



THE NATAL VOLUNTEERS

IN

THE ANGLO-BOER WAR

September 1899 to July 1902

REALITY AND PERCEPTION

By

Mark Coghlan

**THE NATAL VOLUNTEERS IN THE ANGLO-BOER WAR,
SEPTEMBER 1899 TO JULY 1902: REALITY AND PERCEPTION**

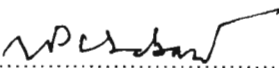
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As the candidate's supervisor I have approved this thesis for submission

Signed: 

Name: JPC LABAND Date: 5 August 2002

**'So, if the potential warriors of the future
are to gain any knowledge of war before
they encounter the reality or if they are to
enlarge on their limited stock of actual
experience, the only means available for them
to do so is vicarious. They must perforce
read military history.'**¹

¹ Hew Strachan, European Armies and the Conduct of War, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1983, p1.

ABSTRACT

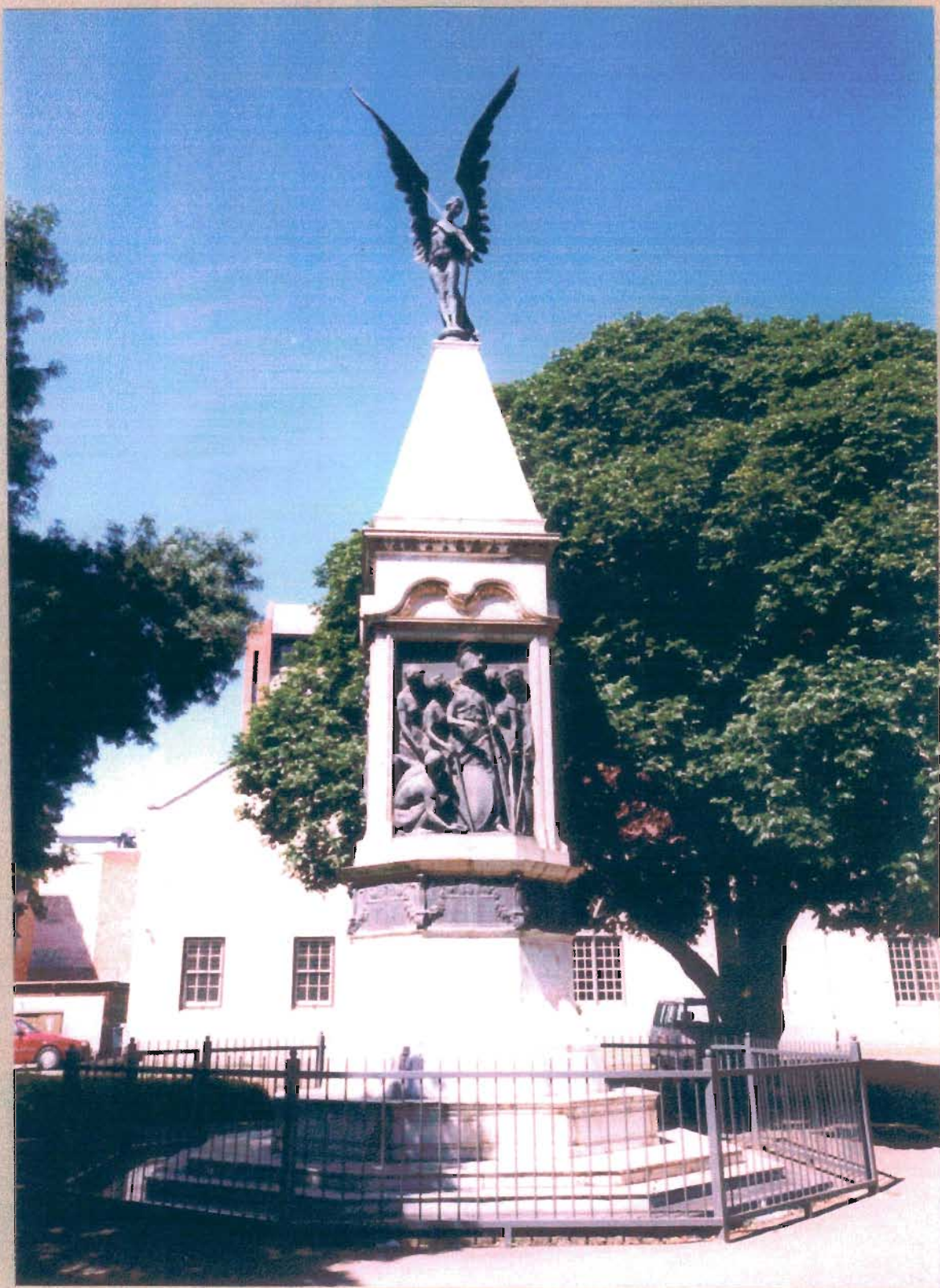
The Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902 has been the subject by contemporary and modern historians alike of a plethora of studies on most aspects of the conflict, including its military operations. None, however, has focussed specifically on the response of the Colony of Natal, which formed an important base of military operations, nor on the conduct and effectiveness of its force of Volunteer soldiers. This study seeks to fill this significant gap in the historiography of the war.

The central theme to emerge in this investigation of the response of Natal to the war is that of a distinct gap between the perception of the scale and consistency of the commitment to military operations and the mobilization of colonial resources on the one hand, and, on the other, the socio-economic, political and military reality.

The Natal Volunteer forces, especially the mounted infantry units such as the Natal Carbineers, were never able to exercise a significant influence on the conduct of the war in the Colony. There were several reasons for this. In terms of immediate military factors, the force was not considered sufficiently reliable by the British Army, and was therefore seldom deployed effectively, particularly in the formal phase of the war. This Volunteer force was also the victim of British strategic errors, such as that which led to the investment of Ladysmith by Boer forces from 2 November 1899 to 28 February 1900. The bulk of the Volunteer force was effectively removed from the war effort in the Colony for this period. Its marginalisation was, however, also evidence of a conflicting and fickle mobilization for war by the Natal government and the Colony's English-speaking settler population. Cultural and Imperial affinity to Britain was countered by parochial regional interests such as economic affiliation with the Transvaal, which meant that Natal did not welcome a British war for confederation in the region.

Qualified official and popular support in Natal for the war lasted only as long as the invading Boer forces posed a perceived threat to the Colony, from October 1899 to October 1900. In fact, from the date of the relief of Ladysmith, Natal colonial interests - directed by a ruling settler agricultural, legal and mercantile elite which controlled political authority, as well as economic policy - agitated for a reduction of military and economic commitment to the war.

Natal's commitment to the British military effort, and the political policy that underwrote it, was retrospectively embellished in the immediate wake of the war as British hegemony in the region appeared to have been restored. However, this masked what effectively had been a muted and disputed response to the Anglo-Boer War.



The Volunteer War Memorial, Court Gardens, Pietermaritzburg

The main text reads: 'This memorial has been erected by the people of Natal in honour of the Natal Volunteers, Natal Police and other Natal colonists who died for their sovereign and country during the Boer War, 1899-1902.'

The units listed on the memorial are: Natal Carbineers, Natal Volunteer Staff, Natal Naval Volunteers, Natal Mounted Rifles, Border Mounted Rifles, Umvoti Mounted Rifles, Irregular Corps raised in Natal (1 and 2 Imperial Light Horse, Bethune's Mounted Infantry, Imperial Hospital Corps, Imperial Bearer Corps, Railway Pioneer Regiment, Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry, Mennie's Scouts, Steineacker's Horse, Imperial Light Infantry, Natal Volunteer Ambulance Corps, Colonial Scouts), Ladysmith Town Guard, Natal Royal Rifles, Natal Volunteer Medical Corps, Volunteer Hotchkiss-gun Detachment, Natal Volunteer Composite Regiment, Natal Mounted Infantry, Durban Light Infantry, Natal Field Artillery, Natal Police Force.

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NOMENCLATURE AND ABBREVIATIONS

Current orthography has been followed with regard to the names of rivers, for example 'Thukela', instead of 'Tugela', except in quoted contemporary sources and in the case of engagements such as the battle of the Tugela Heights, where the names in general use at the time have been used. As far as towns and villages are concerned, the European place names have been retained. The term 'Boer' has been used to identify Dutch-speaking burghers of the Transvaal and Orange Free State Republics, as well as their military forces. In the case of Dutch-speaking colonists of the Colony of Natal, the term 'Natal Dutch' was used in contemporary sources, but to avoid derogatory connotations, 'Natal Afrikaner' has been used in this thesis.

Abbreviations

ARCA	Institute for Contemporary Affairs, UOFS
AGO	Archive of the Attorney-General
CAB	Cabinet Office Papers, PRO
CO	Archive of the Colonial Office, PAR
CO(microfilm)	Archive of the Colonial Office (microfilm), PAR
CSO	Archive of the Colonial Secretary's Office, PAR
CMG	Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George
DCM	Distinguished Conduct Medal
DLHM	Durban Local History Museum, Durban
DLI	Durban Light Infantry
DSO	Distinguished Service Order
GOC	General Officer Commanding
HM	Her/His Majesty
HMSO	His/Her Majesty's Stationery Office
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria
IWM	Imperial War Museum, London
JP	Justice of the Peace
KC	King's Council
KCAL	Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban
KCMG	Knight Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George
KG	Archive of the Kommandant-Generaal, NAR
KSA	King's South Africa Medal
LTG	Ladysmith Town Guard

MJPW	Ministry of Justice and Public Works, PAR
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
NAM	National Army Museum, London
NAR	National Archives Repository, Pretoria
NCP	Natal Colonial Publications, PAR
nd	no date of publication
NDR	Natal Defence Records, PAR
NGR	Natal Government Railways
NMC	National Monuments Council (Amafa aKwazulu-Natali)
NMI	Natal Mounted Infantry
NMP	Archive of the Natal Mounted Police, PAR
NMR	Natal Mounted Rifles
OC	Officer Commanding
OFS	Orange Free State
PAR	Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository, Pietermaritzburg
PCKC	Privy Councillor, King's Council
PM	Archive of the Prime Minister's Office, PAR
PRO	Public Record Office, Kew
QSA	Queen's South Africa Medal
RA	Royal Artillery/Rifle Association
RAMC	Royal Army Medical Corps
RFA	Royal Field Artillery
SALH	South African Light Horse
UMR	Umvoti Mounted Rifles
UNISA	University of South Africa, Pretoria
UOFS	University of the Orange Free State, Bloemfontein
VC	Victoria Cross



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UOFS	University of the Orange Free State, Bloemfontein
VC	Victoria Cross
WO	War Office Papers, PRO, Kew
wrt	with regard to
ZA	Zululand Archive, PAR
ZAR	Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek (South African Republic)

Preface

This thesis has its origins in research undertaken for the Fort Durnford Museum, Estcourt. In addition, the topic was one of many potential research themes available to the writer as regimental historian with the Natal Carbineers, and much of the initial source material used for this dissertation was accumulated in the Natal Carbineers History Centre. An initial manuscript, completed in 1994 and concentrating on the adventures of the Estcourt-Weenen Squadron of this regiment during the relief of Ladysmith campaign, forms the core of this project.

This 1994 manuscript was considerably enlarged for the centenary commemorations of the Anglo-Boer War to include the complete regiment and its associated units over the entire duration of the conflict, complete with detailed appendices of the service record of every member who served. However, this remained essentially an annals of the service of a single regiment, rather than an analysis of the overall role of the Natal Volunteer force in the context of the Colony of Natal's response to the war. Nevertheless, despite the incorporation of Natal regiments other than the Natal Carbineers, such as the Natal Mounted Rifles, the Carbineers do still occupy centre stage, but this had less to do with the writer's grounding in the history of this regiment, than with a relative abundance of surviving Carbineer records on the period compared to other regiments in the Natal Volunteer force. At this juncture the writer was still trapped in what Connerton terms 'an unreflective traditional memory' of Volunteer participation in the Anglo-Boer War, compared to an evolution in the process of research to a 'historically tutored memory' of that participation.² Nevertheless, to a certain extent this work is inevitably infused with the 'assumptions and conventions of the age and society in which that research and reflection take place'.³

A research project of this magnitude, especially when undertaken along with family and work commitments, inevitably makes heavy demands on several organisations and individuals whose support are hereby gratefully acknowledged. For the generous provision of time, expertise and resources acknowledgment is due to Dr John Vincent, Mr Gilbert Torlage, Mr Nic Ruddiman, Mr Robert Wood, Ms Cynthia Nair, and Mrs Sybil Kaye, all of the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Museum Service. Gilbert Torlage, in particular, who also cast a critical eye over the bibliography, with his considerable experience in the subject of the Anglo-Boer War in Natal, has proved a pillar of support. The KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Museum Service also contributed funding towards tuition fees. The support of the RSM of the Natal Carbineers, WO1 John Hall, is also gratefully appreciated.

I vote of thanks is directed to the staffs of all the libraries and repositories consulted, but special

² Paul Connerton, How Societies Remember, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p16.

³ Arthur Marwick, The Nature of History, London, Macmillan, 1989, p143, and see pp3,151 and 154; and Michael Howard, Clausewitz, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1983, pp30-1.

mention must be made of the staffs of the Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository, especially Pieter Nel and Unnay Narrine, and the Natal Society Library, particularly the tireless ladies handling the burdensome task of providing me with the bulky volumes of newspapers.

Grateful thanks are also due to Dr Peter Njuro, of the Department of Statistics and Biometry, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, for assistance with the statistics on the comparative Natal Volunteer strength returns immediately before and after the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War, Mr Louis Eksteen, of the Voortrekker Museum, Pietermaritzburg, for information on the Commercial Road Cemetery Action Group, Mr Dieter Reusch, of the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Museum Service, for assistance with the interpretation of Dutch text in the Natal Afrikaner, Professor B Parker of the School of Music, and Dr Walter Peters of the School of Architecture, both of the University of Natal, Durban, for advice on aspects of music and memorial architecture respectively in the commemoration of the Natal contribution to the war. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Mr Tony Harvey-Williams for reading the final script.

