth the game, but the Boers admitted to 28 killed the next morning when Sloan of ours went out to get in the killed and wounded. It may or may not have been true.



I forget whether I have already told you that Codrington got out of the Commissariat and has a Squadron in the Imperial Light Horse. They are rather a fine set of men, but want a little more discipline and a good deal more training and experience. There is but little doubt that they accidentally killed the only volunteer officer hurt on Lombard's Kop day - by wild firing at anybody they could see.

The Boers have put up a big gun in a very awkward position for us - at the back of the camp - their shells drop anywhere and everywhere and so far our howitzers have not been able to shut him up. They were firing nearly all day yesterday but did no damage beyond the dhoolie bearer's eye. I should imagine that eye must have cost them £500 to knock it out, if not much more, judging by the amount of firing they did.

Some days are pretty warm - but generally after 3 or 4 days hot we get one or two cold ones, with or without rain, though on the whole there has been deuced little rain so far.

Both Piccione and Kellie's horse are quite well - Kellie's has a bit of a cough still. It is no good trying to sell now as nobody wants horses while we are shut up. I should like to sell him if I could as then I might be able to collar a Boer horse when we begin to shore along, but I am afraid that won't be for at least another month.

#### 24th December.

I am afraid this is to be a dull and sorry Christmas for us both. There is as yet no good news - whether Buller or the War Office at home blundered we can't say - only it is self evident to us that we have been shut up here since 1st Nov. and no successful effort has been made to knock the Boers out.

Enteric Fever is getting very bad indeed - in another month or less we shall have more than a quarter of the Garrison down with it - England was going to show Europe what she could do in the way of rapid mobilisation and fighting in a Colony 8,000 miles away and well she has done it !!!! If we don't get any army at least four times the present size we may as well shut up shop all together and retire to the position of a fourth class power. I can't understand what the people at home have been about. Properly done the whole war might have been over in three months provided they had sent sufficient men out in the first instance, say 50,000 but they seem to have thought that 7,000 from India were all that would be wanted, and now we see the result. When we shall get through with it and back to our stations is more than anybody can fortell now - every day is a score to the Boers.

We are quite fit in our hospital - we get a good many shells over us. Five officers of the 5th Lancers were hit by a shell that burst amongst them just alongside us three days ago, none of them very seriously hurt and none killed. Four horses were killed though. Col. Fawcett had the top of one of his fingers smashed. As a rule day after day goes by without any casualties, but on Wednesday last two shells killed 14 people and wounded some dozen more. All the rest of the shells that day (there were a good many too) were harmless. This has been by far our worst week and that all through one bad day.



We are getting very little rain this year and in consequence there is very little grass; provisions are getting short and we shall have a job to hold out for another month - apart from that, if Buller can't get in within the month he might as well give in once and for all.

We have a fair amount of work now, nearly all enteric, or dysentery, and between whiles we are building a thick strong wall that ought to protect us from anything sent direct at us.

I went to Intombi on Tuesday last. The Bruces are both well. He does not seem to get on at all well with people. They have an enormous number of sick there - must be close on 1,000 now. On my way back from there met Currie in Lyle's shop and he then and there introduced me to a man who was going to try and get through to Colenso - and said he would take a letter for me if I did not take more than two or three minutes to scribble it. So sat down in Lyle's shop and wrote you just a few lines to say I am all right. By the way it was last Wednesday (20th) not Tuesday, I sent it off.

I saw Hilliard a few days ago; he is looking very grey, a bit stouter, but very cheerful. I saw him again today, he asked after you.

I am anxiously looking forward to getting your letters, I hope there are some waiting to be sent up - it seems such a long time since I had anything from you - to know how you are, and the Babies.

Dhanji had one day's fever during the week. Phuller can't understand why he has had no letter from India, and makes a complaint about it every now and then.

We had a smallish shell sent into the hospital a few days ago - it knocked out a dhooly bearer's eye and beyond covering us all with dirt and bits of stone did no further damage, which was very lucky. Porter and young Martin were sitting with me at the door of my tent and Porter got a thump in the back - I believe I told you this before, now that I come to think of it. There is very little really to write about - one day is much the same as another bar Sundays which are always peaceful.

Porter and I went for a long ride this morning - did I tell you Piccione got loose one day and was brought back with a black eye looking very foolish. Burnside was ill in hospital when I went to Intombi on Wednesday. He did not like it at all and wanted to come up to us, but has not come so far, so I suppose he was not able to work it. Pope last time I saw him was very "down". Saw Col. Dartnell a few days ago, looking very well.

27. 12. 99.

We had a very warlike Christmas - the Boers would not observe it as a Sunday and were firing into the town and camp more or less all day - but so far as we know did no particular damage. The P.M.O. and his Secretary (Bateson) came to us for Dinner - we had a peculiar sort of dinner. Bateson had been given some champagne and brought two bottles with him. I must tell you that long ago the authorities siezed all liquor in the shops and canteens, so that it is impossible to buy unless you can get it from somebody you know. We had nearly run out of whisky, when Bateson managed to get us 6 bottles from the Devon's Mess at 5/- a bottle. As much as £5. has been given for whisky. The Army Service Corps is holding up some 12,000 bottles - they say the P.M.O. wants it for the hospitals - there is enough for the hospitals for about 12 months, so at sight it seems rather absurd. Some things have reached awful prices -



vegetables particularly - eggs are 1/- each, milk can't be bought - the P.M.O. commandeered it all. Potatoes have been sold at 4d each, no butter in the place. But the Commissariat have managed awfully well - we all got very good rations considering. What hampers our people is being unable to get the sick passed down to the base, and as enteric is very bad the strain is very great. The Boers shells very very seldom do any harm. Yesterday 168 shells were fired at us and beyond one kaffir being slightly wounded no harm was done. Today they were more successful - they got one shell into the Devons Officers Mess - killed one officer, wounded 7 others, one of whom has since died. This sort of thing happens now and then, but the great majority of them do no harm whatever, and then people begin to ignore them until something happens, then they are more careful for a bit.

