

G Lenthal Cheatele : Honing Spruit, South Africa : [Extracts from newspapers referring to his services in the Boer War].

Contributors

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Royal College of Surgeons of England

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183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE UK
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
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Bind in

To Mr L. M. Power K.B.E.
with my regards

(2)

G. LENTHAL CHEATLE.



HONING SPRUIT,
SOUTH AFRICA.

149, HARLEY STREET, W. 1.

TELEPHONE: WELBECK 4444.

8th June, 1932.

My dear D'Arcy Power,

Here is the account I promised to send you.

Yours ever

From "The Morning Post," June, 1900.

WAR LETTER BY WINSTON SPENCER CHURCHILL.

General Smith-Dorrien, who after the capture of Pretoria had been entrusted with the charge of the railway between Kroonstad and Pretoria, was dissatisfied with the security of the section south of the Orange River, and particularly with the position of Heining station. The two guns which should have formed part of the force at this point had been removed by Lord Kitchener's order, and they properly belonged to one of Lord Hamilton's batteries.

A CURIOUS FIGHT.

Smith-Dorrien, therefore, so soon as he was informed, ordered the guns from Rhenoster to Heining Spruit and reformed the Provisional Battalion formed from the British prisoners taken at the Pretoria fall. The guns, as I have described, were sent to the Orange River, and the Provisional Battalion, which was composed of British prisoners, was sent to the Orange River. The Provisional Battalion, which was composed of British prisoners, was sent to the Orange River.

While they were doing this, the Provisional Battalion, which was composed of British prisoners, was sent to the Orange River. The Provisional Battalion, which was composed of British prisoners, was sent to the Orange River.

"No," said Colonel Bullard with decision, and the Provisional Battalion, which was composed of British prisoners, was sent to the Orange River.

So the Boer convoy departed, and both sides went on with their work. The Dutch, for example, and the British, for example, went on with their work. The Dutch, for example, and the British, for example, went on with their work.

GENERAL BULLOCK'S GALLANT DEFENSE.

The Provisional Battalion, which was composed of British prisoners, was sent to the Orange River. The Provisional Battalion, which was composed of British prisoners, was sent to the Orange River.

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By Lord Chester

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140, HARLEY STREET, W.1.

TELEPHONE WELBY 4444.

9th June, 1955.

My dear V'Aray Power,

Here is the account I promised to send you.

Yours truly,
J. V. Aray Power

From "The Morning Post," June, 1900.

WAR LETTER BY WINSTON SPENCER CHURCHILL.

General Smith-Dorrien, who after the capture of Pretoria had been entrusted with the charge of the railway between Kroonstad and Pretoria, was dissatisfied with the security of the section south of Rhenoster River, and particularly with the garrison of Honing Spruit Station. The two guns which should have formed part of the force at this point had been removed by Lord Kitchener's order because they properly belonged to one of Ian Hamilton's batteries.

A CURIOUS FIGHT.

Smith-Dorrien, therefore, so soon as he was informed, ordered two other guns from Rhenoster to Honing Spruit and railed thither part of the Provisional Battalion formed from the British prisoners released when Pretoria fell. The guns, as I have described, were late, but the men, 400 strong, under Colonel Bullock, of Colenso repute, arrived in the nick of time. The train pulled up at the station, the soldiers got out and proceeded to take stock of their new abode.

While they were doing this someone observed Boers riding slowly along the grassy ridges on both flanks and other Boers tampering with the line a mile to the northward. The next event was the arrival of a flag of truce with a formal demand for surrender.

"No," said Colonel Bullock with decision, and the poor released prisoners, long starved in Waterfall Cage, added, "Never again."

So the Boer envoy departed, and both sides settled down to their work: the Dutch to surround and bombard the station; the British to scratch up what shelters they could. It was a curious fight. The ground was of that undulating character which gives no marked advantage to either, but if anything it favoured the Boers.

COLONEL BULLOCK'S GALLANT DEFENCE.

Moreover, their enveloping position enabled them to bring a converging fire to bear on the water tank and three tin houses round which the defenders lay. But the greatest disparity was in respect of arms. The Boers had three modern guns and were all armed with Mauser rifles.

The Provisional Battalion were only armed with Martinis, no other rifles being available in Pretoria. In one-third of these obsolete weapons the carbine ammunition supplied jammed or failed to explode owing to weak strikers, and such as would fire revealed by their puff of smoke every man's position. Moreover, their range was lamentably short compared to the Mauser, and the Boers walk-

ing about carelessly beyond reach of their enemies struck them down in safety. The British had no guns, and could therefore make no reply to the enemy's artillery.

By good luck the officers, of whom there were nearly twenty, had armed themselves with Mauser carbines, and it was on their fire that the defence mainly relied, keeping their tell-tale black powder for a supreme moment at close quarters. The unequal fight lasted seven hours, and in spite of the widely-extended formation which Colonel Bullock adopted, the fire caused a considerable proportion of casualties.

TIMELY SUCCOUR.

In the absence of any medical officers or appliances, the wounded were dressed under fire by Mr. Cheate, a London consulting surgeon, who was assisted in his task by the Hon. Somers Somerset, the despatch rider of the *Times* newspaper. This gentleman's carbolic tooth powder was the only antiseptic dressing available, and was therefore used in all cases, with what results I recommend the *Lancet* to inquire.

The train standing at the siding was much knocked about by the artillery. The tin houses were pierced from various directions. The enemy, being unused to firing at such short range—two thousand yards—burst most of their shrapnel too close to the target, so that the showers of bullets passed overhead and caused little loss. But to lie exposed hour after hour, armed with useless weapons and unable to reply, was a trying ordeal to men picked haphazard from various regiments and united by no honourable association.

With an exception all behaved with the greatest discipline and fortitude. One mixed company, however, being exposed to the cross shell fire, lost heart, and when two more shells burst among them, though these did little harm, they broke, despite the entreaties of the young officer who commanded, and ran southward along the railway in an attempt to escape.