A research trip to England in December 2000-January 2001 was essential to the success of this enterprise, and several votes of thanks must be made. For financial support: the Ernest Oppenheimer Memorial Trust, the Royal Natal Carbineers Association, my father, Mr John Coghlan, and my uncle, Mr Robert Coghlan. For accommodation and hospitality: Guy and Monica Noble, Wimbledon, London, Chris and Marielle Kay, Wokingham, Berkshire, my uncle and aunt, Richard and Myriam Coghlan, Harrogate, as well as my sister, Monica, and brother, David (and his wife, Christine), both of Nottingham.

Last, but definitely not least, is my huge debt to my supervisor, Professor John Laband, who has masterfully guided my shaky hand throughout.

A historian's family and friends invariably bear the brunt of the behavioural eccentricities that accompany an academic undertaking of this nature. My grateful thanks therefore go to my fiancée, Deanne, my two young daughters, Ione and Tiffany, as well as my good friends and confidantes, Eve Hatton and Jo Marwick, who have noted with equanimity how this 'project' mutated alarmingly. To paraphrase from Shula Marks's introduction to her book, Reluctant Rebellion, this work was completed in spite of the attentions of these ladies!

The Lads of the Carbineers

'Here's a toast to the lads of the City,
To the heroes who fought and fell!...
Let the words of a Camp-fire ditty
The tale of their valour tell;...
Away to the distant border
The welkin shall ring with cheers,
As we drink to the toast -
The City's boast -
The lads of the Carbineers!

Chorus: 'Gallant Carbineers!
Dashing Volunteers!
Built of steel and leather!
Give it - All together!
Gallant Carbineers!
Good old Carbineers!'

'There are comrades we miss at muster!
There are gaps in the squadron's ranks!
But the sheen of the Bayleaf's lustre
O'er shadows the death-Fill'd blanks!
There's dew on the cheek of Friendship,
The sparkle of Manhood's tears -
As we stand to the toast -
The City's boast -
The Lads of the Carbineers!

'They have written a rollcall of glory,
They have blazon'd a fair renown
On the page of the City's story
Which tells of her lads in Brown!
Away to the distant border
The welkin shall ring with cheers,
As we drink to the toast -
The City's boast -
The Lads of the Carbineers!⁴

⁴ Natal Witness, 26 October 1899.

INTRODUCTION

The Nature of War

'When we look back over the human past, one obvious feature stands out: the amount of time, energy, and human life which has been expended in that most destructive of all man's activities - war.'¹

The academic discipline of military history has faced major challenges in the century just past as it has sought to draw lessons, derive trends, and extract principles from armed conflicts.² The Anglo-Boer War was one particularly complex socio-economic and military event, as Bill Nasson explains:

'An agrarian conflict with industrial corrugations, in its conditioning and conduct the South African War was perfectly transitional, a traditional war of movement, with cavalry and mounted infantry carrying the fight over enormous spaces, yet connected to modern firearms, railways, electric power, a grid of censorship, the early use of field telephone communication, and the refinement of tough imperial policies of destruction, resettlement, and exile to break the enemy and win the war.'³

Lynn might postulate that he considers military history to be less tied than most other history disciplines to theory and political or social causes.⁴ He might even warn against the very element of social history that is in fact central to this study of the response of the Colony of Natal to the

¹ Marwick, The Nature of History, p168.

² See Martin van Creveld, 'Thoughts on Military History', Journal of Contemporary History, 18/1983, pp560-4.

³ Bill Nasson, The South African War 1899-1902, London, Arnold, 1999, p5; and see Donal Lowry, 'Introduction: not just a "teatime war"', in Donal Lowry (ed), The South African War Reappraised, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000, p2.

⁴ John A Lynn, 'The Embattled Future of Academic Military History', The Journal of Military History, 61/4, October 1997, p782; and see Marwick, The Nature of History, p165.

Anglo-Boer War.⁵ However, Clark is surely correct when he writes that 'we cannot comprehend the manner of waging war without some wider framework of ideas within which acts of war, both of commission and omission, have meaning'.⁶

There is a considerable body of theory which sees war as an instrument of policy for regulating international relations, and this has direct relevance to British imperial interests in southern Africa in the nineteenth century.⁷ Within this debate lies the role of specific interest groups,⁸ such as those evidenced in colonial Natal. Similarly, the theories of Carl von Clausewitz on the conduct of war - often associated with that of absolute war,⁹ and with emphasis on the immediate pragmatism of the conduct of war at the expense of social and economic contexts¹⁰ - nevertheless investigates the relationship between politics and war, civilian and military leadership, and defensive and limited war: all aspects relevant to the conduct of the Natal government, settler community and the Volunteer force in the Anglo-Boer War.¹¹

⁵ Lynn, 'The Embattled Future of Academic Military History', p783; and see Ian FW Beckett, 'Military History', in LJ Butler and Anthony Gorst (eds), Modern British History: A Guide to Study and Research, London, IB Tauris Publishers, 1997, pp183-194.

⁶ Ian Clark, Waging War: A Philosophical Introduction, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988, p10; and see Bernard Brodie, War and Politics, London, Cassell, 1973, p227.

⁷ Julian Lider, On the Nature of War, Farnborough, Hants, Saxon House, 1979, pp49 and 58; and see Black, 'War and the World, 1450-2000', p670; Michael Howard, The Causes of Wars, London, Unwin, 1983, pp7-9; Clark, Waging War, pp45-6; Niall Ferguson, The Pity of War, London, Allen Lane, 1998, xxvi-xxxiii; Brodie, War and Politics, p225. Several theoreticians seek to discover a concept of a primal urge, such as that of a biological drive, in the definition of warfare (Doyle Dawson, 'The Origins of War: Biological and Anthropological Theories', History and Theory: Studies in the Philosophy of History, 35/1996, pp1-28; Barbara Ehrenreich, Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War, New York, Metropolitan Books, 1997, pp8,21,47-52, 94 and 124; Lider, On the Nature of War, pp6-7,9-11 and 18).

⁸ Lider, On the Nature of War, pp50-1.

⁹ Brian Bond, The Pursuit of Victory: From Napoleon to Saddam Hussein, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp45 and 51-7.

¹⁰ Howard, Clausewitz, pp2-3.

¹¹ C Bauer, 'Karl Maria von Clausewitz's On War - His Contribution to Military Thought',
(continued...)

The central theme of this thesis is criticism of the mobilization of colonial Natal towards the British war effort against the Boer Republics, and the consequent deployment of Natal Volunteer troops. These Volunteers were a numerically insignificant component of British operations in the field. Yet through much of recorded history the forms of warfare with which Volunteers such as these are most commonly associated - skirmishing, reconnaissance, patrols and outpost duties - became potentially an important adjunct to the formal armies such as that of the British. According to Keegan, 'all regular armies, even the armies of the French Revolution, recruited irregulars to patrol, reconnoitre and skirmish for them'.¹²

War and Society Studies

Laband has commented on 'the interrelationship between the structure of society, the functioning of the state, military capability and planning, and actual performance in battle'.¹³ While the context of most theoretical studies of this interrelationship is the conflict between European nation-states, these factors can also be applied, with caution,¹⁴ to the response of the Natal government and its armed forces to the Anglo-Boer War.

There are several reasons for focussing on a 'war and society' approach in this study. Firstly, according to van Creveld, 'military history from the earliest times has been intimately involved

¹¹(...continued)

Journal for Contemporary History, 17/2, 1992, pp135 and 141-155; Avi Kober, 'Military Decision in War: A Framework for Research', Armed Forces and Society, 22/1, 1995, p66; Howard, Clausewitz, p16; Bond, The Pursuit of Victory, p49; ; and see Charles Townshend, 'Introduction: The Shape of Modern War', in Charles Townshend (ed), The Oxford History of Modern War, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp8-9.

¹² John Keegan, A History of Warfare, London, Hutchinson, 1993, pp5 and 10.

¹³ JPC Laband, 'Kingdom in Crisis: The Response of the Zulu Polity to the British Invasion of 1879', PhD thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1990, abstract.

¹⁴ Jeremy Black, 'Military Organisations and Military Change in Historical Perspective', The Journal of Military History, 62/4, October 1998, p875, and see p876; LJ Butler, 'History, theory and practice', in Butler and Gorst (eds), Modern British History: A Guide to Study and Research, pp14-32.

with that of society in general'.¹⁵ Secondly, there is the need to understand the socio-political background and specific interests of a ruling colonial settler population, such as that of Natal, situated at the geographical seat of the war. Their background was likely to mould a less committed and more vacillating response to a regional conflict than that prevalent in European countries with professional armies, such as Britain, where warfare was considered 'rational in terms of political economy, and the idea of fighting for the conquest of a cause one believed in belonged to the moral virtues'.¹⁶

Thirdly, the socio-political interests of the Natal settlers must be considered as an important factor influencing their response to the war in terms of a dichotomy between individual loyalties and loyalty owed to the state. Kate Watson states of British attitudes during the Napoleonic period:

'while most British people could be defined as loyalist throughout this period, and would willingly define themselves as such, it was a loyalty that was neither static nor uniform but highly adaptive to the particular concerns of the individual'.¹⁷

Watson concluded that loyalism 'could mean many things, then, for many people, according to personal circumstances and conditions'.¹⁸ Similarly, the citizen army tended to incubate resistance to perceptions of arbitrary and unlawful government, and this could translate into questioning of policy and strategy in war.¹⁹

¹⁵ Van Creveld, 'Thoughts on Military History', p550; and see Michael Howard, 'World War I: The Crisis in European History - The Role of the Military Historian', The Journal of Military History, 57/5, October 1993, p127; and see Lider, On the Nature of War, pp108-117; John Shy, 'The Cultural Approach to the History of War', The Journal of Military History, 57/5, October 1993, p13; Jeremy Black, 'Military Organisations and Military Change in Historical Perspective', The Journal of Military History, 62/4, October 1998, p871.

¹⁶ Lider, On the Nature of War, pp129-30; and see Bond, The Pursuit of Victory, p8.

¹⁷ K Watson, 'Bonfires, Bells and Bayonets: British Popular Memory and the Napoleonic Wars', in Taithe and Thornton (eds), War, Phoenix Mill, Sutton Publishing, 1998, p95, and see pp105-7.

¹⁸ Watson, 'Bonfires, Bells and Bayonets', in Taithe and Thornton (eds), War, p109.

¹⁹ Frederick Martin Stern, The Citizen Army: Key to Defence in the Atomic Age, London, Macmillan & Co Ltd, nd, p62.

This dissertation is consequently concerned with more than the purely military aspect of the contribution of the Natal Volunteers. Most importantly, it deals with the interests of the white settlers of the Colony. In this context Black refers to 'shifting concepts of active citizenship',²⁰ a mix complicated in 1893 by the granting to Natal of responsible government. One of the prerequisites of responsible government was the ability to manage a greater proportion of the burden of defence than had been the case under representative government. In the words of Clarke, under such a form of government the 'capability to wage war...became the most important badge of statehood'.²¹ It will be demonstrated in these pages that despite its territory forming one of the crucial theatres of war, the government of Natal was ambivalent about asserting its military capability against the Boers rather than against African challenges to its authority, such as would arise in 1906.

In its emphasis on the social elements of war, an objective of this thesis is to establish a comprehensive profile of the Natal Volunteers and their place in the British-colonial defence structure. Jeffery is understandably critical of the 'fighting' regimental history that 'says nothing about the domestic context of that service, and does not consider the social, political and economic circumstances of the time'.²²

Howard has commented on the baggage that a regimental historian often takes into a regimental history such as this. He states that the regimental historian is almost compelled

'consciously or unconsciously, to sustain the view that his regiment has usually been flawlessly brave and efficient...Without any sense of ill-going he will emphasize the glorious episodes in its history and pass with a light hand over its murkier passages'.²³

While it will be shown that during the course of the Anglo-Boer War the Natal Volunteers accumulated a positive service record, due attention will also be given to the shortcomings of the

²⁰ Black, 'Military Organisations and Military Change', pp882 and 884.

²¹ Clark, Waging War, p14.

²² Keith Jeffery, Ireland and the Great War, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp151-2.

²³ Howard, The Causes of Wars, p209.

force, as well as to the agendas of the colonial government, settler civil society, British policy and military strategy, all of which served to compromise the effectiveness of the Colony's military response.

The Natal Volunteers in Historiographical Context

The Anglo-Boer War and its origins have been examined and dissected by historians from almost every conceivable angle, including a strong emphasis on the response and involvement of specific social groups.²⁴ Emphasis in the major multi-volume contemporary histories of the war (Amery's The Times History of the War in South Africa (1900-1909) and Maurice's History of the War in South Africa (1906)), as well as more recent works, starting with Thomas Pakenham's The Boer War (1979), lies mainly on the British and Boer protagonists. The part played in the war by the Natal Volunteers, and by the Natal colonists of English descent from whom they were drawn, has remained a neglected aspect of Anglo-Boer War historiography. This sentiment is affirmed by Will Bennett, author of Absent-Minded Beggars: Volunteers in the Boer War, the story of another neglected military force, the English Yeomanry and Volunteers. Bennett writes that the Natal Volunteers 'are a complex subject deserving special treatment'.²⁵

The Colony of Natal itself projected an impression in 1899-1902 of whole-hearted effort, reflected

²⁴ See, for example, B Ovendale, 'The Relations between Natal and the Transvaal during the 1890s', MA thesis, University of Natal, 1966; GP Torlage, 'The British Advance and Boer Retreat through Northern Natal, May-June 1900', MA thesis, UNISA, 1992; André Wessels, 'Die Britse Militêre Strategie tydens die Anglo-Boere Oorlog tot en met die Buller-fase', PhD thesis, UOFS, 1986 (the subject of this thesis has been published in edited form as 'A Military-Strategic assessment of the Buller phase, 31 October 1899-10 February 1900, during the Anglo-Boer War', New Contree, 47/September 2000, pp136-174); Iain R Smith, 'The Origins of the South African War (1899-1902): A Re-Appraisal', South African Historical Journal, 22/1990, pp24-5; JH Breytenbach, Geskiedenis van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog 1899-1902, six volumes, Pretoria, Die Staats-drukker, 1969-1996; Nasson, The South African War 1899-1902; John Gooch (ed), The Boer War: Direction, Experience and Image, London, Frank Cass, 2000, Part Two, passim.