We are still building a long wall - very thick in front of our tents - quite strong enough to stop shells, but of course odd splinters might come over it. As a matter of fact a day seldom passes but we get a few bits amongst the tents. The worst of it is you don't know which side they are coming from. There are no less than 5 guns that fire round about us and all from different directions. Everybody who makes fortifications now works in a big stone with an inscription giving the names of the Corps who built it, so we have let one into our wall, which Col. F. Rhodes, brother to Cecil, says is by far the strongest in the place. He rides all over the Garrison and ought to know. I must make a tour of inspection on Sunday, that is the great day for rides.

12 Jan. 1900.

Since I wrote the above I have been out at Intombi Hospital. They sent me out there on 29th Dec. at a few hours notice. The work is very heavy, all day and half the night, day after day, I had to come back yesterday as Major Martin is very seedy and not fit for work; and Porter is out at Intombi very bad with dysentery - so that left only young Martin fit and I had to come in. There is nothing so much work here as there, but still I had to come in. I had charge of something over 80 sick and wounded officers - all pretty bad. So with overworked nurses and orderlies and not half enough of them had my hands pretty full. It seems quite peaceful here after that, notwithstanding the shells. While I was out there the Boers made a big attack on Caesar's Camp, but did not pull it off. We lost rather heavily, but they lost a good many more, and most people do not think they will try it again. It only wants Buller to give them a good hard knock and then we ought to sail along fairly well.

It has turned out a much bigger affair than anybody seems to have expected and the deuce knows when it will be ended. Codrington had a dangerous wound but is now doing well. They have put him in his tent alongside me - but as he is doing well and requires no particular care beyond lying quiet it is not likely I shall have much to do with his treatment. I found him in our hospital last night when I came back from Intombi. Martin had been looking after him and will I fancy continue to do so. I had a message enquiring after him (Codrington) and myself from the Gallways a few days ago - but could tell them nothing about it as I had not seen him - had only heard he was wounded dangerously and could not find out anything more about him. I am allright still. I shall be more glad than I can say to hear you are quite well. It seems such a long time to be shut up here - now nearly three months, and yet Buller does not seem to be making any progress - I suppose he is waiting for something - but that something seems to be a very long time coming.



15 Jan.

I think it would be better to finish this letter and put it in the post, because anyway now Buller is expected to begin fighting again, and then if all goes well the line may be shortly opened - meanwhile we shall all be very busy either in Ladysmith or we may be some few miles off; in any case it would be better to begin a new letter, so I will post this one now that the Post Office is collecting letters in anticipation, and will also post one I had written and was for post the afternoon the line was cut - it seems a very long time ago now. As soon as communications are opened up I will try and get some pay and send it to you. I have some £17 lying in the Bank, which has now been closed for 3 months - I can send you that too. I did hope to have sent you some by 1st Feb. but I doubt I shall do more than get it off by then.

There is no telling how much longer this campaign is going to last. The optimists say two months - the pessimists say one year. It must be somewhere between the two. Prices are still awful - 1/- each for potatoes, matches 1/- per box. We have to go without these little luxuries, except matches. I got a packet for 6d from the Commissariat two or three days ago.

I had tea with MacNalty - looking very well and quite happy. Everyone is getting very bored with the siege and will be glad to be on the move.

Piccione and Kellie's horse are both quite fit. There is no sale for animals just now. Feeding them is such a difficulty.

A man named Walker of ours died of dysentery the other day. He had paid £45. for one of his horses when the war began and now it has been sold for £4. Then when the thing opens up again there will probably be plenty of Boer ponies looted - but still I might get Kellie's taken over by the Cavalry, as they have lost so many from starvation - but at present they won't buy until they can get forage for them - and Kellie's horse has the advantage of having been kept fat.

I think I told you before, Porter has been and is still very bad with Dysentery and is not expected to be fit for the Campaign again - so we are only three in the Hospital with very little chance of getting anybody to replace him. There are 9 doctors on the sick list - all with enteric or dysentery. I have not had much surgery, and am not likely to get much so long as we are shut up with the Stationary Hospital alongside us at Intombi - probably I shall get some more when we get away from here. My love to yourself and the babies. I hope they have been good and quite well. It seems such a long time since I have heard anything from you, and hope it won't be long before I get some of your letters. I wonder if either Welsh or Northcott have found their way out here with their regiments.

Your loving husband,

Percy.

NOTE: M.P.H. went down with Enteric, see diary 7th February etc.

Ladysmith was not relieved until 1st March 1900.



Letter written  
concerning ~~the~~ 1899  
2nd NW.  
received by his  
wife at Dordrecht  
April 1900

LANSY SMITH

1 Novr 99

We went out on Monday night starting about 11 p.m. We reached our position. Such as it was about 4.30 a.m. and then as soon as it was daylight the firing began. As you will see from the newspaper report it was a rotten show. We were on the right of our position, we were sent out with 2 batteries of artillery, & when it was daylight found there was no cover for the hospital - or for that matter for the guns - to make matters worse the Boers had some guns on our right - absolutely enfilading (I think is the proper term) us - the shells dropped all round us - in front of us and behind - we shunted our position twice during the morning to try & get out of the line of fire, men and horses were knocked about all round us and yet not one of us was touched - a huge chunk of shell struck the ground just near young Martin's foot and bounded on - he saw it go by and then went and picked it up. Then we all opened out and got in amongst the trees but still they tumbled about - and then when our people began to retire a battery of artillery that the Boers were pelting halted alongside us - we were busy with a lot of wounded and expected some mischief but we got off scot free and were very glad when a staff officer of sorts came up and told us



we could advance on to the ground our people had left and pick up the rest of the wounded - after that we were not in any danger as the firing was all behind us. We got done late in the evening and reached camp somewhere about 7.30 dead beat - been at it since 11 the previous night and nothing to eat beyond a bit of bread and a few biscuits and no sleep - After dinner I went over to Bruce's Hospital to see what was going on & found Currie just going to operate so thought I would stay & see what use I could be - my hands were too dirty & it would have been impossible to get them properly clean under half an hour - so I offered to hold the electric light. After about  $\frac{1}{4}$  hour of it I suddenly became faint and managed to hand the lamp over and get to a chair and felt quite done up. & directly I tried to stand up & look on again I felt giddy again so thought I might just as well slope off to bed, which I did.