They succeeded desperately in driving away some Boers who tried to intercept them, and meeting the relieving force from Kroonstad, told a wild tale of disaster. Indeed five men did not stop until they reached Kroonstad itself (twenty miles) where they were promptly arrested, and it is said, are like to be shot for their conduct. The rest of the battalion held their ground stubbornly.

Towards evening the Boers, apprised of the approach of succour, drew off, and were pursued by Yeomanry and guns, which had arrived on the scene. Their losses in this unequal combat were certainly very small. The Provisional Battalion lost eight killed and seventeen wounded, including among the former Major Hobbs, of the West Yorkshire Regiment, a brave and unfortunate officer, who was taken prisoner at the end of his first engagement, and killed at the beginning of his second.

From "The Times," 14th August, 1900.

DE WET'S ATTACK ON HONING SPRUIT.

The following is an extract from a private letter, dated July 1st, written by a despatch rider of *The Times* to *The Times* Special Correspondent:—

On that day, when, with many tears, we parted, I steamed to Elandsfontein, changed trains and waited for departure—departure to be at 6 p.m. Impatient despatch rider strides the station bursting with eager anticipations of pleasure and ease. One Smith-Dorrien, however, glowering in his high office, rules it otherwise. "No trains shall run at night," says Smith-Dorrien. No trains at all. With the morning, however, trains run again as far as Viljoen's Drift and there stick. Shades of eve again appear, and despite Smith-Dorrien and high glowerings on into the night the train drives furiously. Observe, you may not move at night north of the Vaal where it is safe; you may south of the Vaal where all is danger. The train held a provisional battalion of 400 Waterval prisoners—men from several regiments—and 17 "birdcage" officers, all under Colonel Bullock. Rearwards was a saloon sleeping carriage containing Smith (correspondent), self, a doctor, Lenthal Cheate, London, consulting surgeon, and others of no importance to the tale. The composites were to garrison at Honing Spruit, 20 miles north of Kroonstad. Two guns, which should have been on the train but had not arrived, were to come, some day: and meanwhile Honing Spruit is almost the last of Smith-Dorrien's stations, almost out of the danger zone, so to speak. Through the dark hours Smith and the despatch rider slept, and woke early on the cold morning of June 22nd to find ourselves at Honing Spruit. By 7 o'clock we had been there two hours, the mules and some waggons had already been unloaded, the 400 men were unloading, cooking here and there an early cup of warming tea, all were busy and very much at ease, having at last arrived again at a British camp after months of Boer imprisonment. Here is Honing Spruit. The line runs straight; the country flat, rising slightly towards the east, dropping towards the spruit quite gently to the north, the spruit, about 1,100 yards away, crossed by a culvert to the railway. All the rest open and flat, especially around the station where it is as flat as *your* proverbial hand. I was standing—if it interests you—upon the platform of the saloon congratulating the world on the fact that that tangible danger of a trip to Lydenburg was passed, when looking back towards the spruit I suddenly saw three men riding. Three at first and in another moment more and more streaming down one after the other. Boers by —! Another moment and the culvert behind us rose in smoke; it was blown up. Meanwhile, more and more Boers, 400 at least. "—!" said we all. Then the telegraph wire fell. I

rushed to the office: "Is the wire cut down to the south?" "Not yet." Back to Bullock as hard as little legs will work and report. wires are sent and we lie down on the perfectly flat ground round the station—not one scrap of cover, mind you, as no defences made yet or makable, the garrison being only this moment arrived. White flag advances. Retires, for we do not surrender, and then the game begins. Buzz, buzz.

So far it was rather a joke, of poor quality, I grant you, as one does not want to get shot; but that, barring accidents, was not so probable, as one knows, but, as for Lydenburg it seemed absurd, and, besides, about a mile-and-a-half down the line to the south we could see shrapnel bursting in the air—most evidently shrapnel from English 15-pounders—so that obviously guns were already coming up, and, though they were already engaged, it would not be long before they drove away "Brother Boer" and arrived to our assistance. Well, the buzz went on, and in the two or three trips I made about the open ground, I found that "Brother Boer," if he did not absolutely hit, went most unmercifully near to an empty stomach. We had, as I say, 17 officers, a sufficiency, and Cheatle, the doctor, asked Smith and me if we would come and help him with some sort of an ambulance. So we did, going into the tin stabling and tearing bandages, still rather amused, but yet a good rain of "buzzings" going forward so that it was evident we should have a man or two touched, all the time 15-pounder shrapnel bursting down the line incredibly comforting to the dispatch rider. Shooting grew brisker, our reply also, and then I realised a distressing thing. Our men were armed with Martinis, Heaven and the beautiful English military know why, and the things would not work, not for nuts, two out of every three stuck fast, and even when at last opened, exploded cartridges would not extract. Imagine, we had to push them out with our cleaning rods like old muzzle loaders. God help the dazzling management that collects thousands of Mausers and burns the ammunition in merry bonfires and send you to fight De Wet with broken Martinis and bows and arrows, and such like! Soon a wounded man comes in, but dies before arrival. One dead. "Brother Boer" now begins to blow up the line and in the middle of his blowing comes a rather louder report—evidently the are blowing up the line very near, or else—whyww, bang, buzz, shrapnel of the worst. Boer guns after all, and not ours at all. It looks serious. Cheatle, Smith, and I see that there will be wounded and go into the house (out of the stable), and there begin to smash in doors and find room for some wounded. The house was gaudily furnished—silver-plated candlesticks, mirrors, and drapery, and Maple, evidently Maple, had made the ornamentals. In the bedroom was a bed—how odd—the mattress, as is the way with these, had red stripes, which I cut out with a knife, and pinned on a frilled pillow case and set up on a mast. Sheets we tore and rolled for bandages, and then the wounded began to arrive.