²⁵ Will Bennett, Absent-Minded Beggars: Volunteers in the Boer War, Barnsley, Leo Cooper, 1999, x; and see Ian FW Beckett, 'The Local Community and the Amateur Military Tradition: A Case Study of Victorian Buckinghamshire', Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research, part I, 59/1981, pp95 and 97.

in a partisan colonial press, and in an assertive settler community, and in the actions and statements of public officials (colonial and Imperial) and members of the various Volunteer regiments.²⁶ British officials, the colonial government, and the settler inhabitants waxed lyrical in their praise of the Colony's wartime contribution. Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson, the Governor of Natal from August 1893 to March 1901, typified this sentiment in a speech he delivered to welcome the Natal Volunteer contingents to Pietermaritzburg on 8 and 9 October 1900 at the conclusion of a year's service in the field:

'This war, I am glad to think, is now drawing to a close. It was in no way a war of aggression, and you were discharging the primary duty of a soldier - the defence of hearth and home against attack. Since being called out you have well performed your duties. You have fought shoulder to shoulder with the soldiers of the Queen and Volunteers from all parts of Her Majesty's dominions.'²⁷

On 9 October 1900 The Times of London published a glowing tribute in a similar vein:

'...the Natal Volunteers have done yeoman service, and have steadily borne, in common with the Ladysmith relief force and the Natal field force, the main stress of the war which had to be met in Natal'.²⁸

This thesis seeks to narrow the gap in the historical canon on the war between the perception outlined above and the reality of the response to the war. It will do so by teasing out the scattered story of the Natal Volunteers in its social, economic and political context, and in the process will attempt a measured assessment of the actual contribution and level of mobilization on the part of colonial Natal, and a critique of the perceptions and perspective reflected in the sentiments of

²⁶ The Natal Mercury, Natal Volunteer Record: Anglo-Boer War 1899-1900, Robinson and Co, 1900, for example, see the page headings on pp19 and 21: 'Briton to the backbone' and 'An Imperial army'.

²⁷ PAR, MJPW 78, 7894/1900, Special Order, Dartnell, Dundee, 30 September 1900; Natal Carbineers History Centre, Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers': A Personal Narrative of the Natal Campaign 1899-1902', p118; Times of Natal, 1 and 9 October; Natal Witness, 9 and 10 October 1900; Natal Mercury, 11 October 1900; Natal Volunteer Record, pp2 and 15; J Stalker, The Natal Carbineers 1855-1911, Pietermaritzburg and Durban, P Davis and Sons, 1912, p168.

²⁸ The Times, 9 October 1900, enclosure in PAR, CSO 1661, minute paper 8860/1900, 5 November 1900; and see Natal Witness, 11 October 1900.

Hely-Hutchinson and of The Times quoted above.

The military effort of Natal has to be considered in the context of the Colony's situation in South African affairs towards the end of the nineteenth century. Political and popular sentiment in Natal was influenced in divergent directions by cultural connections with Great Britain and the Empire, and by immediate economic and socio-political realities within the region.

Then there is the part which an informally trained Volunteer force with a strong British heritage played in the war effort of the British Army. Would the skills of this force, especially the scouting, escort and reconnaissance ability of its mounted component, be effectively utilised by the conservative British Army that was generally dismissive of the utility of colonial troops? The Natal Volunteers were burdened with a reputation for unreliability, not unlike that heaped on American forces prior to the Civil War.²⁹ Was this reputation deserved, and in the Anglo-Boer War would they demonstrate the grasp of practical military affairs that was often ascribed to colonial irregular forces?³⁰

The first step towards answering this question is to outline and evaluate the inception and evolution of the Volunteer force, and to assess its place within the economic and socio-political dynamics of colonial Natal.

²⁹ Shy, 'The Cultural Approach to the History of War', p17; Also see Mark A Weitz, 'Drill, Training, and the Combat Performance of the Civil War Soldier: Dispelling the Myth of the Poor Soldier, Great Fighter', The Journal of Military History, 62/2, April 1998, pp263-290.

³⁰ John K Dunlop, The Development of the British Army: From the Eve of the South African War to the Eve of the Great War, with Special Reference to the Territorial Force, London, Methuen, 1938, p9.

CHAPTER I

SETTING THE STAGE FOR THE ANGLO-BOER WAR IN NATAL

The Military Preparedness of the Natal Volunteers in the Context of Colonial Defence

'The turnout and smart appearance of the various Volunteer Corps have considerably impressed Tommy Atkins, as well they might.'¹

The nature, composition and preparedness of the Natal Volunteers, the military force available to Natal on the eve of the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, is central to an understanding of the response of the government and settler population of this Colony to the conflict. Before discussing the history of the Volunteers during the war, it is necessary to consider the factors influencing both the position of the Volunteers, and that of Natal, during the prelude to the war. The first of these factors is the history of the Volunteer force itself.²

The British military presence in Natal from 1843 onwards was continuous but maintained at the minimal force levels. Garrison regiments based in the colonial capital, Pietermaritzburg, were predominantly infantry, but included regular cavalry and artillery components.³ This force was

¹ Natal Witness, 14 October 1899.

² The general history of the Natal Volunteer force has not yet received comprehensive attention in a published work, but two dissertations have addressed elements of its evolution. They are MS Coghlan, 'The Natal Volunteer Movement 1846-1873: Inception and Evolution', BA Honours thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1985; and Hamish Paterson, 'The Military Organisation of the Colony of Natal, 1881-1910', MA thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1985.

³ Graham Dominy, 'The Imperial Garrison in Natal with Special Reference to Fort Napier 1843-1914: Its Social, Cultural and Economic Impact', PhD thesis, University of London, 1995, appendix 1; Graham Dominy and Hamish Paterson, 'Fort Napier: The Imperial Base that Shaped the City', in J Laband and R Haswell (eds), Pietermaritzburg 1838-1988: A New Portrait of an African City, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press and Shuter & Shooter, (continued...)

poorly suited to the local task of the protection of settler security. The most important reasons for the garrison's limitations were the large area of responsibility, the small average size of the garrison, especially cavalry, and probably, the fact that the British troops were not familiar with local conditions. The periodic threat of the withdrawal of the garrison prompted the formation of Volunteer regiments from 1854 onwards.⁴ However, for financial and political reasons, the Colony was unable to afford a formal and comprehensive militia system, and relied on the British military presence, however reduced that became.⁵

Following an initial period of positive commitment, the Volunteer force suffered from vacillating public and government support, and was restructured on several occasions, notably in 1872, at which stage it has been described in these unflattering terms:

'A closer look at the Volunteer Force, which formed the backbone of the Colony's defence system, reveals that it was far from reliable. For one thing, as it was composed of able-bodied men who in peacetime performed essential tasks, it could be used only in an emergency because sustained operations would risk economic collapse. In addition, a large question mark hung over its military preparedness and training.'⁶

The deficiencies of the Natal Volunteer force in the field were exposed in November 1873 when

³(...continued)
1988, pp102-9.

⁴ Paterson, 'The Military Organisation of the Colony of Natal', pp24-7; Edgar H Brookes and Colin de B Webb, A History of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1965, pp306-7; Coghlan, 'The Natal Volunteer Movement 1846-1873', chapters 1-4, especially pp57-8. In 1863 a short-lived attempt was made to incorporate Dutch-speaking colonists into the military structure through provision for a Volunteer burgher force, modelled on the Cape Burgher Levies.

⁵ JPC Laband, 'The Danger of Divided Command: British Civil and Military Disputes over the Conduct of the Zululand Campaigns of 1879 and 1888', unpublished conference paper, 'War and Society in Africa', Military Academy, Saldanha, September 2001, p3; CC Eldridge, Victorian Imperialism, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1978, p139.

⁶ Paterson, 'The Military Organisation of the Colony of Natal', pp38-9, and see pp27-8; Coghlan, 'The Natal Volunteer Movement 1846-1873', pp55-66. The Cape Volunteers also earned a reputation for unreliability in the years leading up to the Anglo-Boer War (Keith Surridge, Managing the South African War, 1899-1902: Politicians v Generals, Woodbridge, The Royal Historical Society and The Boydell Press, 1998, p35).

a predominantly colonial force under Major Anthony Durnford of the Royal Engineers failed to apprehend the Hlubi chief, Langalibalele, at Bushman's River Pass. The expedition was adversely affected by the lack of understanding between the procedures of the British Army and the informal approach to active service displayed by the Volunteers.⁷ These contrasting approaches to warfare, evident despite the British heritage apparent in the Volunteers' organisation and social conduct, were to be manifested again in the Anglo-Boer War.

Despite the successful deployment of the Volunteers in the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, the organisation of the force was again overhauled in the 1880s. These reforms were prompted by the sharp decline in commitments outside of episodes of immediate crisis, and included the proposed amalgamation of Volunteer regiments for greater tactical efficiency. Revised Volunteer Laws were promulgated in 1885 and 1888 in an effort to improve Natal's military capability.⁸ In June 1895 further re-organisation prior to the Anglo-Boer War was implemented in terms of responsible government legislation of 1893, and another Volunteer Act was passed, that of 1895.⁹ Many smaller Volunteer regiments in Natal did not survive this process, but by 1899 those that

⁷ See RO Pearse, Barrier of Spears, Cape Town, Howard Timmins Publishers, 1982, chapters 20 and 21; RWF Droogleever, The Road to Isandlwana: Colonel Anthony Durnford in Natal and Zululand, London, Greenhill Books, 1992, pp37-57 and 70-4; RO Pearse et al, Langalibalele and the Natal Carbineers, Ladysmith, Ladysmith Historical Society, 1973, passim.

⁸ Paterson, 'The Military Organisation of the Colony of Natal', p58; Robert Morrell, 'White Farmers, Social Institutions and Settler Masculinity in the Natal Midlands, 1880-1920', PhD thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1996, p123. In July 1888, when attempts were made to raise a Volunteer levy for operations against uSuthu rebels on the Zululand coast, the Governor of Natal, Sir Arthur Havelock, had to admit: 'Colonel [Friend] Addison in Stanger cannot muster more than 20 men. [This would have been from the Victoria Mounted Rifles, later absorbed into the Natal Mounted Rifles.] Can't move yet and doesn't want to go with less than 100' (PRO, WO 32/7839, file 079/6901, Havelock to Lieutenant-General HA Smyth, 6 July 1888).

⁹ See Volunteer Act, 1895, and Regulations under the Same, for the Volunteer Force, Natal, Pietermaritzburg, P Davis & Sons, 1895, particularly pp16-22,25-8,33-4,38-46 and 82; Morrell, 'White Farmers, Social Institutions and Settler Masculinity', p123; Paterson, 'The Military Organisation of the Colony of Natal', p66; see GT Hurst, Short History of the Volunteer Regiments of Natal and East Griqualand, Durban, Knox Publishing Company, 1945, p23, for a detailed summary of Natal Volunteer organisation at the time of the Anglo-Boer War.

had, benefited from consistency of service and establishment.¹⁰

When the proposal for responsible government was seriously debated between 1880 and 1882, one of the stumbling blocks had been the stipulated qualifications by the British government that Natal take responsibility for its own defence, enabling the British garrison to be withdrawn. However, the colonists refused to countenance a militia system, with its conscription option, that would have been necessary to meet this obligation. In fact, when responsible government was granted in 1893, the British government granted the Colony a grace period of five years before its garrison was withdrawn.¹¹ However, by the eve of the Anglo-Boer War, and despite the revised defence legislation of 1885, 1888 and 1895, a militia system had not been implemented, and Natal remained reliant on volunteering.

On the level of military ability, training was rudimentary, and the social aspect of volunteering remained prominent.¹² The following extravagant qualities claimed by a local newspaper for the colonial Volunteers were all too optimistic:

'He is a good shot, a good rider, confident, quick, observant, cautious, tactful, resourceful and intelligent. He is brilliant and sure in attack, resolute and reliable in defence, and

¹⁰ The Marquess of Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry 1816-1919, London, Leo Cooper, IV (1986), p74. Wartime numbers in these surviving regiments were supplemented by short service volunteers enrolling for active service only. When introduced in the British Army in 1870, short service was a significant innovation, but in the more informal Natal Volunteer force there was no distinguishing attributes to this class of recruit (See PAR, NCP 7/4/6, Departmental Reports 1899, Commandant of Volunteers, Annexure A; Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice (et al), History of the War in South Africa, London, Hurst and Blackett, 1906, I, pp11 and 90-1; Ian Knight, Go To Your God Like a Soldier: The British Soldier Fighting for Empire, 1837-1902, London, Greenhill Books, 1996, pp27 and 32).

¹¹ See TRH Davenport, 'The Responsible Government Issue in Natal, 1880-1882', MA thesis, UNISA, 1948, pp31-2,38,56,84-5,99,101,112,119-121,137 and 146.

¹² BW Martin in Anon., A Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith: Unpublished Letters from the Siege, Ladysmith, Ladysmith Historical Society, No 4, 1970, p27; Hurst, Short History of the Volunteer Regiments of Natal and East Griqualand, pp23-4; Coghlan, 'The Natal Volunteer Movement 1846-1873', p5 and chapter 4. There is an air of improvisation about a Carbineer notice of 26 September 1899 for recruit drill on alternative evenings for recruits who had enrolled within the previous three months (Natal Witness, 26 September 1899).

above all, he is an ideal scout.¹³

British military opinion that local colonial forces were 'of uncertain value', was probably a fair comment on the potential of the Natal Volunteer force, and associated with this perception was the further uncertainty, in the wake of the responsible government debate, regarding the scale of the Volunteer response in terms of recruitment.¹⁴ Out of a total manpower of 12 000 in Natal, only 2 000 were actually liable for service in 1899. (See pages 130-1.)¹⁵

The established Volunteer force was backed up by a further reserve force, the rifle associations, whose peacetime purpose was to promote the shooting skills of potential or actual Volunteer recruits. Gymkhanas served a similar purpose for equestrian skills. In wartime the rifle associations could be called upon for local defence.¹⁶ A mounted Burgher Force, established in 1863 for the rural security concerns of Natal Afrikaner settlers, appears to have been moribund by the time of the Anglo-Boer War, and has not been considered here.¹⁷

The Natal Ministry, Settler Society and the Volunteers

**'A citizen army breaks down the barrier that
separates the armed forces, their tasks, and their
problems from the personal experience**

¹³ Times of Natal, 29 January 1900; also see Clement H Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal: Being an Account of the Boer War of 1899-1902, as Viewed by a Natal Colonist, London, SW Partridge and Co, 1900, pp34-5.