Yesterday morning the Boers started shelling the town and woke us all up - the naval guns soon put a end to that & we had peace all day and again all today.

Yesterday I was hard at work dressing and doing an operation all day and was too tired to write last night.

There is no doubt we were beaten on Monday, and from all accounts very badly manoeuvred. The guns and infantry of our force (on the right) were absolutely exposed to fire from their front and right - the guns were out on an open plain, and



had the Boer's shooting been really good not a gun would have been left. Some dozen or two men were killed and wounded, whereas the whole lot ought to have been wiped out. So far as I can make out the left force did not fire a shot, but were peppered by the B's guns from time to time, though very few were hurt. Pope and one of his choosleys had a narrow squeak - one beaver was knocked over but not hurt.

Then the 60<sup>th</sup> were sent out to rush a position at dawn and found themselves surrounded on three sides by Boers, who were on hills higher than theirs and they had to retire - they lost 3 officers and a number of men - amongst the officers I found poor young Marsden, who came with us from Maseru in the CLIVE, shot through the head, & E. W. Gray of my batch - not Bally Hooley, wounded in the stomach; he died next afternoon - Very few of us doctors could go to his funeral, as we were all too busy to be able to get away - he was in charge of the 60<sup>th</sup> and is our first casualty -

The again half the Gloucesters and half the Irish Fusiliers were sent with 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Battery to a place where they were absolutely commanded by Boers and into the bargain ran right into the Boers camp before they knew where they were; anyway the mules stampeded and the mountain guns & ammunition were lost, then after a few hours fighting the whole lot surrendered - Some 800 men. There was no retreat left open for them and apparently nobody went to their assistance - The whole thing



was a ~~big~~ disgrace - and every body is very "down" about it.

Today Boers are evidently planting guns round the town & a large Naval detachment are planting guns for the defence of the town. Probably tomorrow the line will be cut & the row will begin again - Nobody seems to know how it is going to end - We on our side are stuffed full of red tabbed Staff Officers and the Boers are just ordinary dirty looking farmers - who have no tents or kit & yet they can match us. They have no Staff College, scientific theories or "side" - and don't take up untenable positions. Every body here abuses the Staff from top to bottom - every

third man you see is Staff of some sort or another.

Porter was sent out to bring in the wounded Gloucesters and Irish Fusiliers & Gunners. When he came back Archibald Hunter asked him what he saw and what he thought of the position. He answered that he knew nothing of military matter & could only give a common sense opinion, and Hunter said that was exactly what he wanted, so Porter said he considered the position absolutely untenable - and said that the Boers said the same, and were of opinion that they would have shot down every single man and hardly lost one in return, had they not surrendered, nice thing for a Staff Officer



to lead people into (Adye is his name, he is a prisoner with the Boers, so also Carleton, the Deolali Carleton's brother, who was in command of the force -

After Monday's fight we went right up to the Boer lines, for our wounded, they were of course a bit cocky, which was only to be expected, but nobody could be more civil, & were obliging - and helped us any amount in finding the wounded - One of them gave Julian some tinned beef to make soup - A Boer found me going up a gorge & called me back & said one of our people had already gone that way & told me if I went about two miles in a certain direction I would find a doctor & some ten wounded in a tin house - I went there and found Julian with the 10 - & got them all away - Julian was quite done up -

I was riding Piccione - because when I started on Kellie's horse the previous evening I found he was breathing so hard and short that he could barely walk along with me - He was all square in the morning when I walked him down to be shod - some 3-400 yards off, and did no more work that day - but when I got on him at night I had not walked him 500 yards before I had to get off and lead him back and change on to Piccione - he seemed better yesterday - and today seems nearly all right - I have not been able to show him to a vet - yet, but will probably be able to do so tomorrow. As I said I rode Picc. the Boers all admired him immensely, man after man came up & said what a sturdy little pony - and flattered him - notwithstanding he had



been out all night, moving on and on and saddled up for 15 hours continuously he was as perky as ever and squealed at other horses, and let out with his forefeet at one or two of the Boer ponies - One Boer admonished me not to leave him tied up for a minute as he would probably be stolen - so when I went into one rather large farm house I rode him right through the house and into all the rooms looking for wounded much to the amusement of two Boers who were looting there - the more so when I told them my reason on the advice of their own people.

He said "Ach, that is very true, Sei".

As a rule I found them not only civil but very respectful, one or two of the older men were very surly, & one man told me I was a fool to wear such a small red cross on my arm - so I must take the hint and get a larger one made - there is no object in getting potted - Some of them would ride about with me, talking away while I was hunting about. One chap was very amused at my riding Piccione without the bit in his mouth - I told him I did that as he was able to nibble grass so much better while I was off his back. Another man told me he considered us d-d fools to expose ourselves so much - he said you can always see somebody to shoot at - generally an officer or two, and with



us Anybody who ducks when a shell is coming is  
 a bit Chaffed for funking it, and it is a sort of thing  
 to stand up to it and take your chance - that is  
 all very well, but is very silly - Everyman is there  
 for some purpose - and when he is hit is useless, and  
 worse than useless - he is an encumbrance unless  
 dead - That sort of thing was all very fine in the  
 Peninsula; and it is all very well to be ashamed  
 of dodging things, but the Navy people are not  
 ashamed to hide and when a shell is heard  
 coming they get the peremptory order "Lie down" -  
 I think there is a lot of sense in the Boer's remark -  
 It is the same with letting Generals get up under  
 fire - It is certainly very noticeable the way our  
 men stand up to fire - especially the gunners -  
 Officers & men, and it is very fine to look at, but  
 is infernally silly all the same and causes us a  
 great deal of loss, and so again the difference  
 in ~~bases~~<sup>dress</sup> between Officers & men enables the Boers  
 to spot an Officer easily at even 500 or 600 yards, at  
 least they say so - Just to show how blunders are still  
 being made - this afternoon some 2000 Boers were seen  
 with wagons making their way down towards Colenso,  
 only about 2 miles off - They could easily have been  
 shelled, and then the whole 4 Regiments of  
 Cavalry with mounted volunteers should have accounted  
 for the lot - but they were allowed to pass along  
 absolutely undisturbed.