As you know, I have seen several days' fighting of a mild kind, but never, never so long as I live will any considerations of duty or mischance or remuneration tempt me into a field hospital again. War from that standpoint is utterly different and beyond any imagination horrible. Have you ever done it, and see the wounded come in crying out and screaming, and heard ten or a dozen men groaning perpetually together, and some breaking into delirium? If you haven't, you have absolutely no idea of war. I certainly had none whatever. Meanwhile the fire was very hot indeed, and the Boers were shelling with three guns, an English 15-pounder, a 12-pounder, and a 9-pounder, as hard as they could go, using the 15-pounder with shrapnel most frequently. Our Martinis were so useless that they were hardly under fire and were able to work their guns from 1,100 to 1,400 yards, which by the irony of fate was the saving of us. Our perimeter was very small, and the gunners bursting their shrapnel at a point which would have been correct had the range been 3,000 yards, the contents of the shell flew straight out ahead and for the most part right beyond our furthest opposite lines. Fire, I assure you, as hot both for bullets and shells as I have ever seen, and you may imagine it when you think there were from 500 to 700 Boers and three guns, and we were so small a mark just lying round the station. My poor saloon had a shell in its "tummy" which burst it up pretty considerable, but no one was there. So it went on. Forty-eight shells fired at the engine, but yet the machine was not broken nor much damage done.

There now arose the question of Lydenburg, indeed; also the question, would help come? I thought not, remembering you to have said there were only very few troops in Kroonstad. In fact I lost 2/- on the point in a desperate bet with Smith to that amount—so reckless am I of my money. But that anticipates. Well, this went on as I say. Poor Major Hobbs, just out of prison and free again, shot through the heart, a Lieutenant Smith through the leg (slight), and all the time the wounded coming in—shell wounds, many of them, one man with his hand, his foot, and his chin carried off, and one "slosh" of blood, black with it, and crying. Remember we had nothing, not even a pair of scissors, nothing but sheet bandages which Smith and I made as fast as we could, and when these were done, bandages from the clothing of the woman of the place whose underclothes, nice ones, we found in a cupboard and tore frantically. By good chance there was a pot of carbolic tooth powder in the place, and with this we dressed the wounds. Honestly I shall never forget it. The shells were coming very thick. Only one struck the house, and that luckily landed on some bales of wool and did no damage beyond a loud noise; and every time the shells howled or burst near by the whole of the wounded lying in the room—poor devils, with their nerves shaken by pain I suppose—set up one long moan, "Oh-oh-oh-oh-Doctor-oh." Like that. The most unearthly chorus of fear and pain imaginable.

Well, this went on eight hours from the time of the first shot. At about the fifth hour some of our men—a few, about 40—lying with their backs to the heat of the shell fire and having at that time no one before them to shoot at, were suddenly panic-stricken and bolted south down the line as hard as they could go for half a mile in utter rout. The Boers on our other face were closing in, our rifles jammed, and Bullock, who had shown the greatest bravery, came by and said we were done. Not done, however, as rifles good or bad beat off the enterprising burgher. Meantime our runaways had, as I say, gone down the line. Suddenly, still further down the line, appeared a party of Boers, and our runaways checked, fired, and beat them off. Think of the luck. It never looked like a run; it looked as though we had sent out a party to attack the new direction of attack and had succeeded. Well, suddenly the firing stopped and the Boers began to retire. A relief force had appeared and was soon shelling vigorously with artillery. “Brother” sat on a kop and then removed away, and it was over. We remained with one officer, four men and one Kaffir dead, and one officer and 17 or 18 men wounded. Cheatle put these, or the first detachment, in a wagon, and Smith and I went with them to get them into a house further down the line in case of further fighting. On the way I met part of the relief—a C.I.V. battery (Honorable Artillery Company), which did not come into action, some infantry and one squadron of 17th Lancers (remounts), under—imagine my surprise—my brother-in-law, who was so ill in Bloemfontein. Here we found a R.A.M.C. man and gave him the wounded. Imagine what Smith and I should have done with them if Cheatle had not happened to be on his way home by that train. He is a very gallant fellow and did well. There ends the tale of the most damnablest day at Honing Spruit.

From “The Globe,” 26th June, 1900.

*This is going on in
Lomb-stone if I hear
R.C.*

ORANGE RIVER COLONY.

A DESPERATE ENGAGEMENT. THE FIGHT NEAR KROONSTAD.

CAPE TOWN, June 25th.

GEN. DE WET'S commando is still exceedingly active. On Saturday it cut off an outpost of Canadians on the railway between Kroonstad and Honing Spruit, attacked an entrenched camp of Shropshires and Canadians, and at Honing Spruit Station intercepted a train going south with troops, cutting the railway to the north and south.

The released British prisoners from Waterval, commanded by Col. Bullock, came to the assistance of the latter, and a desperate fight took place, lasting several hours. Reinforcements from Kroonstad arrived, and the Boers retired.

Our loss was Major Hobbs, of the West Yorks, and three men killed, and one officer and sixteen men wounded.—*Reuter*.

KROONSTAD, June 24th.

Dr. L. Cheatle, consulting surgeon on Lord Roberts' Staff, happened to be in the train, otherwise the wounded would have fared badly. Dr. Cheatle hastily extemporised a hospital in a cottage adjoining the station.

Among the reinforcements from Kroonstad, besides the 17th Battery Royal Artillery and 300 Yeomen, were the 4th Argylls and the 17th Lancers. All took part in the relief of the attacked force. The wounded were sent to Kroonstad, where they arrived safely. Two have died, but the remainder are doing well.—*Reuter's Special Service*.

From "The Daily Express," 27th June, 1900.

KROONSTAD, Sunday.

PART of Commandant De Wet's commando, consisting of about 700 to 800 men, with three guns, attacked the railway between Kroonstad and Honing Spruit yesterday.

The attack was first made on an outpost of Canadian Mounted Rifles two miles south of Honing Spruit. The outpost was cut off and two men were killed, and Lieutenant Triglis and four men were wounded. Three men are missing.