¹⁴ Royal Commission on the War in South Africa, London, His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1903, I, Report of His Majesty's Commissioners, p82.

¹⁵ Eric Goetzsche, Rough But Ready: An Official History of the Natal Mounted Rifles, and its Antecedent and Associated Units, 1854-1969, Durban, 1969, p92.

¹⁶ See PAR, MJPW 72, minute paper L&W 5087/1899, Government Notice 560/1899 and 635/1899; PAR, MJPW 71, minute paper L&W 4341/1899, Benningfield to Hime, 4 October 1899; PAR, MJPW 90, Hime to WC Stockill, 6 August 1901; Hurst, Short History of the Volunteer Regiments of Natal and East Griqualand, pp116-7.

¹⁷ See John Laband and Ian Knight, The War Correspondents: The Anglo-Zulu War, Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1996, p3.

The Volunteer force was a product of the settler community of Natal, and its conduct was managed by the colonial government in Pietermaritzburg. The structure of this settler community and government closely followed British and, to a lesser extent, European patterns, and the Natal settler military establishment therefore drew from the theories and structures that underpinned military evolution in that context. On a local Natal level the British garrison played an important part in replicating this social pattern in the English-speaking settler elite.¹⁹

The divergence, common in British colonial wars, between political and military interests, manifested itself in Natal during the Anglo-Boer War.²⁰ It invites a comparison with the English Volunteer movement during the Napoleonic Wars, when issues of pervasive localism, exploitation by elites, and the imposition of army control and supervision, complicated a coherent response to a threat of French invasion.²¹

Despite the British military presence, towards the end of the nineteenth century British policy in southern Africa had to contend with assertive local colonial authorities such as that in Natal.²²

¹⁸ Stern, The Citizen Army, p280.

¹⁹ Graham Dominy, 'The Making of the Rough and the Respectable: The Imperial Garrison and the Wider Society in Colonial Natal', South African Historical Journal, 37/November 1997, pp48-9 and 65; and see Dominy, 'The Imperial Garrison in Natal', chapter 6.

²⁰ Paret, 'Justifying the Obligation of Military Service', pp119-120; Jock Haswell, Citizen Armies, London, Peter Davies, 1973, pp17 and 20.

²¹ Cookson, 'The English Volunteer Movement of the French Wars', pp867,871-2,874-5,878,882 and 884-5. Cookson comments that 'at this time volunteering was one of several developments which brought Britain recognizably close to 'total' war in terms of its population's war-involvement'. On 22 June 1887 the Pietermaritzburg newspaper, the Natal Witness, printed an article entitled 'Volunteers and their Work', originally published in an English journal entitled Nineteenth Century (May 1887) that referred not to the Natal Volunteers, but to the English Volunteer movement (Natal Witness, 22 June 1887).

²² John Benyon, 'Main Show or Side-Show? Natal and the South African War', The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, 27/1, January 1999, p28; and see Surridge, Managing the South African War, pp4-5. John Tosh, in The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New
(continued...)

Power was exerted by the ruling settler elite, representing the top tier in the diverse political structures which administered the self-governing dominions and colonies.²³ This group was a class elite within the settler minority in Natal, but more importantly, it represented the general interests of the overall settler community which was itself a racial elite in the context of the African majority.²⁴ The genealogy of a sample of the Volunteer force in colonial Natal reveals a foundation in a settler culture and political system of British origin.²⁵ According to Connerton, the actions, rules and beliefs of an elite such as that which ruled colonial Natal functioned in the

²²(...continued)

Directions in the Study of Modern History, Harlow, Longman-Pearson Educational, 2000, pp6-7,15 and 22-3, emphasises the importance of the identification of the historian with past social systems such as that of the Natal settlers.

²³ Surridge, Managing the South African War, pp5-6; Robert Morrell, 'Preface', in Robert Morrell (ed), Changing Men in Southern Africa, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 2001, xi, Robert Morrell, 'The Times of Change: Men and Masculinity in South Africa', in Morrell (ed), Changing Men in Southern Africa, pp9 and 12; David Cannadine, Ornamentalism: How the British saw their Empire, London, Allen Lane and The Penguin Press, 2001, p36. See Gregory Hanlon, 'The Decline of a Provincial Military Aristocracy: Siena 1560-1740', Past & Present, 155/May 1997, passim, for evidence that the existence of regional governing elites was not a uniquely local phenomenon. Also see John L Comaroff, 'Reflections on the colonial state, in South Africa and elsewhere: factions, fragments, facts and fictions', in Abebe Zegeye (ed), Social Identities in the New South Africa, Kwela Books and History Online, 2001, pp42,59 and 61.

²⁴ The racial elite forged by settler community in Natal is examined in a comprehensive recent study of the evolution and structure of the South African racial state. See Timothy Keegan, Colonial South Africa and the Origins of the Racial Order, London, Leicester University Press, 1996, pp6,10,281,283,285,287 and 293.

²⁵ Cannadine, in Ornamentalism, xviii-xix, pp4,12 and 14, has made a detailed study of the Empire as a social structure, and its place as a vehicle for the extension of British social structures. On a Natal regional level, Anna Bjorvig has made a study of social stratification and political influence of the settler elite in Durban in the period 1824 to 1910, although only one of the individuals studied (out of a group of 35 mayors), Charles Henwood, is specifically identified as a Volunteer officer with the Natal Mounted Rifles (AC Bjorvig, 'Durban 1824-1910: The Formation of a Settler Elite and its Role in the Development of a Colonial City', PhD thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1994, chapters 1,2 and 3, with particular reference to pp98-9 for Henwood; and see Anon., The Natal Who's Who, Durban, The Natal Who's Who Publishing Co, 1906, p90). Also see KA Heard, 'Local Government in Town and Country in Natal, 1847-1856', MA thesis, Natal University College, 1943, pp12,14 and 128.

manner of an 'implicit background narrative'.²⁶ The families represented in the ranks of the Volunteer regiments were drawn from the agricultural, commercial, legal and government sectors in the Colony, and also furnished many of the members of the settler ruling strata in Natal. This group, whose vested interests included economic concerns and security issues involving the African majority, sought to manipulate Natal's participation in the Anglo-Boer War, and to direct Volunteer involvement.²⁷ Most of its members fell into an upper middle class and middle class, as defined by Patricia Scott in the context of mid-Victorian Grahamstown.²⁸

Local political assertiveness in Natal accompanied a general spread and intensification of settler military, economic and cultural dominion, especially from 1893 onwards when the granting of responsible government freed the Natal legislature from much of the direct control previously exercised by the Imperial Colonial Office, which was seeking to minimise its share of the burden of the defence of its colonies, especially one as insignificant and economically unproductive as Natal. The big question was how much of the burden for its defence the Colony was prepared to shoulder, and how much political influence this gave its government.²⁹

Cultural and political affinity, as well as Imperial honours, did not necessarily translate into

²⁶ Paul Connerton, How Societies Remember, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p18.

²⁷ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Natal Carbineers service register, c1880s to 1920s; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p9; The Natal Who's Who, pp70,80,120-1,127,140,145,154,162,174,176,184,194-5,199 and 212; and Olsen, Rider Fraser (ed), Who's Who in Natal: with which is incorporated Women of Natal, Durban, The Knox Printing and Publishing Company, 1933, pp139,141,175,194,206-7,222 and 270, both feature Natal Carbineer names from Natal settler society who served in the Anglo-Boer War, while those featured in The Natal Who's Who, pp13,18,24,27,43,53,66,71,99,139 and 147-8, and in Olsen, pp31,44-5,66,78,132,155,233-4 and 272, are all prominent members of the DLI, the NMR the NFA, the NRR, and the BMR.

²⁸ Scott is cited in Dominy, 'The Making of the Rough and the Respectable', p56.

²⁹ See Black, 'Military Organisations and Military Change', p872; Eldridge, Victorian Imperialism, pp43,52-3,83-4,94-5,99,104-5,126,130 and 172-3; Bill Guest, 'Towards responsible government, 1879-93', in Andrew Duminy and Bill Guest (eds), Natal and Zululand from Earliest Times to 1910: A New History, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal and Shuter & Shooter, 1989, p239; Surridge, Managing the South African War, p23.

unquestioning commitment to British political and military interests in the region.³⁰ Although members of the inaugural Natal responsible government ministry of 1893, for example, were all, bar one, Knight Commanders of the Order of St Michael and St George (KCMG),³¹ this was nevertheless a local elite whose patriotic national Imperial consciousness was countered by an emergent desire for political autonomy and local identity.³²

Morrell, in considering the growth of militarism in the Colony towards the end of the nineteenth century, firmly establishes a connection between the civilian and military in terms of common personnel, and the preoccupation in the Colony with domestic military issues.³³ These were closely associated with perceived dangers facing Natal, especially from the Boers and the African population, and accounted for the strong civil and political agenda in the formulation and conduct

³⁰ This point is made forcefully by Cannadine in Ornamentalism, p141.

³¹ These officials were Sir John Robinson, the Prime Minister, Sir Thomas Murray, Minister of Public Works, Sir George Sutton, the Colonial Treasurer, and Sir Frederick Moor, Minister of Native Affairs. The sole exception was the Attorney-General, the Right Honourable Harry Escombe, PCKC (PAR, photograph collection, c8093; and see The Natal Who's Who, pp140 and 145; Steve Dymond, Researching British Military Medals: A Practical Guide, Marlborough, Wilt, The Crowood Press, 1999, p10, and Owen Letchen, Medals and Decorations of the British Commonwealth of Nations, Cape Town, Hortors Ltd, 1941, pp2-3 and 14-19, for a brief outline of the honours award structure).

³² JE Cookson, 'The English Volunteer Movement of the French Wars, 1793-1815: Some Contexts', The Historical Journal, 32/4, 1989, p868. Also apparent was the ambivalent relationship between Volunteers and government (pp869-70). Also see Jeffery, Ireland and the Great War, p14, for comment on the motivation of political advantage in Irish participation on the British side in World War I.

³³ Morrell, 'White Farmers, Social Institutions and Settler Masculinity', pp119-120 and 130. Morrell (pp140-3) pays particular attention to the most renowned Natal Carbineer of the Anglo-Boer War generation, Duncan McKenzie. According to Ferguson, The Pity of War, pp1-30, this so-called 'culture of militarism' was generally in evidence at the time of the Anglo-Boer War, and was an important factor behind the outbreak and perpetuation of World War I. Also see Ron Viney, 'Officers and Gentlemen: Masculinity, English-speaking South African Colonial Troops and the British Army during the South African War, 1899-1902', unpublished conference paper, UOFS, October 1999, passim; Bertrand Taithe and Tim Thornton, 'Identifying War: Conflict and Self-definition in Western Europe', in Taithe and Thornton (eds), War, pp8 and 71.

of military policy.³⁴

However, this thesis will contend that while the Natal settlers employed the Volunteers to further parochial interests prior to and during the Anglo-Boer War, martial enthusiasm for the war itself was to be muted and short-lived, and was far from a dictionary definition of militarism as the 'glorification of the ideals of a professional military class'.³⁵ However, given the fact that the Natal elite did closely mirror British society, it is reasonable to assume that in the Colony there existed a sympathy for 'a more military lifestyle' along the lines encouraged in Britain towards the end of the nineteenth century to remedy 'Britain's apparent demographic and international decline'.³⁶

The close relationship between civil and military concerns is evident in the involvement of Sir Albert Hime, Prime Minister of Natal from June 1899 to August 1903, and Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson, Governor of the Colony from August 1893 to March 1901, in the conduct of Natal policy in the build-up to the Anglo-Boer War and the military campaign of the Natal Volunteer forces.³⁷ Hely-Hutchinson's position was particularly important. According to Cannadine, governors, 'as the direct, personal representative of the sovereign...were at the apex of the colonial social hierarchy, they legitimated and completed it, and they linked it directly and personally to the monarch and the mother country'.³⁸

In the case of Natal there was certainly 'circumstantial evidence' to suggest a powerful role for settler society in the control of political and military affairs. The figure of Hime, for example, who

³⁴ Morrell, 'White Farmers, Social Institutions and Settler Masculinity', pp120-1 and 137. See Cannadine, Ornamentalism, p27, for comment on settler social hierarchy superimposed over the 'hierarchy of race and colour' that prevailed in the Colony.

³⁵ Reader's Digest Universal Dictionary, London, The Reader's Digest Association, 1987, p979; and see Woodfine, "'Unjustifiable and Illiberal": Military Patriotism and Civilian Values in the 1790s', Taithe and Thornton (eds), War, p85.

³⁶ Keith Surridge, 'More than a Great Poster: Lord Kitchener and the Image of the Military Hero', Historical Research, 74/185, August 2001, pp306-7.

³⁷ Morrell, 'White Farmers, Social Institutions and Settler Masculinity', p139; and see The Natal Who's Who, p92..

³⁸ Cannadine, Ornamentalism, p32.

loomed large in the relationship between the Natal government and London, was a prominent example of the power elite. He had attended the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, had a brother who rose to the rank of Major-General in the Royal Engineers, and he had been given the responsibility for the defence of Natal during the Anglo-Zulu War.³⁹ Hime was sympathetic towards the concerns of the settler military milieu from which the Natal Volunteers were drawn. These concerns were evident in the maintenance of a civilian military capacity in the form of the Volunteers.⁴⁰

The promotion of settler interests became more apparent from 1897 when a farming element secured pivotal positions in the Natal government, joining commercial and professional elements in exerting a powerful influence on policy.⁴¹ There were three farmers in Sir John Robinson's five-

³⁹ Morrell, 'The Family Man and Empire: Sir Albert Hime of Natal, 1875-1903', Journal of Natal and Zulu History, 18/1998, pp24-43 Both Hime and another Binns minister, Henry Bale, were members of the virulently anti-Kruger South African League (Brookes and Webb, A History of Natal, p198). In the wider context of the Empire as a whole, Cain and Hopkins pay close attention to what they consider the crucial role of the English gentleman in the dissemination of the Imperial mission. They make the point, for example, that 'Britain's representatives abroad shared the social origins and values of their counterparts in the metropole' (PJ Cain and AG Hopkins, British Imperialism 1688-2000, London, Longman, 2001, p48, and see pp38-47).