On Monday all the Boers I met after the fight



were grouching about the awful heat, it certainly was a warm day, and a Boer hat I was wearing was much more comfortable than a small cap - but I told them it was not warm for us who came from India, & showed him I was wearing a Turkish flannel shirt & a serge coat. He said he believed it was hot in India -

I must say they have exceeded all our expectations in the way they have treated our wounded, and certainly we looked after their wounded as well as our own, some of them are still here in hospital - There is a rumour today that the Basutos have crossed the border into the Free State - They will make things very uncomfortable for the States if this is true and many of the Free States - if not all - will leg it back to their country - It is expected too, if the Basutos rise the Swazis will do the same - it would be a great help to us just now if they did all rise, but they would have to be sat upon afterwards. +

I think I had better stop this letter now and if the line is still open tomorrow post it.

The date stamps on the letter are

Ladysmith (date undecipherable)

Matal - Mar 00

Tuticorin 3 Apr 00

Derbali Camp. 6 Apr 00



Ladysmith

RAME 380/1/4

9<sup>th</sup>. Nov<sup>r</sup> '99

It is now some days since all communications were cut. I forget the exact day and I have not my diary near just now. The Boers bombarded the town every day more or less - but on Friday it got so bad that we had to think about the hospitals. We had an awful afternoon, shells pitching all about us; but no real damage was done - I went to Bruce's Hospital (in the Town Hall) to see how he was getting on, when he asked me to go over to lunch with him, that day the proprietor of the Hotel had opened a new dining room at the back for residents, so we went there to lunch - Just as we had finished lunch a shell came into a small cottage next the hotel, blew the whole side of the cottage out and blew out all the contents of the room and passed into the dining room which was just then crammed through and through with people at lunch, it came at the window just near Bruce's usual place, it knocked Minnie(?) who was lunching there with a man named Balfour, clean off his chair, but without hurting him, and knocked Balfour on the back of the head and he had two fingers (cut) with bits of glass - Nobody was touched beyond these two - It was really marvellous - After that they went on bombarding all the afternoon; a few people were hit and a good many houses. That day Charles Taunton was shot dead in a skirmish with the Boers outside the town. I went to dine with Currie and whilst there we began talking about the exposed position in the middle of the town of the hospitals - There was Bruce's Hospital consisting of the Town Hall



and two separate churches just behind. The Volunteer Hospital, No 11, 12 and 24 Field Hospitals - also 26 & 18 F. Hospitals had that day been sent down by the Rivers from Dundee with 94 wounded. These were all in round the Market Square. Then on top of the hill there were a lot of sick in the Convent just overlooking the Town Hall. In the end we all decided to ask Hyslop (who is Volunteer P.M.O.) Martin and Carter (11<sup>th</sup> F Hospital) to get the P.M.O. to ask the General if arrangements could not be made to move the sick all out of fire and clear of the town on to some neutral ground. So after dinner Hyslop went over with me - saw Carter who was willing, then Martin and whilst he was in our tent talking to Martin the P.M.O. came in. At first he did not seem to see it - but eventually he went to see the General and early the next morning Bateson (P.M.O.'s Secretary) went out to Tourbet and in the end it was arranged that there would be an Armistice till midnight Sunday - in which time the sick and wounded with Hospital Establishments were to be sent some four miles out. We could not begin work till early Sunday morning and then the first train promptly ran off the line - that stopped all work till about 2 p.m. when we got the first trainful of sick off. Bruce objected very strongly at first - and I believe till quite to the very end - but I think there is no doubt but that it was the best plan, anyhow the rest of us were quite unanimous about the matter - Carter's (No 11) and Donegan's (No 18) Hospitals were to be left in the town, and we were sent up to the old camp - all the Troops being spread out all around the town - most of the inhabitants went out under canvas with the Hospitals - I saw Miss Thompson, she is nursing, when I was putting our sick people into the train.

I have a letter not yet posted to you that was finished before I went to bed the day before the line was cut - they cut it during the day, so that the evening mail could not go. Since then I have



not written anything - I think I told you in it all about the fight on Monday week at Lombard's Kop - Since ~~then~~ we have been up in camp again we have all been busy building a shelter by the river bank for patients - Trying to make it shell proof - it is not finished yet - Until today our corner has been quite free of shells - but early this morning at about 1/4 to 5 they began sending shells over our tents - so we skipped out of bed and lowered our tents in a few minutes - put our patients in the shelter which is not quite finished and then most of us went over the river and climbed up the rocks for cover, which we got in sort of little caves under some enormous stones. Then three guns came and planted themselves just behind where our tents were lying on the ground and began blazing away at the Boers.

Of course they drew the Boer's fire into our corner and shells were flying along the river just beside our caves all the morning almost without stopping - one dropped in the river just opposite where Porter and I were sitting and splashed up the water to a great height - It is an odd thing how little damage shells sometimes do - not a man or a horse was struck near us, though they fell in amongst the 18<sup>th</sup> Hussars - the Battery and our mules and oxen - Still when a bit of shell does touch you it is very bad - I hear a Colour Serjt. of the Liverpools was literally blown to pieces by one today - Still this may not be quite true though I have seen a good many men very badly knocked about by them - I think I told you poor Grey was shot on Monday week & died the following day -



4

Pope and his people in No 11 'Commandeered' Bester's (a very disloyal Dutchman) house for their own use and dug a pit by the side of it, roofed it over with sleepers and balks of timber & mud as a shelter, but they put all their four horses into the stable, the result was that on Monday a shell went into the stable, burst there, killed Carter's and Pope's horses, and I believe Cameron's was not expected to live. Forde tied his up in the garden and it was not touched. Not only have they been shelling our part of the camp, but judging from what one could hear of big gun & rifle fire, & from what we hear from other people the Boers tried an attack on no less than three points. On one spot on the other side of the camp they were driven off and retired somebody said (I think it was Raymond) 5 miles. Then they came within 800 yards on our side but were shored off by the 60's. I believe they tried to get in on the other side of the town but all were unsuccessful. Still it is very hard to find out. Sometimes what is happening except in one's own immediate neighbourhood.