The enemy then attacked a camp occupied by two companies of the Shropshires and fifty Canadians. At Honing Spruit Station a train from Pretoria, going south with 400 Infantry, was also attacked.

The released prisoners from Waterval hastily arrived. They were armed with rifles surrendered by the Pretoria Boers, and were without artillery.

Colonel Bullock, of the Devon Regiment, was in command. The attacking force numbered about 300, and had two fifteen-pounders. Colonel Bullock just managed to telegraph to Kroonstad before the wires were cut. The enemy destroyed the railway on each side of our position. They sent a white flag summoning the troops to surrender, but the demand was at once refused. An attack with rifle fire from the north immediately commenced. It was then about half-past eight. The Boers also opened with shell fire from guns posted to the north and south-east of the position. Then their riflemen, riding round to the east, practically encircled our men.

After a heavy shell and rifle fire, which lasted several hours, the enemy again invited Colonel Bullock to surrender, but he indignantly

refused, and continued his unflinching resistance until half-past three, when reinforcements, despatched by General Knox, consisting of the 17th Battery Royal Artillery and 300 Yeomanry, under Colonel Brookfield, from Kroonstad arrived. The Boers fled immediately.

Major Hobbs, of the West Yorks, who had been for eight months a prisoner, was killed; Lieutenant Smith-Glover was wounded; and three men were killed and sixteen wounded. Two of the latter have since died.

Fortunately, Dr. Lenthal Cheatle, consulting surgeon on Lord Robert's Staff, happened to be in the train, otherwise the wounded would have fared badly.

Dr. Cheatle, taking for bandages sheets and pillow-cases, and for splints all the pieces of wood he could find, had a very hard day. He hastily extemporised a hospital in a cottage adjoining the station.

Colonel Bullock's reappearance in the field recalls the dramatic story of his capture. It was at the battle of Colenso, where, in the words of General Buller's report, he "behaved with great gallantry." The Colonel, not having received the order to retire, fought on, his men not only defending themselves, but also the wounded of two batteries; at the same time meted out severe punishment to the enemy.

The Boers, however, eventually surrounded Bullock's men, and the Colonel only surrendered when he was told that the wounded would be shot if he did not do so. Colonel Bullock himself was knocked down by a Boer with the butt end of his Mauser.

His lengthy incarceration at Waterval has clearly not subdued his fighting spirit.

From "The Pall Mall Gazette," 23rd July, 1900.

BATTLE OF HONNEN SPRUIT.

YESTERDAY a battle was fought at Honnen Spruit, to the north of this town, which was noticeable only in so far as it showed how patient the British soldier will be under the superior fire of an enemy, and the resourcefulness of one of the consulting surgeons sent to the front, and was a good object-lesson to demonstrate how we have had so many reverses in this particular part of the country.

Three hundred men, ex-prisoners of war, were sent from Pretoria to hold the spruit. It was expected by everybody save,

perhaps, some of the authorities, that the train would be attacked by De Wet, yet no maxims were sent with the party, and no surgeon or hospital staff was told off to accompany it. The arms served out to the men to repel the Mauser attack were old Westley-Richards and Martini rifles surrendered by the Boers.

The train reached Honnen Spruit at 5 a.m., when it was still dark, and at 7 o'clock, when the men began to off-load the trucks, the enemy were seen approaching the railway line. Colonel Bullock, who commanded, wired here for assistance, and the moment his message was through, the telegraph line was cut, and the retreat of the train prevented by a party who destroyed the rails.

The Boers had four guns. They sent in a flag of truce to ask our men to surrender, and by the time that the flag got back with Colonel Bullock's refusal the British were lying under what cover they could get, prepared to do their best.

There were no interesting details in the fight. The Boers shelled with their guns and got in a good deal of long-range rifle fire. Our men simply lay where they were, occasionally loosing off their obsolete arms, which may have frightened, but certainly did not hurt, the Boers. The Dutch, who had the whole game in their hands, fired about 130 shells during the eight hours' fighting, and many of the projectiles were 15-pounders, with the "R.L." mark. thrown from guns captured from our forces. In the end, when the men were being to despair, a force from this town arrived to reinforce Colonel Bullock, and on their appearance De Wet's men limbered up their guns, and jauntily left the field.

Yeomen service was done by Dr. Lenthal Cheatile and his orderly. The doctor chanced to be a passenger by the train, and volunteered to look after the wounded. During the day he, with his assistant, went from the tin shanty that served as a hospital to bring in the men who were hurt. He made bandages of the bed-sheets from the train, and his Red Cross flag consisted of a pillow slip, with a cross cut from a red Kaffir blanket. For antiseptic powder he used his supply of carbolic tooth powder, and when this failed he employed boiled rags.

When the train came in here several of the coaches were badly wrecked, and there were many evidences of the action about it. Those who are not strongly prejudiced in favour of the powers that be in the field strongly comment upon the absolutely unprepared condition of the force to meet an enemy, although whoever was responsible had ample materials at hand. There were thousands of Mausers in Pretoria, and a large supply of ammunition for them, and in the circumstances it seems incomprehensible why any officer who did not actually wish to throw the force away to the enemy could allow the men to go to the field armed with rifles which, pitted against the Dutchmen's arms, were little better than popguns.

From "The Morning Post," 4th August, 1900.

THE FIGHT AT HONING SPRUIT.

THE following account of the fight which took place on the railway at Honing Spruit, about twenty-one miles to the north of Kroonstad, on June 22nd is taken from a letter written by one of the officers who took part in the engagement to his relatives in England :

THE APPEARANCE OF THE BOERS.