⁴⁰ Robert Morrell, 'White Farmers, Social Institutions and Settler Masculinity', p119; and see Marwick, The Nature of History, pp115 and 159, for a broad summary of the question of class. There is a strong suggestion here of a class hegemony that was also evident in the English heritage of the Natal Volunteer movement.

⁴¹ Morrell (ed), Political Economy and Identities, ch2; Bill Guest and John M Sellers, 'Introduction', in Bill Guest and John M Sellers (eds), Enterprise and Exploitation in a Victorian Colony: Aspects of the Economic and Social History of Colonial Natal, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1985, passim. Also see John Lambert, 'The impoverishment of the Natal peasantry', in Guest and Sellers (eds), Enterprise and Exploitation, pp287-8,291,295-6; Guest, 'Towards responsible government', in Duminy and Guest (eds) Natal and Zululand from Earliest Times, pp233-4 and 244-5; Benedict Carton, Blood from Your Children: The Colonial Origins of Generational Conflict in South Africa, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 2000, pp27-41; and see Uma Mesthrie, 'White Dominance and Control in Natal 1893-1903', Journal of Natal and Zulu History, VII, 1984, passim; Ken Smith, The Changing Past: Trends in South African Historical Writing, Johannesburg, Southern Book Publishers, 1998, p174; PS Thompson, Natalians First: Separatism in South Africa 1909-1961, Johannesburg, Southern Book Publishers, 1990, vii and chapter 1; Rodney Davenport and Christopher Saunders, South Africa: A Modern

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strong Natal cabinet (October 1893 to February 1897): Frederick Moor (Secretary for Native Affairs), George Sutton (Colonial Treasurer) and Thomas Murray (Minister of Lands and Works).⁴² Several senior officers in Volunteer regiments, such as Colonel Edward Greene, the Commanding Officer of the Natal Carbineers, and Major Duncan McKenzie, a staff officer in the same regiment, held political office or occupied prominent positions in the civil service and settler society.⁴³

One of the most prominent pioneer settlers who also played a leading part in the formative years of the Volunteer force was Charles Barter, whose fifty-year career in Natal included command of a Volunteer regiment, the Karkloof Carbineers, and a ten-year tenure as an MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) for Pietermaritzburg County. He was also in command of the Volunteers who served at Bushman's River Pass in 1873.⁴⁴ In the 1880s and 1890s Natal Volunteer ranks were replete with members of prominent settler families. In the case of the Natal Carbineers these included: Shepstone ('Native' administration); Erskine (the civil service) and Foxon (law), to name but a few.⁴⁵ Greene practised law in Pietermaritzburg with Henry Bale, later

⁴¹(...continued)

History, London, MacMillan, 2000, pp113-120; Tosh, The Pursuit of History, p140. Best calls this the primacy of 'sectional social interests over military efficiency' (Geoffrey Best, War and Society in Revolutionary Europe, 1770-1870, Glasgow, Fontana, 1982, p237).

⁴² John Lambert, Betrayed Trust: Africans and the State in Colonial Natal, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1995, p67.

⁴³ Morrell, 'White Farmers, Social Institutions and Settler Masculinity', pp121-2 and 138; Coghlan, 'The Natal Volunteer Movement 1846-1873', pp6-7; The Natal Who's Who, pp80,127,140 and 145; Olsen (ed), Who's Who in Natal, p110; AG McKenzie, Delayed Action: being Something of the Life and Times of the Late Brigadier-General Sir Duncan McKenzie, the Author, 1967, pp1-34; Dictionary of South African Biography, Kaapstad, Tafelberg Uitgewers and Human Sciences Research Council, II (1972), pp421-2; RJH King, Along the Road to Fort Nottingham, Nottingham Road, the author, 1987, pp24-9.

⁴⁴ See Carmel Rickard, 'Charles Barter: Natal Diary, 14 August 1852 - 26 April 1853', BA Honours thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1975, pp15-30, and especially pp20-1. The Methleys were another Natal pioneer gentry family with connections to the Volunteers (See G Dominy, 'The Methleys of the Natal Midlands: the making of a colonial gentry family', Natal Museum Journal of Humanities, 2/November 1990, pp163-181.

⁴⁵ Morrell, 'White Farmers, Social Institutions and Settler Masculinity', pp126 and 138-9;
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Chief Justice of Natal, and sat in the Legislative Assembly from 1893.⁴⁶ Harry Escombe, Attorney-General in Robinson's administration and briefly Prime Minister in 1897, served in the Royal Durban Rifles during the Anglo-Zulu War, and at different times commanded both the Natal Naval Volunteers and the Durban Volunteer Artillery.⁴⁷

The Attorney-General of Natal from 1857 to 1890 and Chief Justice from 1890 to 1901, Sir Michael Gallwey, who had a son serving in the Natal Carbineers, was another prominent public personality to have an association with the Volunteers. He was a shareholder in the Natal Land and Colonisation Company that owned vast tracts of Natal in the mid- to late-nineteenth century.⁴⁸

Further settler families with connections to the Volunteer force include those of Speirs, Raw, Lugg, Nicholson, Comrie, Hackland, Mapstone, Richards, Macfarlane, Smallie, Weighton, Baynes and Lyle.⁴⁹ One family that has attracted recent academic attention is the Ralfe dynasty from the

⁴⁵(...continued)

The Natal Who's Who, pp70 and 177-8; Olsen (ed), Who's Who in Natal, pp95-6; and see John Lambert, Betrayed Trust, p60. Another prominent pioneer settler family were the Campbells. Although they do not have a direct Volunteer association, the story of the patriarch of this family, William Campbell, a Byrne emigrant, reveals the Victorian values, diligent work ethic and fortitude that typified the successful colonist. See GK Tatham, 'William Campbell: His Life and the Colony of Natal in his Times', BA Honours thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1986, passim.

⁴⁶ Anon., Twentieth Century Impressions of Natal: Its People, Commerce, Industries and Resources, Natal, Lloyds Greater Britain Publishing, 1906, pp47 and 128-9. Also see Natal Witness, 28 September 1904, for a detailed record of Bale's career to that date.

⁴⁷ MH Comrie, 'The Ministry of Harry Escombe 1897', BA Honours thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1965, pp3 and 5-6.

⁴⁸ The Natal Who's Who, p72; Lambert, Betrayed Trust, p15; Twentieth Century Impressions of Natal, pp127-8.

⁴⁹ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Smallie and Weighton Papers, passim; Natal Carbineers History Centre, Raw family records, passim; The Natal Who's Who, pp21,82,120-1,162 and 214; Ruth Gordon, The Place of the Elephant, Pietermaritzburg, Shuter & Shooter in association with Simon van der Stel Foundation, 1981, p106; Walter A Speirs, Ox-wagon to Space Travel, passim; EF Speirs, Menfolk the Speirs Family, George, nd, passim; Twentieth
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Estcourt-Weenen district, who emerge as one of the 'landed gentry' of the Colony. Of this family, one, Robert Ralfe, Junior, served with the Weenen Yeomanry Cavalry, and another, Harry Ralfe, was an officer in the Weenen County Rifle Association.⁵⁰ There were also four members of this family in the ranks of the Natal Carbineers between the mid-1890s and the 1920s.⁵¹

Other regiments, such as the Border Mounted Rifles, the Natal Mounted Rifles, the Durban Light Infantry, and the Umvoti Mounted Rifles exhibited a similar pattern.⁵²

These Volunteer members of the upper strata of Natal colonial society rubbed shoulders with officers of the British garrison in Pietermaritzburg, which 'played an important part in underpinning the colonial state structure.'⁵³ Despite this social association, military strategy in the Anglo-Boer War was to be complicated by the blending of military and political constraints.⁵⁴

⁴⁹(...continued)

Century Impressions of Natal, pp237, 252-4 and 583; HC Lugg, A Natal Family Looks Back, Durban, TW Griggs & Co, 1970, passim; Alice Hope, Yesterdays: The Story of Richmond, Durban, Alpha Graphic, 1970, pp13-17, 33-6 and 53-6; Charmian Coulson, Beaulieu-on-Illovo, Richmond, Natal: Its People and History, Richmond, Richmond Women's League and Institute, 1986, pp171-186, 192-8 and 222-6; RO Pearse, Joseph Baynes: Pioneer, Pietermaritzburg, Shuter & Shooter and The Baynesfield Board of Administration, 1981, pp51 and 58.

⁵⁰ Julia Edith Ralfe, 'Progress in Natal: The Re-Gentrification of a Settler Family, 1850-1910', BA Honours thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1998, pp36 and 51; Natal Witness, 25 November 1999.

⁵¹ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Natal Carbineers service register.

⁵² George Molyneux and James Scott Wylie of the DLI were both MLAs, and Wylie practised in the legal firm of Shepstone and Wylie in Durban. H Sparks MLA, of the NMR, operated the cold storage company of Sparks and Young in Durban, and JF Rethman and George Leuchars of the BMR and UMR respectively, were both MLAs, with Leuchars later filling the position of Secretary of Native Affairs and Minister of Lands and Works in the Natal ministry of Sir George Sutton, 1903-4 (Olsen, Who's Who in Natal, Knox 1933, pp132,175,233 and 272; Twentieth Century Impressions of Natal, pp48, 50-1,406-15,435 and 451).

⁵³ Dominy, 'The Imperial Garrison in Natal', p17.

⁵⁴ Black, 'Military Organisations and Military Change', pp886-8; Keegan, War and Our World, p68. See Jeremy Black, 'The Military Revolution II: Eighteenth Century War', in

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During the course of the war, when the Natal government sought to maintain and defend control over its own colonial forces, it struggled to establish a harmonious relationship with the British government and military that controlled operations.

British Policy and Natal Economic Interests in South Africa

**'Men of European stock, who had lived cheek by jowl
for more than a generation, and who were well-disposed
towards each other, did not approve of a wedge
being driven between them.'⁵⁵**

The debate surrounding the causes of the Anglo-Boer War, the sequence of events leading up to it, and the conduct of the war itself, have been covered in depth by numerous historians, with an upsurge of writing to mark the centenary of the conflict.⁵⁶ From the perspective of the Colony of Natal, it was the ramifications of the shift in the focus of power in the sub-continent from the Cape to the Transvaal that was to have an immediate impact on the government in Pietermaritzburg during the slide to war in the late 1890s.

For the British government the relationships with its colonies and dominions was important since

⁵⁴(...continued)

Townshend (ed), The Oxford History of Modern War, pp51-2, for comment on the impact of early modern European warfare on civilian populations.

⁵⁵ FR Carroll, 'The Growth and Co-ordination of Pro-War Sentiment in Natal Before the Second Anglo-Boer War', MA thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1981, p58.

⁵⁶ See, for example, Ritchie Ovendale, 'Profit or Patriotism: Natal, The Transvaal, and the Coming of the Second Anglo-Boer War', The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, VIII/3, May 1980, passim; Shula Marks, 'Scrambling for Africa', Journal of African History, 23/1982, passim; Smith, 'The Origins of the South African War (1899-1902): A Re-Appraisal', passim; Andrew Porter, 'The South African War (1899-1902): Context and Motive Reconsidered', Journal of African History, 31/1990, passim; Ian Phimister, 'Unscrambling the Scramble for Southern Africa: The Jameson Raid and the South African War Revisited', South African Historical Journal, 28/1993, passim; Thomas Pakenham, The Boer War, London, Macdonald, 1979, passim; Davenport and Saunders, South Africa: A Modern History, chapter 8; Owen Coetzer, The Road to Infamy, Rivonia, Waterman Publications, 1996; Iain R Smith, The Origins of the South African War, 1899-1902, London, Longman, 1996, passim; and Nasson, The South African War 1899-1902, passim.

the war fell in the middle of a period in which Australians, New Zealanders and white South Africans began asserting new-found nationalisms.⁵⁷ The Imperial context of this development lay in the rise of the concept of Free Trade, which devalued colonial possession in British eyes, and reduced the need for close political control over the colonies. It was this political disengagement that accelerated the granting of responsible or self-government to white colonies of settlement, such as the Australian colonies of New South Wales and Victoria in 1852, and the dominion of Canada in 1867.⁵⁸

There was renewed British interest in the southern African region in the 1890s, and a second attempt at a confederation of colonies of white settlement in southern Africa, after the failure of the first in 1879, prompted by the discovery of mineral wealth in the northern Cape Colony and the Transvaal.⁵⁹ Iain Smith makes the important point that this development meant that the

⁵⁷ John Eddy and Deryck Schreuder (eds), The Rise of Colonial Nationalism, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1988, back cover and p1; and see Donal Lowry, 'Introduction: not just a "teatime war"', in Lowry (ed), The South African War Reappraised, p14; Bennett, Absent-Minded Beggars, pp8-9.

⁵⁸ Cain and Hopkins, British Imperialism 1688-2000, pp24-5 and 231-5; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1973 edition, volume 2, p789, volume 4, p738; Eldridge, Victorian Imperialism, pp4-6,26,31,41 and 54. The contextual impact, especially economic, of the evolution of British Imperial policy in the mid-nineteenth century on colonial security is a subject worthy of separate and detailed study, but the reader is referred for authoritative studies in this field to PJ Cain and AG Hopkins, British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion 1688-1914, London, Longman, 1993, and British Imperialism 1688-2000. TE Kirk has examined this phenomenon in the context of the Cape Colony in the period 1846 to 1854 (TE Kirk, 'Self-Government and Self-Defence in South Africa: The Inter-relations Between British and Cape Politics 1846-1854', PhD thesis, Oxford, 1972, iii-iv, pp12-15,19,22-33 and 35-6).

⁵⁹ Cecil Headlam, 'The Failure of Confederation, 1871-1881', in Eric A Walker (ed), The Cambridge History of the British Empire, VIII, Cambridge, at the University Press, 1963, pp459-497; Richard Cope, Ploughshare of War: The Origins of the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1999, chapter 3; Morrell et al, 'Colonialism and the Establishment of White Domination', in Robert Morrell (ed), Political Economy and Identity in KwaZulu-Natal: Historical and Social Perspectives, Durban, Indicator Press, p50, and see pp49 and 53; Iain Smith, The Origins of the South African War, 1899-1902, London, Longman, 1996, pp21-51; Cain and Hopkins, British Imperialism, pp326-7; David Steele, 'Salisbury and the Soldiers', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, pp617; Laband and Knight, The War Correspondents: The Anglo-Zulu War, p1. Several officials in the Natal colonial executive, including Colonel Hime, were also members of the South African League (Benyon, (continued...))