Reilly of my batch is here - he came with the Rifle Brigade. I saw Harrison the other day looking very well - Goddington, who came out for duty with the Indian Commissariat is now posted to a Squadron of the Imperial Light Horse, so he will have something better to do than serving out stores etc.

We have been working so hard the last 4 days, heaving stones and sand - selves, shelly wallahs & all (only the Assistant Surgeons



are too superior to do any heavy work). We are quite stiff and quite glad to spend the day lying up under the stones. My arms are so stiff I can hardly use them. It has been fairly hot all day - but cool under the stones -

Piccione and Kellie's horse are all right. I have not done anything with Kellie's since he was so seedy beyond walking exercise every day. Now that we are shut up in Ladysmith there is no sale for horses unless you are entitled to govt rations, as it is impossible to buy any forage. I think old Carter might like him, now that his is killed - he would beat Carter in every thing except height - he is a long way to climb upon and Carter is a small rotund person. Next time I see him I will ask him if he wants him.

I don't think there is anything more to say tonight - but this is the first day's "loaf" we have had for some time so I thought I would begin a letter which will be posted when we are relieved - though as far as we can find out that is unlikely to be about another 10 days at the best.

10 Nov<sup>r</sup>. Last night I slept on a ledge of rock high up above the river - because yesterday morning they began firing shells just over us, and as they had been dropping shells all about our camp all day it was just as well to be out of their way and not have to turn out at 4 am. to drop tents. So I rolled up the



tent and all my gear and slept in the open in comfort and safety. The first thing I saw in the morning was Shangi's\* head peering over the rock with a cup of tea. As luck would have it we had a peaceful day, which was just as well because we had to move our camp to a place where we can put up some tents for such with some degree of safety. There was no firing till later in the afternoon, which began just after a sharp thunderstorm with a few hailstones. You might tell Kellie that his horse was again breathing very short today and I showed him to a vet who said he has Chronic Emphysema and asthma, and that I can't say he is 'sound'. I am afraid this will rather get in the way of my selling him - Still he might suit old Carter who will never want to go out of a walk - first time I see him I will tackle him about it. Piccione is very fit - so much so that he is a bit troublesome - he has not been able to get much work the last 5 days or more and is not likely to while we are shut up here.

There is no definite news of our being relieved yet - only rumours and plenty of them. I have heard nothing from Bruce lately, & there does not seem much chance of getting out there. The greater part of my day was spent in dismantling our bridge over the river for the sake of the planks and sandbags - and also the "shelter" we had made for the sake of the iron pipes and sandbags of which it was built - so I suppose we shall have to set to work to build a new one if it is possible.

12 Nov<sup>r</sup> - Sunday I have not much to tell you today. There was a little firing yesterday in which so far as I can find out very little mischief was done beyond killing a couple of mules that were standing in an ambulance in a yard behind the P.M.O.'s office.



Today being Sunday there has been no firing -

I saw Northey today - looking very well - and quite a different being from what he was on the "CLIVE". He has grown a beard and at first I did not know him - he and Cumberland are the only two out of all those on the ship with us who are neither killed, wounded or missing. They have lost from one cause or another 16 officers since the war began - Mrs N is at Cape Town -

I saw Pope today - looking very sorrowful - he does not like the war at all - not that any of us like shells flying about - we were busy during working hours making our new shelter. It is pretty hard work but gives us plenty of exercise - Piccione is very fit - and Kellie's horse improving again, and was quite skittish but his wind is still very short -

There is some talk of our being relieved about Thursday next, but I think it will take more than that to enable us to advance - we hear that Buller has relieved Kimberley and should soon be marching on Bloemfontein - wonder how much truth there is in it - we hear such a lot of rumours that are generally contradicted next day, that it is impossible to believe anything - must shut up now and go to bed.

19<sup>th</sup> Nov (Sunday)

The week has passed very much as usual more or less shells sent at us every day, and our guns seem to answer less freely than they did at first - probably they are saving their ammunition - twice during



the week the Boers fired at us during the night - not a nice thing to be woken up by shells passing over your head in the dark. Several days were wet during the week, followed as usual by hot sunny mornings.

Martin has had a bit of a go of dysentery but is better now and he was able to sit on his pony and walk down town today with me - we had to try and get some things for the mess - scarcely any shops open now - and then only for an hour or so during the day at uncertain times; and there is scarcely anything to be bought and what there is, is mostly very dear.

I am keeping very fit - thanks probably to working part of the day like a navvy at the shell proof shelter we are building - every day we do some more to it, trying to make it safer and stronger - Today I went to the Railway to try and get some sleepers & rails to work into it and managed to get a little -

Shopping when you can do any is a most extraordinary affair - you go into a shop, wander about, pick up what you want and put it all together - go behind the counter or into the stores behind the shop and see for yourself what there is that is any use - Butter and biscuits are not to be bought for money - none in the place -

They seem very slow about relieving us - There is a great deal of discontent that nothing is being done - we merely



sit down & get shelled more or less all day, and yet 9  
many people think there are not so many Boers round us  
after all as it is supposed the greater number have gone down  
to ESCORT to oppose the relieving force - and we are told  
it may be one or even two months before they get here -  
Discontent is a very mild word for the feeling and it is  
certainly thought that some effort might be made to collar  
some or other of the guns that worry us all day -  
Another shell went into the Royal Hotel yesterday - entered  
by the roof, went down the staircase, out of the front door  
knocked a hole in the pavement and took both legs off a poor  
old ~~the~~ Civilian doctor - a naturalist - He died the same  
evening - Shepherd, the Maritzburg baker, told me about  
it today - Otherwise there have been extraordinarily few  
casualties from their beastly shell fire. We had our  
turn yesterday afternoon - several pieces dropping in amongst  
our tents, but nobody was touched - A large piece fell  
within a few inches of Martin's servant who was lying down  
just behind the mess tent where we were all sitting at tea -  
It rather ~~startled~~ startled us as we were not expecting  
anything of the sort - Then - a few more came not quite so  
near and then we had peace till middle of the night.  
When they began again -