We left Pretoria, he says, on June 14th, and went to Elandsfontein, near Johannesburg, where we did outpost duty for a few days. Just as we had got comfortably settled down off we started again for Honing Spruit. There were 400 men and 16 officers of various regiments. The officers were: Colonel Bullock, of the Devonshires, commanding; Major Stock, of the Wiltshire Regiment; Major Carleton, Royal Lancasters; Captains Elmslie and Freeth, of the Lancashire Fusiliers; Lieutenants Bryant, Temple, Radice, Smith, Mackenzie and Gray, of the Gloucestershire Regiment; Jones, of the Connaught Rangers; Best, of the Inniskilling Fusiliers; Prior, Engineer Militia; Colson, of the 5th Fusiliers; and Wood-Martin of the Suffolk Regiment. We travelled in open coal trucks, and it was very cold at night. After many hours and stops on the way we pulled up at Honing Spruit Station to unload some waggons, and were then coming on to Katbosh Camp, about a mile and a half further on. It was an hour or so before dawn when we got to the station, but when it got light I and several others were walking up and down to try and get our feet warm—most of the men being still in the trucks—when suddenly I saw a lot of mounted people riding down to the line from the east. I knew they were Boers, and rushed back to our truck to tell Colonel Bullock, our commanding officer. He immediately got all the men out of the trucks and formed them up round the station, and we began to make shelter trenches. Only having twenty picks and twenty shovels among 400 men we were not able to do much, but shelter of any kind is a "moral" support, and the men passed the tools along from one to the other, and each scraped up a bit of a place for himself. The commanding officer sent a wire to Kroonstad to say we had been "held up" and the line cut both sides of us, and asking for help. This was acknowledged from Kroonstad at 7.40 a.m., but no help arrived till 3.30 or 4 p.m., about an hour after the Boers had withdrawn. The wire was only just in time, as the telegraph poles, etc., were destroyed a few minutes later.

MARTINI-HENRY RIFLES AND BLACK POWDER.

While all this was going on the Boers had begun blowing up several culverts on the line, about 1,200 yards north of the station, which we had crossed that morning. They then sent in a man with a white flag, who brought a note from one of their commandants telling us to surrender, as they had so many men, guns, etc., and would annihilate us if we did not. Did you ever hear such cheek? Of course, it was only their usual dodge to find out our strength, etc. Colonel Bullock most indignantly refused to surrender and the Boer rode off. Before going further I must tell you that after our release in Pretoria the men were armed with Martini-Henry rifles and black powder ammunition from the arsenal at Pretoria, probably rifles the Boers did not think worth taking away. They are only sighted up to 1,200 yards, whereas 1,500 to 2,000 yards is a very ordinary range for the Lee-Metford and Mauser. We were told in Pretoria that there was not enough ammunition to serve us out with Mauser rifles. We officers managed to get hold of Mauser carbines and bandoliers of ammunition. I have got one and hoped to be allowed to stick to it. But there we were—a ragged crew of released prisoners, without any proper kit except some new underclothing; some men with good boots, others not fit to march ten miles in; some in uniform, or partly uniform and partly mufti; some with helmets, some without; armed with the nearly obsolete Martini rifle and black powder ammunition; dumped down on the line, without any doctor, to assist in protecting the railway, and that in a spot where the Boers were more or less known to be. Though we had no Army doctor, there was a saloon carriage at the end of our train with several passengers, including, most luckily for us, Mr. Cheatle, one of the consulting surgeons who came out with Sir William MacCormac. He had been on "Bob's" staff, and was going home, thinking the whole show was over. I fancy he is a big man in town, but anyhow he's an awfully nice fellow, and set to work later on with our wounded, and, in fact, did everything, though he had no appliances of any sort, and had to tear up sheets, etc., for bandages. He borrowed our tins of Calvert's carbolic tooth powder for antiseptic purposes, and luckily I was able to supply him with a new tin. But to continue the fight.

IN THE THICK OF THE FIGHT.

When the white flag had returned the Boers began going at us with rifles, but kept about 1,200 yards away all the time, so that we couldn't do them much damage with our old muskets, and the black powder must have given us away directly. At first they were only near the line to the north of us, covering the men who were destroying the culverts and telegraph lines, but they gradually worked round to the east, and about 8 or 8.30 down came the first shell—shrapnel—from about 2,000 yards away. The train all this time was in the

station, and I think they wanted to damage the engine, but their shooting wasn't good enough. The engine went a little way up the line, but found it cut, and had to return. Shells were pretty frequent now, and bullets too numerous to be exactly pleasant, but Colonel Bullock and Major Hobbs, who was second in command, were walking about seeing to everything in the coolest possible way. No 1 Company, under Captain Elmslie, of the Lancashire Fusiliers had made some small trenches facing north, but when the Boers worked round to the east we were, of course, enfiladed, so we got into a ditch running along the side of the line north and south. They peppered us pretty well while we were getting there, but only one man was hit in the arm. Previous to this poor Major Hobbs, who with the colonel had been sitting behind one of our small shelters, which did not like anything cover them, was shot through the heart and killed. Young Smith, of the Gloucesters, had been sent down the ditch, near the line with seven men to try and get a bit nearer to the Boers who were damaging the culverts. They had rather a warm time, and Colonel Bullock sent Freeth, the adjutant to bring them back. Poor Smith was shot through the groin, and the bullet went right through him. Two of his men were wounded and one killed out of the seven. Smith got back with Freeth's help all right, and I found him afterwards sitting up in bed smoking cigarettes and as unconcerned as possible.

MOST UNPLEASANT CROSS-FIRE.