Transvaal 'replaced the Cape as the new centre of political gravity and threatened to draw all the rest of South Africa away from British influence towards dependence upon it'.⁶⁰ However, how would Natal interpret its interests in the light of this development? They would not necessarily dovetail with British Imperial strategies such as confederation.

In the British Empire as a whole the Anglo-Boer War became a test of Imperial sentiment in her colonies of settlement.⁶¹ In Britain the positive response of local Volunteers and those from the settler colonies was interpreted as confirmation of Whitehall's policy in South Africa, although this response was to be marred by controversy over dominion allegations that the War Office had rejected the offer of mounted troops, that were to prove so essential, in favour of infantry.⁶²

⁵⁹(...continued)

'Main Show or Side-Show', p34). Volunteer involvement in politics was also a factor in the English Volunteer movement (Ian Beckett, 'The Problem of Military Discipline in the Volunteer Force, 1859-1899', Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research, 56/1978, pp71-2). See Frank Emery, 'Early Colonists' Perceptions of Natal', Journal of Natal and Zulu History, VIII/1985, pp1-9, for comment on the embryonic evolution of the settler community in Natal.

⁶⁰ Smith, 'The Origins of the South African War', p57.

⁶¹ LS Amery (ed), The Times History of the War in South Africa 1899-1902, London, Sampson Low, Marston and Co, I-VI (1900-1909), pp25 and 30-1; Hendrik van der Walt, 'Die Suid-Afrikaanse Republiek in die Britse Buiteland en Koloniale Beleid (1881-1899)', Archives Yearbook for South African History, 26/1, 1963, chapter 4. Also see Keith Jeffery, 'Kruger's farmer's, Strathcona's Horse, Sir George Clarke's camels and the Kaiser's battleships: the impact of the South African War on imperial defence', in Lowry (ed), The South African War Reappraised, chapter 11; Edward T Cook, Rights and Wrongs of the Transvaal War, London, Edward Arnold, 1901, pp329-342; Donal Lowry, '"The Boers were the beginning of the end?": the wider impact of the South African War', in Lowry (ed), The South African War Reappraised, pp203-7 and pp225-7; Hew Strachan, preface in Bill Nasson, The South African War 1899-1902, viii; Bennett, Absent-Minded Beggars, pp146-166.

⁶²LM Field, The Forgotten War: Australian Involvement in the South African Conflict of 1899-1902, Carlton, Victoria, Aus, Melbourne University Press, 1979, pp22-3; Jacqueline Beaumont, 'The Times at War, 1899-1902', in Lowry (ed), The South African War Reappraised, p75; and see Jonathan Hyslop, 'Jandamarra, My Great-Grandfather and the British Empire: Reflections on Family History, Colonial War, and the Making of Men and Women', in Morrell (ed), Changing Men in Southern Africa, p143; Bennett, Absent-minded Beggars, chapters 4,5 and 7; Royal Commission on the War in South Africa, I, Report, pp77-8. The root of this 'snub' appears to have been a mistaken assumption that by regular cavalry

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This thesis will investigate whether Natal made a similarly positive response.

There were several counteractive forces that influenced the level of initial and sustained commitment, especially a military commitment, on the part of the Colony. These included an emergent nationalism and desire for autonomy versus imperial loyalty, a debate colonists did not consider as necessarily incompatible.⁶³ The British government had, for example, exhibited considerable flexibility in negotiations with the Colony of Natal over the granting of responsible government in 1893.⁶⁴ However, this dichotomy was to prove a problem, and the colonial government of Natal was also to clash with the British Army's conduct of the war on its territory, both in terms of political strategy and military operations.⁶⁵

Although a superficial impression of the war effort suggests that Natal colonists were generally compliant towards British policy in the region, the war was to put significant strain on that

⁶²(...continued)

was also meant mounted infantry, actual or potential.

⁶³ Eddy and Schreuder, The Rise of Colonial Nationalism, p2, 6-8. These counter-active forces were also evident in the established dominions such as Canada. See Jeffery, 'Kruger's farmers', in Lowry (ed), The South African War Reappraised, pp190-3. According to Lowry, there was also a parallel in the evolution of Irish sovereignty in the decades following the Anglo-Boer War (Lowry, "'The Boers were the beginning of the end'", in Lowry (ed), The South African War Reappraised, pp231-236).

⁶⁴ Benjamin Kline, 'The Establishment of Responsible Government in Natal 1887-93: The Legacy of Apartheid', Journal of Natal and Zulu History, IX/1986, pp55-70. According to John Lambert, this British reluctance to become entangled in Natal affairs can be trace back to the 1850s (Lambert, Betrayed Trust, p55).

⁶⁵ Black, 'War and the World, 1450-2000', pp669-70; and 'Military Organisations and Military Change', pp871 and 886-8; Donald Denoon, A Grand Illusion: The Failure of Imperial Policy in the Transvaal Colony during the Period of Reconstruction 1900-05, London, Longmans, 1973, p251; Keegan, War and Our World, p68; Bond, The Pursuit of Victory, pp6-7. Bond asserts that the military generally held the upper hand in the pre-World War I period. See Black, 'The Military Revolution II', in Townshend (ed), The Oxford History of Modern War, pp51-2, for comment on the impact of early modern European warfare on civilian populations; and Russell F Weigley, 'The Soldier, the Statesman and the Military Historian', The Journal of Military History, 63/4, October 1999, p808, for a comparable context in the modern history of the United States.

relationship.⁶⁶ The Prussian military strategist, von Clausewitz, addressed this issue in terms of the relationship between political ends and military means.⁶⁷ He suggested that in order for politicians and the military to avoid working at cross-purposes, 'political leadership needed to possess a good general grasp of military policy and to be in constant consultation with the military command'.⁶⁸ This often did not apply in the immediate context of British political and military operations in Natal, where, for example, local attitudes towards such issues as interaction with the British military hierarchy, the commitment of settlers to military service, and the settler willingness to fund the war were thrown into sharp relief.⁶⁹ The outcome was the lack of a co-ordinated civil-military policy towards the 'Transvaal Crisis' as it evolved between 1896 and 1899.⁷⁰

The threat of war in the 1890s clashed with a genuine spirit of co-existence between Natal and the Transvaal, accommodating the Colony's British settler milieu and the practical realities of essential trade ties.⁷¹ There was a delicate balance in the pre-Jameson Raid (January 1896) period between a need for economic stability, and loyalty to Imperial interests.⁷² This was especially so

⁶⁶ Denoon, A Grand Illusion, pp1 and 5.

⁶⁷ Howard, Clausewitz, p34.

⁶⁸ Howard, Clausewitz, p38.

⁶⁹ Black, 'Military Organisations and Military Change', p871; and see Keegan, War and our World, pp32-3.

⁷⁰ See Surridge, Managing the South African War, chapters 2-4 and conclusion.

⁷¹ Carroll, 'The Growth and Co-ordination of Pro-Boer Sentiment', pp1-4,31; Ovendale, 'The Relations between Natal and the Transvaal during the 1890s', chapters 1 and 5; Brookes and Webb, A History of Natal, pp189-90; Surridge, Managing the South African War, chapter 1; and see John Pampallis, Foundations of the New South Africa, Cape Town, Maskew Miller Longman, 1991, pp39-40 and 49; and Ritchie Ovendale, 'The politics of dependence, 1893-9', in Duminy and Guest (eds), Natal and Zululand from Earliest Times to 1910, pp324-6; De Volkstem, 6 April 1900; Bill Guest, '"It was the Best of Times, it was the Worst of Times"', Natalia, 29/1999, p23; Nasson, The South African War, p56; Kirk, 'Self-Government and Self-Defence in South Africa', p501.

⁷² Cain and Hopkins, British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion 1688-1914, p273; and see Black, 'War and the World', p675; and Iain Smith, 'A Century of Controversy over

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when the economy of Natal underwent considerable change in the late nineteenth century, including major improvements in infrastructure, agricultural and manufacturing production, and the emergence of a coal industry.⁷³ The prewar economic position of Natal should also be considered in the context of the theories centred on the writings of JA Hobson, interpreting the origins of the war as an imperialist one driven by capitalist forces centred on the Rand mine owners.⁷⁴

Natal's response to the mounting crisis in southern Africa, spearheaded by confederation, was therefore guarded. The ministry did not consider that military intervention was warranted,⁷⁵ and

⁷²(...continued)

Origins', in Lowry (ed), The South African War Reappraised, p39. According to Cain and Hopkins, p370, 'the vision of self-supporting communities of loyal settlers failed to materialise' Also see Bill Freund, The Making of Contemporary Africa: The Development of African Society since 1800, Boulder, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998, pp106-9 and 118-122). This struggle for the heart of Natal interests, evident from the time of the British annexation of the Transvaal in April 1877, was thrown into clear relief by the Anglo-Boer War of 1880-1881, which revealed comparable tensions in Natal society (HW Whysall, 'The Response of Natal to the Annexation of the Transvaal and the Subsequent Anglo-Boer War of 1880-81', BA Honours thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1964, passim; Mark Coghlan, 'The Memorialists: Newcastle's Bid for Neutrality, 1881', Military History Journal, 9/3, June 1993, pp106-8). The Jameson Raid was an abortive paramilitary incursion into the Transvaal, orchestrated by Cecil Rhodes, Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, and led by Leander Starr Jameson, in December 1895-January 1896, intended to support an Uitlander uprising against the government of Paul Kruger. See Christopher Saunders and Nicholas Southey, A Dictionary of South African History, Cape Town and Johannesburg, David Philip, 2001, p95; Brian Johnson Barker, A Concise Dictionary of the Boer War, Cape Town, Francolin Publishers, 1999, pp69-71.

⁷³ Bill Guest, 'The new economy', in Duminy and Guest (eds), Natal and Zululand from Earliest Times to 1910, chapter 12, especially p302.

⁷⁴ Smith, 'The Origins of the South African War', pp29-38; Smith, 'A century of controversy over origins', in Lowry (ed), The South African War Reappraised, pp28-32. Irina Filatova uses the term 'colonial capitalism' to describe the moulding of settler social and political identities (Irina Filatova, 'History Through the Prism of Identity: Interpretation at the Crossroads', in Morrell (ed), Political Economy and Identities, pp10-13).

⁷⁵ It is asserted that throughout the period in question it was, in fact, the Irish question that held centre stage in British politics (John Benyon, '"Intermediate" imperialism and the test of Empire: Milner's "eccentric" High Commission in South Africa', in Lowry (ed), The South African War Reappraised, pp84-5, 85-7, 89-90 and 92-4; Thomas Pakenham, The Scramble for
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the scale of the Colony's commitment and military participation was far from certain.⁷⁶

A crisis arose when it became apparent that for Natal, economic ties were regarded as more important than loyalties of sentiment to Britain, counteracting apparent English-Afrikaner cultural blocks in southern Africa.⁷⁷ During the late 1890s Natal fell under the sway of hardening Milner-directed British policy in South Africa, in association with the assertive Cape administration of Cecil Rhodes. Milner made a point of exerting influence over Hely-Hutchinson, who supported the Colony's close relationship with the Transvaal, aware that the Colony was the likely avenue of a Boer invasion.⁷⁸ He also placed considerable reliance on settler compliance with his designs,

⁷⁵(...continued)

Africa 1876-1912, Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1991, pp558-9). Milner had also played a part in the frustration of Natal efforts to secure possession of Basutoland in 1868-70. All this did not preclude some ambitious annexationist claims by Governor Hely-Hutchinson and Sir Harry Escombe (Cecil Headlam (ed), The Milner Papers: South Africa 1899-1905, London, Cassell & Company, 1933, pp41 and 152).

⁷⁶ Carroll, 'The Growth and Co-ordination of Pro-Boer Sentiment in Natal', *passim*; Benyon, 'Main Show or Side-Show?', pp27-58; John Lambert and Robert Morrell, 'Domination and Subordination in Natal 1890-1920', in Morrell (ed), Political Economy and Identities, pp63-7.

⁷⁷ Cain and Hopkins, British Imperialism 1688-2000, p371; Benyon, '"Intermediate" imperialism and the test of Empire', in Lowry (ed), The South African War Reappraised, p95; Mordechai Tamarkin, 'The Cape Afrikaners and the British Empire from the Jameson Raid to the South African War', in Lowry (ed), The South African War Reappraised, pp121-139; and see Ovendale, 'The Relations between Natal and the Transvaal during the 1890s', pp2-5; Ovendale, 'Profit or Patriotism', p209; Benyon, 'Main Show or Side-Show', p33; Stephen Miller, Lord Methuen and the British Army: Failure and Redemption in South Africa, London, Frank Cass Publishers, 1999, pp69-70; Nasson, The South African War 1899-1902, p6; Denoon, A Grand Illusion, pp6 and 12; Davenport and Saunders, South Africa: A Modern History, pp213-5; Ovendale, 'The politics of dependence', in Duminy and Guest (eds), Natal and Zululand from Earliest Times to 1910, pp326-7; Filatova, 'History Through the Prism of Identity', in Morrell (ed), Political Economy and Identities, pp7-9; Guest, 'Towards responsible government, 1879-93', in Duminy and Guest (eds), Natal and Zululand from Earliest Times, p237.