29<sup>th</sup> Nov. Nothing much has happened the last 10 days  
beyond firing more or less every day but Sunday - Several



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times they have sent shells near us, but this morning two  
evidently sent at a strong wall we are building  
dropped over us between the tents and our shell proof shelter.  
They did no harm beyond making us all take cover for an hour or  
so -

The flies here are abominable - they worry everybody all day  
long, especially on warm days - All sorts of flying rumors  
have been spread from day to day, but at last it seems  
certain they are making a move in our direction - we could  
hold out comfortably for another month. But we are pretty  
well sick of being shelled every day - very seldom anybody  
is hit - on an average one a day - It is really  
extraordinary how little damage they do - Yesterday with a  
new big gun they have put up they fired amongst others  
a couple of shells just over our heads at Morthey's camp,  
just the other side of the river, but did not touch anybody -  
Just made them all take cover down by the river for an hour  
or so - The shells passed very near us overhead and we all  
thought the first one was coming for us, but it went on another  
100 yards to Morthey - They are beginning to fire at  
all our positions from the reverse side which is a bit  
disconcerting - They still fire at the town in fits and starts,  
but do no harm beyond knocking holes in buildings - but  
people have burrows in the ground, or strong shelter of



11

of some sort. Still some people have to go about for various purposes - An Indian was killed by a shell yesterday that went through McAlty's store the other side of the river some 200 yards beyond McAlty's Camp. They have sent a good many at the Commissariat store (McAlty's) but beyond killing the oxen one day have not touched anybody till yesterday -

The days do not pass so very slowly because we have been busy every day building either the shelter or the wall. The latter was put up to cover the sick tent, and the former for anyone who can get to it. It is partly underground and is very cool and consequently a good loafing place. As a rule I am out in the sun with the dhooly bearers building and I much prefer it to doing nothing, besides it keeps one fit -

The last three days I have had a little of the prevailing complaint, either from bad water or something else, but am better today. We have had to stop work today.

The wall is pretty big, 30 ft. long by 14 ft. thick by 7 ft. high of stone; surrounded on all sides by 5 ft. or so of tamped earth and now we are covering it over with turf so that it ought to be almost invisible -

We have had to cover all our tents with red mud



to make them less visible, certainly white is a very bad colour - well rubbed with red mud they are scarcely visible against the red stones which cover the hills mixed with a good deal of green -

we have very little hospital work. The men seem very healthy, and all bad cases are sent out to Bruce at Inkambi Spruit.

We all wish the railway could be opened so that we could get some news from the outside world. Nothing but rumours have reached us till yesterday when we were told that there had been a fight at Mooi River and the Boers were driven back to Coersoo. Certainly on Monday night there was a fire somewhere down there.

I saw the reflection in the sky and called Martin out of his tent to see it - he had gone to bed. And then the next day (Tuesday) we were told officially that the Boers had burned Coersoo, so it looks as if there is some truth in it all - hope so. I wish I could hear

if you and the chicks are all right, I suppose there will be some letters waiting to be sent up as soon as the line is opened, but it seems a very long time being done - When they do open up and drive the Boers back there is bound to be a big rush, as no doubt we shall all be pushed on after them as rapidly



as possible so that I may not get them for several days or even a week or so - still it can't be helped.

They must be kept on the run once they are started if all goes well. Besides heavy gun firing the Boers keep on sniping at our outposts pretty well all day - never touch anybody that we hear of, and very often our people put up a dummy or a helmet for them to fire at - and it always draws them.

I hear they go and talk to the Tommies at Intombi Hospital and most of them say they are sick of the business, but I suppose they don't see their way to giving in, and most of them don't intend to at any price.

13 Dec<sup>r</sup>. There is so little to write about and one day is so much like another with the exception of there being more or less firing on one day as compared with another that it is hard to know what to write.

Prices are of course going up now things are beginning to get scarce - we hear more news from outside now - for the first few weeks we heard positively nothing - Clery's Column is said to be making their way along slowly and we have heard about Methuen's fights and also that Gatacre has got the Boers' position at Stormberg - a list of casualties up by



14

KIMBERLEY has been published and I was very sorry to see Northcott's brother's name - it will be a bit of a blow to F. Northcott in more ways than one - It is to be hoped the Boers will be wiped out this time and that no soft-heartedness, or dislike of Englanders, will prevent their being left in a position to do further harm.

We have heard that a ship has gone ashore by the Cape and lost all the horses, guns, ammunition, stores, etc. It is a great loss just now.

I went out to Intombi Spruit to see Bruce last Monday week. He seems unfortunately to be in hot water with everybody - He has a very bad manner and manages to quarrel with nearly everybody - Mr. Bruce is out there. Both looking very well.

We have no butter now for the past 3 or 4 weeks, and I have not tasted Cow's milk since I left India. These are not hardships because we get very little exercise, otherwise we get plenty to eat so far.

The P.M.O. had been holding an inspection of our Hospital yesterday evening at 5 p.m. usually a pretty busy firing time, and as the dhooly bearers were unpacking one of the wagons that had been left where some Boers could see them, a shell was sent at them & dropped short of them bang into the Hospital Camp - We all got covered with bits of dirt and stone. One dhooly bearer had a bit of stone driven into the eye, and I am afraid



he will lose the sight of it - Porter and Young Martin were sitting at my tent door, and Porter got a rap on the back with a piece of copper that "takes the rifling" as they say, but no further harm was done - It just shows that a shell may drop into a crowd (there must have been no less than 30 or 40 people just round where it fell), and yet do very little harm.