There were two or three corrugated iron houses close to the station, and open veldt all round. To the south the ground sloped gradually upwards for about a mile, and about half a mile over the brow was Katbosh Camp, where there were two companies of the Shropshires and some of the mounted Canadians. This camp was also attacked by the Boers, so, of course, they had to defend themselves, and couldn't help us. We made use of a small tin house at the station for a hospital, and manufactured a Red Cross flag out of a pillow-case and some stuff found in the house, which was put up on the shaft of an up-tilted cart. Apparently the Boers could not make it out, and sent in the same man again with a white flag to find out what it meant. Colonel Bullock went out to meet him, and told him what the flag was, and he went away. They then separated their guns. I think there were four, but certainly three, and they shelled us from the north and east at the same time, a most unpleasant cross-fire. One shell went through the saloon carriage and broke all the glass, but an officer's servant sitting in it wasn't touched. Another shell went into the little verandah of the hospital which was luckily stacked with bales of wool, in which the shell burst, and was afterwards found by Cheatile. Thus it went on hour after hour, and we were shooting away with our old Martinis. I fired off fifty-five rounds with my Mauser carbine, but don't know

with what result, except that some Boers, exposing themselves on the sky-line, very quickly got down flat on the grass after I had taken a steady pot at them at about 1,400 yards distance. The Boers must have known how we were armed, as it is quite against their custom to expose themselves at all. At last we saw some men coming over the hill to our right, and thought it was the relief force, but they turned out to be Boers in khaki, some of whom, I believe, had helmets, probably taken from the convoy they collared a week or two ago, somewhere in this neighbourhood.

A TREMENDOUS RELIEF.

Of course, we were longing for help to arrive all this time, and couldn't make out why it didn't, but I don't think the men were at all keen on being made prisoners again, and they would have made a tough fight for it if the Boers had closed in on us. At last, about 2.30 or 3, they began very deliberately to move their guns away, their scouts having evidently reported the arrival of relief troops from Kroonstad, and soon we saw our scouts coming over the hill from the south. You can imagine what a tremendous relief it was to us all, after seven or eight hours at pretty high pressure, and of course our long confinement and inactivity made it all the worse. But, personally, after the first half hour I did not mind so much, especially when we got the cover of the ditch, though there were plenty of bullets going over us, and one spent one fell into the ditch just behind me. I've got it, and also a couple of the shells fired at us, and, just imagine, two of their guns were our own 15-pounders, probably captured at Sanna's Post. The shells have our Government mark on them, and are unlike Boer shells. They nearly all of them burst. I suppose from 80 to 100 shells were fired at us, and I found they were not so very alarming after all, though, of course, the moral effect is great. Personally I think the deadly Mauser bullet much worse. Our casualties were one officer and three men killed, one officer and seventeen men wounded; two of the latter have since died in hospital. After the Boers left we still remained in the trenches, and strengthened them as much as possible, but the Argyll and Sutherland Militia and some Mounted Infantry and a battery arrived from Kroonstad, and the battery shelled a kopje two or three miles away, where the Boers were collecting. We judged there were from 700 to 1,000 of them, and three or four guns; one party, of course, was attacking the Katbosh Camp, while the rest attended to us. We heard afterwards that the Boer loss was six killed, and that they took away three waggons full of wounded, but this cannot, of course, be verified. At Katbosh Camp some of the Canadians had a very hot time of it, and fought splendidly, preventing the Boers getting right round behind us. I hear they lost two killed and about three wounded, including an officer.

From "The Cape Times," 28th June, 1900.

BATTLE OF HONING SPRUIT.

HOLDING UP A MAIL TRAIN.

KROONSTAD, June 23rd.

FOR real excitement in the war just now, one wants to get away from the front. There the issue of an engagement is never in doubt. Right from Bloemfontein to Pretoria, few of the actions rose above the nature of a skirmish with the enemy, who could confidently be relied upon to fold up his tents, and silently steal away, as soon as he caught sight of a force coming round his flank. Lord Roberts's tactics enabled him to cover the ground between Bloemfontein and Pretoria in record time, but unfortunately he "left a lot of little things behind him" in the shape of

DE WET'S COMMANDOES,

who have made themselves uncommonly obnoxious in our newly-acquired colony. The clever commandant will doubtless soon pay the penalty for disregarding the proclamation which declares him and his merry men rebels, but in the meantime he contrives to lend a spice of excitement to railway travelling between the Vaal River and Kroonstad, and one car at least must be closed for alterations and repairs, as the result of one of his descents upon the railway line. The fight at Honing Spruit on Friday, June 22nd, was a very one-sided affair, but it served to show the stuff the British soldier is made of, even when he is called on to do almost more than is humanly possible.

THE COMPOSITE REGIMENT.

On the morning of Wednesday, June 20th, 400 men of the "composite regiment" left Pretoria to garrison the wayside station of Honing Spruit, which had been attacked about a week before when the station master or "frontier officer," to give him his proper title, had been chased from his post, escaping with his instruments on a trolley. To prevent a repetition of this episode, a garrison was sent down consisting of prisoners who were released when we entered Pretoria. The Composite Regiment well deserved its name, for it was recruited from an extraordinary variety of regiments. The Devons were represented by the officer who commanded the new garrison, Colonel Bullock, a man whose iron face did not belie the stern determination which he showed in the defence of his post. The West Yorks sent Major Hobbs. A hundred of the men came from the 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers, ninety from the Wilts, and eighty from the Northumberland Fusiliers. The Royal Irish Rifles, the King's Royal Rifles, the Gloucesters, the South Lancashires, the King's Own Loyal Lancashires, the Inniskilling

Fusiliers, the Royal Irish Fusiliers, and the Middlesex, all supplied a man or two to bear his share in the unequal contest which was waged through the long hours of nearly an entire day. The soldiers, too, were more fitted to be sent to a sanatorium than to bear the brunt of a stubborn defence. Many of them had dragged out the long months of the war in Boer prisons, barely kept alive on their miserable diet of mealie pap, their hearts sickened with the long-deferred hope of release. They were armed with weapons which they might reasonably have expected would not be called upon to oppose the long-range Mauser of the enemy. Among the miscellaneous collection of arms surrendered by the burghers were a number of Westley-Richards rifles. These were served out to the released prisoners, whose bandoliers were full of cartridges filled with black powder. Such was the garrison sent down to protect the line of communication at Honing Spruit.

A POOR POSITION.

Honing Spruit is a position which the Boers would never dream of attacking against a decently-armed force, supported by a gun or two. The station stands in practically level ground; a slight rise to the east runs parallel to the railway line, less than half a mile distant from it; a spruit about 400 yards north of the station has had its wrecked culvert replaced by piles of sleepers to carry the iron track. A few small ant-hills complete the natural fortifications of the place.