⁷⁸ Ovendale, 'The politics of dependence, 1893-9', in Duminy and Guest (eds), Natal and Zululand from Earliest Times to 1910, pp329-333; Benyon, '"Intermediate" imperialism and the test of Empire', in Lowry (ed), The South African War Reappraised, p95; and see Jeffrey Merriwether, 'The Uncertain Path: War Office Administration and the Journey into War', Military History Journal, 11, 3/4, October 1999, pp75 and 77-9; Haswell, Citizen Armies,

(continued...)

and acquiescence in British political and military direction.⁷⁹ Milner was also aware of the importance of Natal government support in the context of the Colony's substantial British loyalist majority.⁸⁰

The Natal ministry was under the impression that the relationship between Whitehall and Pietermaritzburg worked both ways. This was reflected in the effort, on 25 May 1899, to extract maximum mileage from an undertaking of 25 May 1899 from Milner to the Colony for Imperial protection in the event of a crisis.⁸¹ Then, on 28 October 1899, Hely-Hutchinson cabled Chamberlain regarding the perceived inadequate defences of Durban and Pietermaritzburg, requesting reinforcements.⁸²

⁷⁸(...continued)

p123; Benyon, 'Main Show or Side-Show', pp29-32; Ritchie Owendale, 'Natal, the Transvaal, and the Origins of the Second Anglo-Boer War', unpublished conference paper, University of Natal, Durban, 1985, pp10-11; Smith, 'The Origins of the South African War', pp38-43; Tamarkin, 'The Cape Afrikaners and the British Empire', in Lowry (ed), The South African War Reappraised, p126; Cecil Headlam (ed), The Milner Papers: South Africa 1897-1899, London, Cassell & Company, 1931, chapters 15-20; Miller, Lord Methuen and the British Army, p65; Davenport and Saunders, South Africa: A Modern History, pp220-2. For Hely-Hutchinson's conciliatory position, unpopular with English settler Natalians, towards Kruger in the wake of the Jameson Raid, see Ritchie Owendale, 'Natal and the Jameson Raid', Journal of Natal and Zulu History, IV/1981, pp10-15.

⁷⁹ Benyon, 'Main Show or Side-Show', p30. Milner was possibly concerned about the Natal Government asserting excessive influence in what was becoming an unsettled periphery of the Empire. Eldridge terms this phenomenon 'sub-imperialism' (Eldridge, Victorian Imperialism, pp140 and 206-7).

⁸⁰ Surridge, Managing the South African War, pp44-6. 'Without the backing of this important sector of colonial opinion, Milner's attempts to persuade the British that colonial loyalty was at risk would have little credibility' (p44). While Milner's influence on the Natal government is given considerable emphasis, it is not suggested in this thesis that he was a maverick lone force, and the reader is referred to Phimister, 'Unscrambling the Scramble for Africa', pp205-220, and Cain and Hopkins, British Imperialism: 1688-2000, p326, for the placing of Milner within the context of British Imperial policy.

⁸¹ Benyon, 'Main Show or Side-Show', pp36-8.

⁸² NAR, War Office Records (FK) 1762, file 9638, Hely-Hutchinson to Chamberlain, 28 October 1899; PRO, WO 32/7858, 079/9638, Hely-Hutchinson to Chamberlain, 28 October 1899; NAR, FK 1762, file 9638, Memorandum, Wolseley (recipient not identified, probably
(continued...)

The British government thought otherwise. The involvement by Natal officials in issues of political policy and military strategy was regarded by the British military authorities as interference in the renewed implementation of confederation. Field-Marshal Viscount Wolseley, Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, made this clear on 27 July 1899 when he complained to the Marquess of Lansdowne, the Secretary of State for War, that he felt it was impossible to conduct policy if 'our military plans are to be communicated to the local governments and by them to the colonial political party that chances to be in power'.⁸³

Such a dispute was not without precedent in Natal. During the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, Lieutenant-Governor Sir Henry Bulwer had also demonstrated in his protracted confrontation with Lord Chelmsford, the British military commander, that 'he was prepared and eager...to justify the Colonies in the eyes of the Imperial Government, at the expense of the military administration'.⁸⁴ Bulwer had also objected to the instigation of that war by Sir Bartle Frere, the High Commissioner for South Africa at that time.⁸⁵ The assertiveness of Bulwer demonstrated that Natal, despite its lowly status in the Imperial pantheon, was seeking to flex its political muscle, and this was further demonstrated in 1881, when a successful objection was lodged against the appointment of Mr WJ Sendall, a commoner, to succeed Governor Sir George

⁸²(...continued)

Chamberlain), 31 October 1899; Surridge, Managing the South African War, pp59 and 77; Brookes and Webb, A History of Natal, pp198-9; and see Benyon, 'Main Show or Side-Show', pp44-5. Laband has suggested that the civil-military wrangles that bedevilled British operations in Natal in 1879 and 1888 prompted a revision and clarification of regulations to ensure that 'colonial governors and the officers commanding forces would have no doubt as to their respective jurisdictions' (Laband, 'The Danger of Divided Command', p1). However, Hely-Hutchinson's experience suggests that this was not the case by the time of the Anglo-Boer War.

⁸³ PRO, WO 6369, 266/Cape/41, Wolseley to Lansdowne, 27 July 1899; and see Surridge, Managing the South African War, pp40-4; Taithe and Thornton, 'Identifying War', in Taithe and Thornton, War, pp10-11.

⁸⁴ Davenport, 'The Responsible Government Issue in Natal', p35; JPC Laband, 'Bulwer, Chelmsford and the Border Levies: The dispute over the defence of Natal, 1879', in John Laband and Paul Thompson, Kingdom and Colony at War, Pietermaritzburg and Cape Town, University of Natal Press and N&S Press, 1990, pp150-162.

⁸⁵ John Benyon, 'Colonial capital', in Laband and Haswell (eds), Pietermaritzburg 1838-1988, p87; Cope, Ploughshare of War, pp238-40.

Pomeroy Colley as Lieutenant-Governor, rather than full Governor.⁸⁶

The Afrikaner (Dutch-speaking) and African Populations of Natal and the Volunteers

The Natal Dutch-speaking settler population (or Boers), besides the African majority, also had to be considered among the concerns troubling the Natal government. There was guarded suspicion in British settler circles concerning the Natal Afrikaner community. This suspicion prevailed despite the class and social solidarity among white colonists, and the high regard in which certain prominent Afrikaners were held. A leading example was Mr FM Wolhuter, a veteran of the battle of Congella in 1842, and a director of two leading colonial companies, the Natal Bank and the Natal Fire Assurance and Trust Company, who died in March 1899. His funeral was well attended by the English settler elite.⁸⁷ In August 1899 Thomas Watt of Newcastle considered that the

'Dutch people in the district speaking generally don't want war. A few of the younger men will help the Transvaal if hostilities begin, but the majority of the farmers, although all their sympathy will be with the enemy, will be still.'⁸⁸

Many of these Dutch-speaking farmers from the northern rural districts had winter-grazing farms

⁸⁶ Benyon, 'Colonial capital', in Laband and Haswell (eds), Pietermaritzburg 1838-1988, p88. Colley had been killed at the battle of Majuba on 27 February 1881. The Natal Witness referred pointedly to Sendall's existing position as 3rd Assistant Secretary to the Local Government Board, London, and described his appointment to the Natal post as an 'insult to the Colony' (Natal Witness, 18 and 23 November 1881, and see 19 and 30 November 1881, and 19 and 28 December 1881, and Natal Mercantile Advertiser, 19 and 24 November, and 6 December 1881).

⁸⁷ Natal Witness, 25 March 1899. I am indebted to Mr Louis Eksteen of the Voortrekker Museum for this reference.

⁸⁸ PAR, PM 23, minute paper PM 1402/1901, Watt to Bale, 31 August 1899. Watt, a solicitor, served in the Imperial Light Infantry during the Anglo-Boer War and also commanded the Newcastle Town Guard. Between 1903 and 1906 he was Minister of Justice and Education in the Natal Government (The Natal Who's Who, p212).

in that region of Natal with other farms in the Republics.⁸⁹ English settler suspicion was directed in particular towards the Afrikaner colonists of the Umvoti District, a group which was also considered to have harboured sympathies with the Boers during the Anglo-Boer War of 1880-1881.⁹⁰

A 1902 history of the Voortrekker occupation of Natal, entitled Natal and the Boers: The Birth of a Colony, published in London 'for sale in the Colonies only', would appear to typify a patronising sense of superiority over the Afrikaners who had remained in the Colony after the establishment of British suzerainty (a drawn-out process lasting from 1842 to 1844). It was assumed, for example, that stated progress in the Colony under the umbrella of this suzerainty, and the direction of a growing English settler population, had in turn benefited those Afrikaner colonists who remained. The book was dedicated to Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson, and the Prime Minister, Hime.⁹¹

The Natal government considered most Natal Afrikaners to be republicans at heart, although it was reluctant to risk antagonism by acting on this sentiment.⁹² Hely-Hutchinson was certain that in the event of war Afrikaner sympathies in the Colony would lie with the ZAR, partly for reason of kinship, and partly because of 'delusions' of Boer fighting ability, but he was confident that provided British troops did not suffer severe setbacks, the Afrikaners would not take up arms.⁹³

⁸⁹ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p108.

⁹⁰ Whysall, 'The Response of Natal to the Annexation of the Transvaal', pp20,27-8 and 71. The pro-British Rand journal, the Transvaal Critic, trumpeted in September 1899 that Klip River, Weenen and Umvoti Counties in Natal were 'honeycombed with rebels' actively organising in support of the Boers (Transvaal Critic, VI/139, 1 September, p213).

⁹¹ See T Rowell, Natal and the Boers: The Birth of a Colony, London, JM Dent & Company, 1902.

⁹² PAR, CSO 1628, minute paper 8032/1899, Permanent Under-Secretary to the Prime Minister, and Prime Minister to Colonial Secretary, 19 October 1899, with regard to a proposal from WJ Slatter, President of the Umvoti Rifle Association, 16 October 1899; and see Dartnell in Royal Commission on the War in South Africa, I, Report, Appendix C, p187; Carroll, 'The Growth and Co-ordination of Pro-Boer Sentiment', p6.

⁹³ Carroll, 'The Growth and Co-ordination of Pro-Boer Sentiment in Natal', p189.

The British Army authorities at Ladysmith shared this view and took pains to demonstrate their military power to the Dutch colonists in northern Natal.⁹⁴ By contrast, the English-language colonial press adopted a recklessly inflammatory tone as war loomed, and the Natal Witness announced that there 'is no such thing as a loyal Dutch farmer in Natal'.⁹⁵

The Natal Afrikaner provided a forum in the Colony for moderate Natal Afrikaner interests. Throughout the war this newspaper maintained a strong editorial stance of loyalty to the Crown blended with regret at the necessity for conflict.⁹⁶ Opinion towards Natal's Volunteer force was sympathetic, and in an article shortly before the outbreak of hostilities, entitled 'Onze Vrijwilligers' (Our Volunteers), expressed regret that 'Kolonisten and Afrikaners uit de aangrenzende Republieken net het geweer in de hand tegenover elkander moeten staan'.⁹⁷ The military actions of British forces and the Natal Volunteers was reported upon in a balanced and consistent fashion.⁹⁸ While acknowledging an element of sympathy for the Republics on the part of the Natal Afrikaner community, the Natal Afrikaner rejected military support for the Boers, and repeatedly warned Afrikaner colonists against sedition.⁹⁹ The suspicions of the English settlers of Natal was therefore a cause for concern to the newspaper, and by 1901 it had adopted a strongly critical stance towards the colonial government. (See pages 314-15.)

As far as the immediate interests of the Natal Volunteers were concerned, uncertainty over the loyalty of Afrikaner colonists was apparent in the posting, in early October 1899, of Dutch-

⁹⁴ WH Bizley, 'A Breath of Fresh Air at Government House: Sir William Butler in South Africa', Theoria, LIII/October 1979, pp40-1. This particular demonstration, it must be added, was an amusing failure.

⁹⁵ Natal Witness, 24 November 1899; and see Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p114.

⁹⁶ Natal Afrikaner, 16 June and 22 September 1899, 29 May 1900 and 29 January 1901. The almanac published in the issue of 13 January 1899 included a prominent formal portrait of the Governor, Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson.

⁹⁷ 'Colonists and Afrikaners from the adjacent Republics are compelled to face each other with rifle in hand' (Natal Afrikaner, 17 October 1899).

⁹⁸ Natal Afrikaner, passim, but see 3,6,20 and 31 October 1899 and 6 March 1900.

⁹⁹ Natal Afrikaner, 24 January and 5 December 1899, 13 March 1900.

speaking members of the Umvoti Mounted Rifles to the Ixopo border in southern Natal, far from the potential war front. Such a posting blatantly suggested that they could not be trusted to fight 'kinfolk'.¹⁰⁰ The subsequent deployment, from October 1899 to March 1900, of the Umvoti Mounted Rifles to the obscure duty of securing the Tugela Ferry crossing over the Thukela River, between Greytown and Dundee, can be interpreted as evidence of further doubt about the loyalty of this regiment.¹⁰¹ In the Umvoti district it was alleged that local Boer sympathisers had 'marked' the homes of UMR men on service for ruthless looting.¹⁰² Evidence of a poisoning of relations between English and Afrikaner settlers was also apparent in the concerns of one Maggie Bester, a Dutch-speaking resident of Ladysmith. With reference to the 'nagmaal' service of 18 October 1899, she speculated that 'we should then notice the different feeling of our so-called English friends towards us'.¹⁰³

In the event, the Natal Afrikaners did little more than defect, in limited numbers, from the northern districts of the Colony.¹⁰⁴ In fact, in the wake of the Jameson Raid, messages of loyal support were received from the Umvoti, Weenen and Klip River Districts, all with substantial

¹⁰⁰ PAR, CO (microfilm), 1/1/1/1/197 [PRO 179/206], Hely-Hutchinson to Chamberlain, 6 October 1899; and see PAR, MJPW 71, minute paper, Lands and Works 4393/99, in connection with a detachment of the UMR to Ixopo, 6 October 1899; and see Natal Advertiser, 2 November 1899; Times of Natal, 11 November 1899.

¹⁰¹ See AJ Du Plessis, The Umvoti Mounted Rifles 1864-1975, Greytown, Umvoti Mounted Rifles, 1975, pp 59 and 61.

¹⁰² George Clarke Musgrave, In South Africa with Buller, London, Gay and Bird, 1900, p175; and see Natal Volunteer Record, p18, for comments by Major George Leuchars, of the UMR, on Dutch settlers in the Umvoti district. In March 1900 the Natal Afrikaner reacted indignantly to an accusation from the Natal Witness that Afrikaners in the Umvoti district had failed to celebrate the relief of Ladysmith (Natal Afrikaner, 13 March 1900).

¹⁰³ PAR, Schoon Papers A72/4, Maggie Bester, 'My Experiences during the Anglo-South African War', p1.

¹⁰⁴ Carroll, 'The Growth and Co-ordination of Pro-Boer Sentiment', pp5 and 35-6; Ovendale, 'Natal and the Jameson Raid', pp10 and 14-15. The anticipated 'aansluiting verwachte van Natalsche Afrikaners [enrolment of Natal Afrikaners with the Boer commandos]' did not materialise (Gedenkboek van den Oorlog in Zuid-Afrika, Amsterdam-Kaapstad, Hollandsch-Afrikaansche Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1904, p188).