I hear we can get helios through to PMB, so I will try & get one in tomorrow to Mr. Mac, to ask her to write & let you know I am all right - I would ask her to wire all the way, but you might be a bit startled to get a wire, after knowing we are shut-up for so long and having heard nothing - Anyway I believe all casualties have been wired down and published, so you will know there is nothing much the matter with me - as a matter of fact we are all very fit - So far I am the only one who has not been "sick" yet - I can almost hear you say "Don't bruck too soon" -

We still continue to have remarkably few casualties, except when they make rushes for guns at night - One night some Imperial Light Horse went out and blew up two of the Boer's guns and brought in a third one. They had, I believe, no casualties - Then a week later some of the Rifle Brigade went out and blew up another, but they lost a good number of men - 13 killed and some 30 wounded



hardly worth the game, but the Boers admitted <sup>16</sup>  
to 28 killed the next morning when Sloan of ours went out to  
get in the killed and wounded. It may or may not have been  
true -

I forget whether I have already told you that Goddington got  
out of the Commissariat and has a Squadron on the Imperial  
Light Horse. They are rather a fine set of men, but  
want a little more discipline and a good deal more  
training and experience. There is but little doubt  
that they accidentally killed the only volunteer officer  
hurt on Lombard's Kop day - by wild firing at  
anybody they could see.

The Boers have put up a big gun in a very awkward  
position for us - at the back of the camp; their shells  
drop anywhere and everywhere and so far our howitzers  
have not been able to shut him up. They were firing  
nearly all day yesterday but did no damage beyond  
the dhooly bearer's eye. I should imagine that eye  
must have cost them £500 to knock it out; if not  
much more, judging by the amount of firing they did.

Some days are pretty warm - but generally after  
3 or 4 days hot we get one or two cold ones, with or  
without rain, though on the whole there has been deuced  
little rain so far.

Both Pricione and Kellie's horse are quite well - Kellie's  
has a bit of a cough still. It is no good trying to sell now  
as nobody wants horses while we are shut up. I should like



to sell him if I could as then I might be able to collar  
a Boer horse when we begin to shore along, but I am afraid  
that won't be for at least another month. 17

24 Dec<sup>r</sup> I am afraid this is to be a dull and sorry  
Christmas for us both. There is as yet no good news - whether  
Buller or the War Office at home blundered we can't say - only  
it is self evident to us that we have been shut up here since  
15<sup>th</sup> Nov<sup>r</sup> and no successful effort has been made to knock

the Boers out -

Enteric Fever is getting very bad indeed - in another month  
or less we shall have more than a quarter of the garrison  
down with it. - England was going to show Europe what she  
could do in the way of rapid mobilisation and fighting  
in a Glorious 8,000 miles away and well she has done it !!!!

If we don't get an army at least four times the present  
size we may as well shut up shop all together and retire to  
the position of a fourth class power. I can't understand

what the people at home have been about. Properly done  
the whole war might have been over in three months provided  
they had sent sufficient men out in the first instance, say  
50,000 but they seem to have thought that 7,000 from

India were all that would be wanted, and now we see the  
result. When we shall get through with it and back to  
our stations is more than anybody can portell now. Every  
day is a store to the Boers.



18

we are quite fit in our hospital - we get a good many shells over us. Five Officers of the 5<sup>th</sup> Lancers were hit by a shell that burst amongst them just alongside us three days ago, none of them very seriously hurt and none killed. Four horses were killed though. Col Fawcett had the top of one of his fingers smashed. As a rule day after day goes by without any casualties, but on Wednesday last two shells killed 14 people and wounded some dozen more. All the rest of the shells that day (there were a good many too) were harmless. This has been by far our worst week and that all through one bad day.

we are getting very little rain this year and in consequence there is very little grass; provisions are getting short and we shall have a job to hold out for another month - apart from that, if Buller can't get in within the month he might as well give in once and for all.

we have a fair amount of work now, nearly all enteric, or dysentery, and between whiles we are building a thick strong wall that ought to protect us from anything sent direct at us.

I went to Intombi on Tuesday last. The Bruces are both well. He does not seem to get on at all well with people. They have an enormous number of sick there - must be close on 1,000 now. On my way back from there met Currie in Lyle's shop and he then there introduced me to a man who was going to try and get through to Glenso - and said he would take a letter for me if I did not take more than



two or three minutes to scribble it. So sat down in <sup>19</sup>  
Lyle's Shop & wrote you just a few lines to say I am all right -  
By the way it was last Wednesday (26<sup>th</sup>) not Tuesday, I sent it off.

I saw Willard a few days ago; he is looking very grey,  
a bit stouter, but very cheerful - I saw him again today; he  
asked after you -

I am anxiously looking forward to getting your letter, I  
hope there are some waiting to be sent up - it seems such a  
long time since I had anything from you - to know how you  
are, and the Babies -

Dhanji had one day's fever during the week - I huller  
can't understand why he has had no letter from India, and  
makes a complaint about it every now & then -

We had a Smellish shell sent into the hospital a few days  
ago - it knocked out a doorknocker's eye and beyond  
covering us all with dirt and bits of stone did no further  
damage, which was very lucky - Porter and young Martin were  
sitting with me at the door of my tent & Porter got a thump  
in the back - I believe I told you this before, now that I  
come to think of it - There is very little really to write  
about - one day is much the same as another but Sundays  
which are always peaceful.

Porter and I went for a long ride this morning - Did I  
tell you Piccione got loose one day and was brought back  
with a black eye looking very foolish -



Burnside was ill in hospital when I went to Intombi<sup>20</sup> on Wednesday. He did not like it at all and wanted to come up to us, but has not come so far, so I suppose he was not able to work it. - Pope last time I saw him was very "down". - Saw Col. Dartnell a few days ago, looking very well.