But then nobody apparently dreamed that Honing Spruit would need to be seriously defended. Lord Kitchener had been down and returned to Pretoria, which we left with the happy assurance that the way through to Bloemfontein was "clear." At Vereeniging we picked up the first mail, so they told us, that had gone for three weeks. We reached Viljoen's Drift about noon, and whiled away the long hours of the wait till dusk by inspecting the bullet dents in a train that had just come up from south, and in telling the occupants what a narrow escape they must have had. Two long trains loaded with supplies, then came through. That dispelled our last doubts. The road, so we told one another, must be clear. How else would provision trains have been allowed to escape? So as our train steamed southwards into the darkness, we went to sleep with light hearts, someone jocularly remarking that he hoped the Boers would not wake us with a volley. Soon after dawn we pulled up at Honing Spruit, and set about off-loading a few transport wagons and mules. The men stood about, stamping their feet to restore circulation after the chilly night in the iron trucks.

IN FOR A FIGHT.

The cooks had but a few fires, and set about boiling coffee. But the cold and the coffee and everything were forgotten, and all

eyes were turned on some horsemen galloping rapidly on the other side of the spruit towards the temporary bridge. An explosion and a cloud of smoke confirmed the fear that the Boers were upon us. To the south we heard the boom of a gun, and turning, half in the hope that it might be from our friends, the Canadians and Shrophires, who were encamped about two miles further down the line, we saw shrapnel bursting over their position. We were in for a fight, and Col. Bullock at once made preparations to repel an attack. The men were prompt to obey his orders. "A've done eight months in the Boers' hands, a a've." said one, "and 'a doan't want to do any more." A semi-circle of skirmishers was thrown out on both sides of the line, facing the spruit where the enemy had been seen. Another line in widely extended order began to creep towards the top of the ridge to the east, while the wagons were laagered up to form a barricade to the south, men being also sent some distance down the line. Hardly were these preparations made when a burgher cantered up with a white flag to give us a chance to surrender before a shot had been fired. Probably he expected the answer he got, but he caught a glimpse of our condition before he remounted and rode off to tell his friends what a fine day's sport was before them. We did not know what artillery they might have—one gun we were certain might be turned on us at any moment, but it was then employed in shelling our friends three miles away, who, as a Canadian scout riding into our camp told us, were as powerless to reply to them as we were ourselves. A few minutes passed before the Mauser opened its familiar note, and these were busily occupied in trying to drive holes into the asphalt-like veld with the scanty picks and shovels we had with us. But there was no time to make any effective entrenchments, and when the bullets began to whistle round, most of the skirmishers were lying flat in the open, their only protection being the identity in colour between their clothes and the short grass.

AT CLOSE RANGE.

Those of us who remained near the station took refuge behind the small dump blocking the end of a siding, or found shelter by crouching close to the wheel of a truck, or in the lee of a water-tank. No one dared to move, for the slightest sign of a body drew a volley from the enemy who were firing from close range. Our men attempted to return the fire, but the smoke from the black powder only revealed their position. As often as not the cartridge-cases got jammed in the barrels of their obsolete weapons, and had to be driven out with the cleaning-rod, or else the breech-blocks went out of order and refused to close. The Colonel, therefore, ordered his men to reserve their fire unless the Boers attempted to rush our position, and this we felt confident they would not have the pluck to do. So we lay there, shivering with cold, but heedless of the rifle fire, which, though fierce, was doing no damage.

After about an hour of this, Colonel Bullock decided to retire on the Canadians' camp. The ammunition was replaced on the trucks, the outlying men were called closer in and the engine, which had gone down the line on a short scouting expedition, was brought back. But the driver reported that large numbers of the Boers had got between the two camps, and we had to remain where we were. So far we had had nothing but the Mauser to seek shelter from.

LONG ODDS.

At half-past eight the boom of a gun, followed instantaneously by the shriek of a shrapnel as it tore the air over our heads, and burst a few yards from us, told us that there were longer odds against us than even the great disparity between the rifles. There was no hope unless artillery came to our rescue, and the nearest artillery was at Kroonstad, twenty-one miles away, and the only bit of silver lining in our cloud was that the telegraph operator had flashed news of our defenceless plight to Kroonstad before the wire was cut, and had got back the reply "All correct." When the first shell screamed over us we began to calculate how soon help could reach us. Would they have to march all the way from Kroonstad, or would they be able to come most of the distance by train? It was a momentous question to us, for we were in a small space, and both the guns and the rifles could get close in and rake us without fear of retaliation. The heart of the stoutest man will quail when self-defence is impossible. The defenders, however, were encouraged by the coolness of their colonel, who moved about in almost reckless fashion, directing the men, cheering them on, and showing plainly that as long as he was alive he would fight on till not a man was left. So the gallant fellows stuck to their posts, firing occasionally when the Boers ventured too close, retreating a little when the fire became intolerable, but creeping boldly back again, determined that "not through them should England come to shame."

AN ALMOST HOPELESS TASK.

But as they lay under the bursting shells and the falling bullets they reminded one another that this was not the first time they had been called on to perform an almost hopeless task. You heard one of the lately released prisoners tell how his company had held out for twenty-two hours till their ammunition gave out, and they had to surrender because no reinforcements were sent to help them. Another had been battered into submission by artillery, to which his party had no guns with which to reply. Still they held out, while the Boer cannon thundered forth, and the Mausers poured their bullets wherever there was a sign of life. For nearly the whole forenoon the gun directed its efforts at the water tank and at the locomotive. One shell struck the wooden frame on which the tank stood, and shattering a stout post, crashed through the side of a carriage and out at the bottom, shivering every pane of glass to fragments. By noon the enemy thought they must have cowed us,

and sent in the white flag again to see if we wanted to surrender. Colonel Bullock's reply convinced them that their only chance was to annihilate the defenders, and they set themselves to the task in real earnest. The gun which had been shelling the Canadians turned its shrapnel upon us, and under cover of their artillery fire the Boers gathered more closely round their prey. They rode right on to the top of the ridge to the east of the line, and we began to wonder whether they would have the courage to charge in and overwhelm us. The few men who had bayonets prepared to sell their lives dearly, but a few volleys served to keep our foes out of a hand-to-hand struggle. But the smoky volleys only too clearly revealed the position of our riflemen, and both guns burst shrapnel with fearful accuracy over our lines. Nothing was too small to escape their notice. Two men were lying out by themselves to the west of the line. The riflemen detected them and poured in volley which made them rise up and run together for some distance. A little dog trotted along between them, his tail up and his tongue lolling out as if he enjoyed the sport. Suddenly one of the men collapsed as if he had been shot, and his companion crawled over to him. The dog ran on, but missing them, turned round and hasted back to lick the faces of the prostrate soldiers. But closely as they had imitated the fall of a wounded man, they were not hit, and the gunners seemed to know it. A shrapnel burst in the air above them, the bullets spattering all round them. They got up to run for shelter to the station, and one reached it breathless and thoroughly alarmed. The other, vainly trying to shelter his head with his overcoat ran on, a splendid target for the opposing riflemen. He fell a few yards from the building, which then became the mark for both guns. One shell crashed through an iron building close at hand, just missing the group of men who were sheltering in a shallow trench behind it. The shells now fell so thickly that everyone looked on the destruction of all the buildings as inevitable. Men calmly lit their pipes and waited for the end.

HELP AT LAST.

Suddenly four smothered booms far to the north, roused one of the soldiers from the sort of stupor that was overcoming them. "There's our guns," he exclaimed, but most of us doubted it. More likely it was only the enemy blowing up fresh portions of the railway. But as if by magic, the clamour of the Boer guns was hushed, and the crackle of the rifles was no longer heard. Even then we feared that the Boers were only laying a fresh trap for us, and crawled carefully round the corners of our shelter places to see what was going on. There was no mistake about it. The enemy was in full flight. Our own guns had arrived from Kroonstad, and as soon as they opened fire the gallant burgher had lifted up his heels and fled. The British batteries hastened on, and opened a brisk fire on a wooded kopje in which the enemy had taken shelter.

For a few minutes we watched with keen delight the spectacle of the bursting shells, and then at four o'clock in the afternoon, we turned to and made breakfast. Some of the men went out and completed the melancholy task of bringing in the dead and wounded. This duty had been nobly undertaken during the fight by Dr. Cheatle and his servant, a corporal in the Northumberland Fusiliers. The doctor, who is consulting surgeon on Lord Roberts' staff, was fortunately on board the train as a passenger. He had no instruments with him and no bandages, but these he improvised from strips of sheeting and so forth. The Geneva cross was manufactured from a pillow slip and strips of red cloth torn from a Kaffir's blanket. This amateur flag was hoisted on the end of a cart pole tilted into the air. The pole was struck in three places by fragments of shell and bullets, while a shell passed through the end of the building over which it flew, but luckily, was stopped by bales of wool. Major Hobbs, of the West Yorks, was killed, while the "butcher's bill" also included Privates Levett and Reeves, of the 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers, and Private Barnes, of the Wilts. The wounded included Lieutenant H. H. Smith, of the Glosters, and seventeen men, two of whom afterwards died of their wounds.

From "M.A.P.," 25th October, 1902.

A SOLDIER DOCTOR.

DR. CHEATLE, C.B.

Dr. Lenthal Cheatle, C.B., whose marriage has just taken place, not only rendered excellent service during Lord Roberts' advance to Pretoria, but when on the way home from the capital of the Transvaal gave proof of that great resourcefulness for which he has made a name. Soon after the occupation of Pretoria, and when the remainder of the campaign was characterized as a "police job," Cheatle left to return to King's College, which had lent him to the Army. He started down country as passenger in a train that conveyed a handful of troops, under Colonel Bullock, to hold Honing Spruit. Through some oversight the force was armed with a mixture of captured rifles of different patterns and worse-mixed ammunition; there was not a single machine gun, and no doctor was assigned to the unit. The train arrived at Honing Spruit in the early hours, and daylight was awaited by the commander to detrain his men. Towards dawn a column of smoke was seen in front, along the railway, and when the surgeon and others were wondering what it meant an explosion was heard in the rear. Then it was discovered that a bridge ahead had been burned and a culvert be-

hind blown up, so that the train was useless. At the same time the enemy, armed with artillery, came into view, and a white flag messenger sent over to demand the surrender of the force, a request to which Colonel Bullock refused to accede. While the messenger was returning to his own lines, Bullock telegraphed to Kroonstad for help, and the moment his message got through the wire was cut.

HIS RED CROSS FLAG.

Action opened, and Cheatle saw that his services would be in request. There were no medical or surgical requisites—none of the things required, not even a red cross flag for the hospital. This being the first thing necessary, the surgeon made one with a pillow slip from the train and a Kaffir's red blanket, but after a while a white flag messenger came in to ask what flag it was. The red bars had been made too long, and the Boers mistook the emblem for the cross of St. George! Bandages were hastily made from bed-sheets torn into slips, and in lieu of antiseptic powder Cheatle opened his supply of carbolic tooth-powder, which did excellently so long as it lasted. When it gave out he resorted to the expedient of sterilizing the bandages by boiling them, and throughout nine long hours of fight, during which Colonel Bullock's men could do no more than lie down and take the fire of the enemy, Dr. Cheatle worked hard in the zinc hut in which he had established himself, and through which stray bullets often ripped their way. The saving of several lives was undoubtedly due to the accidental presence of the surgeon, and probably to his ingenuity in improvising. I am not aware that he was mentioned in dispatchs for his services on the occasion; but I believe the possession of his rudely-made red cross flag is more prized by him than would be a half-column clipping from any general's message from the front.