27/12/99 he had a very warlike Christmas - the Boers would not observe it as a Sunday and were firing into the town and camp ~~remotely~~ more or less all day - but so far as we know did no particular damage. The P.M.O. and his Secretary (Bateson) came to us for dinner. We had a peculiar sort of dinner. Bateson had been given some champagne and brought two bottles with him. I must tell you that long ago the authorities seized all liquor in the shops and canteens, so that it is impossible to buy unless you can get it from somebody you know. We had nearly run out of whisky, when Bateson managed to get us 6 bottles from the Devon's mess at 5/- a bottle. As much as £5 has been given for whisky. The Army Service Corps is holding up some 12,000 bottles - they say the P.M.O. wants it for the hospitals - there is enough for the hospitals for about 12 months, so at sight it seems rather absurd. Some things have reached awful prices - vegetables particularly - eggs are 1/- each. Milk can't be bought - the P.M.O. commandeered it all.



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Potatoes have been sold at 4<sup>d</sup> each, no butter in the place. But the Commissariat have managed awfully well. We all get very good rations considering. What hampers our people is being unable to get the sick passed down to the base, and as enteric is very bad the strain is very great. The Boers shells very very seldom do any harm. Yesterday 168 shells were fired at us and beyond one Kaffir being slightly wounded no harm was done. Today they were more successful - they got one shell into the Devons Officers mess - killed one Officer, wounded 7 others, one of whom has since died. This sort of thing happens now & then, but the great majority of them do no harm whatever, and then people begin to ignore them until something happens, then they are more careful for a bit.

We are still building a long wall - very thick in front of our tents - quite strong enough to stop shells, but of course odd splinters might come over it. As a matter of fact a day seldom passes ~~to~~ but we get a few bits amongst the tents. The worst of it is you don't know which side they are coming from. There are no less than 5 guns that fire round about us and all from different directions.

Everybody who makes fortifications now works in a big stone with an inscription giving the names of the Corps who built it, so we have let one into our wall, which



Col. F. Rhodes, brother to Cecil, says is by far the strongest in the place - He rides all over the Garrison and ought to know - I must make a tour of inspection on Sunday, that is the great day for rides.

12 Jan<sup>y</sup> 1900 Since I wrote the above I have been out at Intombi Hospital. They sent me out there on 29<sup>th</sup> Dec<sup>r</sup> at a few hours notice. The work is very heavy, all day & half the night, day after day. I had to come back yesterday as Major Martin is very seedy and not fit for work; and Porter is out at Intombi very bad with dysentery - So that left only young Martin fit and I had to come in. There is nothing so much work here as there, but still I had to come in. I had charge of something over 80 Sick and wounded Officers, - all pretty bad. So with overworked nurses and orderlies and not half enough of them had my hands pretty full. It seems quite peaceful here after that, notwithstanding the shells. While I was out there the Boers made a big attack on Caesar's Camp, but did not pull it off. We lost rather heavily, but they lost a good many more, and most people do not think they will try it again. It only wants Buller to give them a good hard knock and then we ought to



Sail along fairly well -  
 It has turned out a much bigger affair than anybody  
 seems to have expected and the deuce knows when it  
 will be ended - Goddington had a dangerous wound  
 but is now doing well - They have put him in his tent  
 alongside me - but as he is doing well and requires no  
 particular care beyond lying quiet it is not likely I  
 shall have much to do with his treatment - I found him  
 in our hospital last night - when I came back from  
 Intombi - Martin had been looking after him and will  
 I fancy continue to do so - I had a message enquiring  
 after him (Goddington) and myself from the Gallweys a  
 few days ago - but could tell them nothing about it  
 as I had not seen him - had only heard he was wounded  
 dangerously and could not find out anything more about  
 him - I am all right still - I shall be more glad than  
 I can say to hear you are quite well - It seems such a long  
 time to be shut up here - now nearly three months; and  
 yet Buller does not seem to be making any progress -  
 I suppose he is waiting for something - but that something  
 seems to be a very long time coming.

15 Jan I think it would be better to finish this  
 letter and put it in the post; because any day now  
 Buller is expected to begin fighting again, and



then if all goes well the line may be shortly opened - meanwhile we shall all be very busy either in Ladysmith or we may be some few miles off; in any case it would be better to begin a new letter, so I will post this one now that the Post Office is collecting letters in anticipation, and will also post one I had written and was for post - the afternoon the line was cut - it seems a very long time ago now. As soon as communications are opened up I will try and get some paper & send it to you. I have some K<sup>17</sup> lying in the Bank, which has now been closed for 3 months - I can send you that too - I did hope to have sent you some by 1<sup>st</sup> Feb<sup>y</sup>, but I doubt I shall do more than get it off by then.

There is no telling how much longer this Campaign is going to last - The optimists say two months - the pessimists say one year - It must be somewhere between the two - Prices are still awful - 1/- each for potatoes, matches 1/- per box - we have to go without these little luxuries, except matches - I got a packet for 6<sup>d</sup> from the Commissariat two or three days ago -

I had tea with Mae Valtie - looking very well and quite happy - Everyone is getting very bored with the Siege and will be glad to be on the move.

Piccone and Kellie's horse are both quite fit - The 6



no sale for animals just now - Feeding them is

Such a difficulty -

A man named Walker of ours died of dysentery the other day - He had paid £45- for one of his horses when the war began and now it has been sold for £4 - Then when the thing opens up again there will probably be plenty of Boer ponies looted - but still I might get Kellie's taken over by the Cavalry, as they have lost - So many from starvation - but at present they won't buy until they can get forage for them - and Kellie's horse has the advantage of having been kept fat -

I think I told you before, Porter has been and is still very bad with dysentery & is not expected to be fit for the Campaign again - So we are only three in the Hospital with very little chance of getting any body to replace him - There are 9 doctors on the Sick list - all with enteric or dysentery -

I have not had much Surgery, and am not likely to get much so long as we are shut up with the Stationary Hospital alongside us at Intombi - probably I shall get some more when we get away from here. - My love to yourself and the Babes - I hope they have been good and quite well -

It seems such a long time since I have heard



Anything from you, and hope it won't be  
long before I get some of your letters.

I wonder if either Welsh or Northcott have found  
their way out - here with their regiments

Your loving husband  
Percy

Note M.P.H. went down with enteric, see diary  
7<sup>th</sup> Feb'y etc.  
Lady'smith was not relieved until 1<sup>st</sup> March 1900

H.S.H.