Dutch-speaking populations.¹⁰⁵ The martial law proclaimed in five magisterial districts in northern Natal on 15 October 1899 was consequently hardly necessary.¹⁰⁶

It was also feared that war between the two white races would impact adversely on colonial rule over the African population, an important factor in the issue of responsible government.¹⁰⁷ Britain did not assuage these concerns, maintaining that precautions against an African rising was the responsibility of local authorities, with the War Office responsible only for defence against external attack.¹⁰⁸ The Volunteers were almost certainly not sufficient to put down an extensive African uprising, and this was another reason for Natal not to risk going to war.

Growing Support in Natal for War

According to Julian Lider, the 'process leading up to the decision to engage in war is one of the most important problems in any study of the nature of war, for it concerns the decisive moment when policy-makers decide to change the means by which they work for their objectives from

¹⁰⁵ Carroll, 'The Growth and Co-ordination of Pro-Boer Sentiment', p48; Ovendale, 'Profit or Patriotism', pp213,220 and 223.

¹⁰⁶ PAR, NCP, 6/1/1/52, Natal Government Gazette, LI, No3055, 15 October 1899; PAR, CO (microfilm), 1/1/1/197 [PRO 179/208], Hely-Hutchinson to Chamberlain, 16 October 1899; PAR, GH 1679, Diary of Events, p35, 23 October 1899; Surridge, Managing the South African War, pp26-7; and see Herbert Alfred Mocke, 'Die Slag van Colenso, 15 Desember 1899', MA thesis, University of Pretoria, 1966, p8. Also see Times of Natal, 16 October 1899; Natal Afrikaner, 17 October 1899; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p99. The delicate position of the Natal Afrikaner during this period is the currently (2002) the subject of a doctoral study, see JM Wassermann, 'The Natal Afrikaner and the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902', PhD thesis, University of Pretoria, forthcoming.

¹⁰⁷ PAR, PM 20, minute paper 9142/1900, Hime to magistrates, 9 September 1899; UNISA Archives, notebook diary, RC Alexander, 70th Regiment, South African Field Force, 14 November 1899; Ovendale, 'Profit or Patriotism', p216; Brookes and Webb, A History of Natal, pp192-3; Headlam (ed), The Milner Papers: South Africa 1897-1899, pp464-5; Balasubramanyan Chandramohan, 'Hamlet with the Prince of Denmark left out?: the South African War, Empire and India', in Lowry (ed), The South African War Reappraised, p170; and see Carroll, 'The Growth and Co-ordination of Pro-War Sentiment', pp166-7.

¹⁰⁸ PAR, CO (microfilm), 1/1/1/201 [PRO 179/208], War Office to Colonial Office, 4 May 1899. See Lambert, Betrayed Trust, p64. This was the official position in Natal during the Rebellion of 1906.

peaceful to violent means'.¹⁰⁹ For southern Africa in the 1890s this moment arrived with the episode of the Jameson Raid in December 1895-January 1896.¹¹⁰

Following the Raid, a vociferous element emerged on a local political level, seeking a 'crusade of all-out hostility towards the Republic' to ensure that the Colony played its part in 'the imperial strategy of uniting the sub-continent under the Union Jack'.¹¹¹ One manifestation of this movement was the South African League that called a packed public meeting in the Pietermaritzburg City Hall on 3 January 1896. The meeting was chaired by Edward Greene, Commanding Officer of the Natal Carbineers.¹¹²

Although Milner was sympathetic to Natal concerns that the Colony was likely to be a base for hostilities,¹¹³ he had no sympathy for Natal's economic position, and now emphasised to the Natal government that relations with the Transvaal must not be at the expense of Imperial interests and British supremacy.¹¹⁴ In a British proclamation of 27 October 1899, rejecting Boer claims on

¹⁰⁹ Lider, On the Nature of War, pp59 and 60-1.

¹¹⁰ Smith, The Origins of the South African War, pp97-100.

¹¹¹ Carroll, 'The Growth and Co-ordination of Pro-Boer Sentiment', p32; Guest, "It was the Best of Times, it was the Worst of Times", pp23-4; Benyon, 'Main Show or Side-Show', pp33-4,38; and see Count Sternberg, My Experience of the Boer War, London, Longmans, Green and Co, 1901, ch1; Ovendale, 'The relations between Natal and the Transvaal during the 1890s', p19; and see Ovendale, 'Natal and the Jameson Raid', pp6-20.

¹¹² Carroll, 'The growth and Co-ordination of Pro-Boer Sentiment in Natal', pp33-5 and 67-9; Benyon, 'Main Show or Side-Show', p34. Also see Ovendale, 'The Relations between Natal and the Transvaal during the 1890s', p20; Ovendale, 'Profit or Patriotism', p213; Ovendale, 'Natal, the Transvaal, and the Origins of the Second Anglo-Boer War', pp9-10; and 'Natal and the Jameson Raid', p8; MF Bitensky, 'The South African League 1896-1899', MA thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1950, footnote reference in Smith, 'The Origins of the South African War', p43; Ovendale, 'The politics of dependence', in Duminy and Guest (eds), Natal and Zululand from Earliest Times to 1910, p328; Smith, The Origins of the South African War, pp127-132.

¹¹³ Headlam (ed), The Milner Papers: South Africa 1897-1899, pp462-4.

¹¹⁴ Ovendale, 'The Relations between Natal and the Transvaal during the 1890s', pp45 and 54; Ovendale, 'Profit or Patriotism', pp215-8; Smith, 'The Origins of the South African War', pp50-3; and for a succinct assessment of Milner's campaign to prepare the British colonies for

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colonial territory, settlers were reminded of their obligations as British subjects.¹¹⁵

Natal, with its British majority among the white population, was caught in a dilemma: concern about possible 'penalties' for disloyalty if it continued its courtship of the Transvaal, but also fear of retribution from the Republic if the crisis did not lead to war.¹¹⁶ By August 1898 it was apparent that the Imperial connection had prevailed, and the High Commissioner was assured of the Colony's support.¹¹⁷ Once this die was cast, however, the colonists wanted the issue resolved as quickly as possible.¹¹⁸ There was, however, considerable doubt concerning the scale and speed of any colonial police and military response.¹¹⁹ The Colony was also acutely aware of the outcome

¹¹⁴(...continued)

war, see Tamarkin, 'The Cape Afrikaners and the British Empire', in Lowry (ed), The South African War Reappraised, pp121-4.

¹¹⁵ Himeville Fort Museum, Harding diary, 27 October 1899.

¹¹⁶ Ovendale, 'The politics of dependence', in Duminy and Guest (eds), Natal and Zululand from Earliest Times to 1910, pp333,335 and 337; Ovendale, 'Profit or Patriotism', p224; Ovendale, 'Natal, the Transvaal, and the Origins of the Second Anglo-Boer War', pp14-5.

¹¹⁷ Ovendale, 'The Relations between Natal and the Transvaal during the 1890s', pp78 and 130; Brookes and Webb, A History of Natal, pp199 and 201; Benyon, 'Main Show or Side-Show', p31. Winston Churchill wrote as follows of the Natal colonists:

'Firstly the colonists have had many dealings with the Boers. They knew their strengths; they feared their animosity. But they have never for one moment lost sight of their obligations as a British colony...they knew that if war should come, on them would fall the first fury of the storm' (Louis Cresswicke, South Africa and the Transvaal War, Edinburgh, TC and EC Jack, 1900, II, p73; and see Smith, The Origins of the South African War, p300).

¹¹⁸ Christison Rare Books, catalogue 16/1998, item 261, resolution of a meeting held at Pietermaritzburg, 6 September 1899. This followed public meetings in Durban and Pietermaritzburg (1 July), and Estcourt, on 8 July, at which resolutions were passed in support of the government (PAR, GH 1679, Diary of Events, pp3-4, 1 and 8 July 1899; Natal Witness, 3 and 7 July 1899). Natal had, in Guest's words, nailed 'her colours to the Imperial mast' (Guest, 'It was the Best of Times, it was the Worst of Times', p25).

¹¹⁹ PRO 30/40/16, Ardagh Papers, 'Frontier Defence in South Africa', p8; Merriwether, 'The Uncertain Path', p77. The booklet stated, inter alia: 'As regards the Volunteers, it is doubtful whether more than a certain proportion could leave their duties in civil life; and a careful consideration will be necessary in deciding to what posts they could be safely allotted,

(continued...)

of the First Anglo-Boer War, and feared another British capitulation.¹²⁰

However, in the spring and early summer of 1899, when a breakdown in the talks with the Kruger government appeared likely, there was continued reluctance to mobilize military forces as the Natal government did not want to be labelled the aggressor.¹²¹ Ambivalence in Natal colonial circles, and the efforts to secure certainty of their position in British policy considerations towards the republics, is evident in correspondence from Milner to Chamberlain in late May:

'Governor of Natal has written me important letters. Owing to Boer preparations across the border scattered British in the northern corner of Natal are getting anxious, and the Ministry is nervous at the prospect of war. The Governor has told the acting Prime Minister that he has no reason to anticipate hostilities, but that if the British Government found it necessary to advance fair and reasonable demands in the interests of the Uitlanders, the Natal Government ought to give British Government unwavering support and to share duty and responsibilities involved, and not to confine itself to benevolent neutrality...

- ✓ The Minister replied that he would gladly do as the Governor suggested, but that he feared the consequences to Natal if the British Government drew back after all.¹²²

The Natal Prime Minister, Hime, continued on 17 June 1899 in anxious vein in a minute to Hely-Hutchinson:

'Ministers would further point out that should war unfortunately break out, Natal would probably become the field of operations, and as this Government would, as a matter of course, give its loyal and active support to Her Majesty's Government, Natal would

¹¹⁹(...continued)
and in what time they should reach those posts.'

¹²⁰ Headlam (ed), The Milner Papers: South Africa 1897-1899, p462.

¹²¹ NAR, Leyds Archive (T39), Blue Book series, volume 1042 (CD44), 'Correspondence relating to the Defence of Natal, 1900', Chamberlain to Milner, 28 May 1899; NAR, Leyds Archive, Blue Book, volume 1042 (CD44), 'Correspondence relating to the Defence of Natal, 1900', Hely-Hutchinson to Chamberlain, 9 August 1899; and see PH Kritzing and RD MacDonald, In the Shadow of Death, London, 1904, pp103-4.

¹²² NAR, Leyds Archive 1042, CD44, Correspondence relating to the Defence of Natal, No.1, Milner to Chamberlain, 25 May 1899.

thereafter be regarded by the South African Republic and the Orange Free State with suspicious and unfriendly feelings.¹²³

The divergent stance of leading British and Natal colonial, military and civil officials in relation to Natal policy furnishes an important procedural edge to the emerging debate surrounding the impact of the war on the Colony. While British military commanders in South Africa did display subservience (albeit often contentious) to civil superiors in Britain, the involvement of Natal officials, even those as senior as the Governor, was resented.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, the Colonial Office did instruct that consultation with colonial governors be exercised with regard to colonial and frontier defence.¹²⁵

Despite the debates over commitment to British political policy and military strategy, towards the last quarter of 1899 there was little doubt as to where the sympathies of the English settler-citizen in Natal lay.¹²⁶ On 12 August a public meeting was held at Nottingham Road 'for the purpose of arranging the best possible means of assisting the Imperial authorities in the defence of the Colony in the event of hostilities arising with the Transvaal'.¹²⁷ However, Natal also considered that the

¹²³ NAR, Leyds Archive 1042, CD44, Correspondence Relating to the Defence of Natal, Hime to Hely-Hutchinson, 17 June 1899, enclosure in No.4, Hely-Hutchinson to Milner, 17 June 1899; and see Brookes and Webb, A History of Natal, pp197-8.

¹²⁴ Weigley, 'The Soldier, the Statesman and the Military Historian', pp809-10. Weigley talks of the perception by the military of separation from and sense of superiority over civilian decision-makers. Surridge, Managing the South African War, pp2-3. Also see Douglas Porch, 'Imperial Wars: From the Seven Years War to the First World War', in Townshend (ed), The Oxford History of Modern War, pp94-8, for comment on the driving force of the military in imperial expansion. Porch states that civilians in the metropole were generally apathetic towards Empire.

¹²⁵ PRO, WO 6369, 266/Cape/36, AAG to C-in-C, 8 June 1899; and see PRO, WO 6369, 266/Cape/38, Butler to War Office, 3 July 1899; PRO, WO 6369, 266/Cape/1, Memorandum Ardagh, 15 November 1898; PRO, WO 6369, 266/Cape/30, FW Stopford AAG (GOC Troops SA) to War Office, 21 December 1898; and see Surridge, Managing the South African War, pp59-60; Miller, Lord Methuen and the British Army, p77.

¹²⁶ See W Watson, The Siege Diary of William Watson, October 1899-February 1900, Ladysmith, Ladysmith Historical Society, 1989, 6 November 1899.

¹²⁷ Natal Witness, 4 and 14 August 1899. On 6 September another public meeting was
(continued...)

British government was obligated to seek a prompt military decision after its aggressive promotion of the war to the Colony.¹²⁸

The Strategic Military Context in Natal

The fact of the British decision to settle its differences with the Boers through war had an immediate impact on Natal, located as it was adjacent to the Republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State.¹²⁹ Benyon sees Natal as the potential base for a defensive, rather than offensive campaign, as befitting its 'status' as a junior Colony. Northern Natal's apex in the Lang's Nek-Majuba area, which was of strategic importance not only for defence against a Boer invasion, but also for a British offensive into the Transvaal, could not be ignored, although initial British strategy dictated an advance through the Orange Free State to avoid the difficulties of terrain and transport in the Natal theatre.¹³⁰

The Natal government insisted on the defence of the entire Colony rather than strategically select regions. However, military capacity, including colonial forces, was only adequate to hold as far

¹²⁷(...continued)

convened in Pietermaritzburg by the Mayor, GJ Macfarlane - another Natal Carbineer officer. The meeting urged the immediate resolution of the 'Transvaal crisis' (Natal Witness, 9 September 1899; Times of Natal, 7 September 1899).

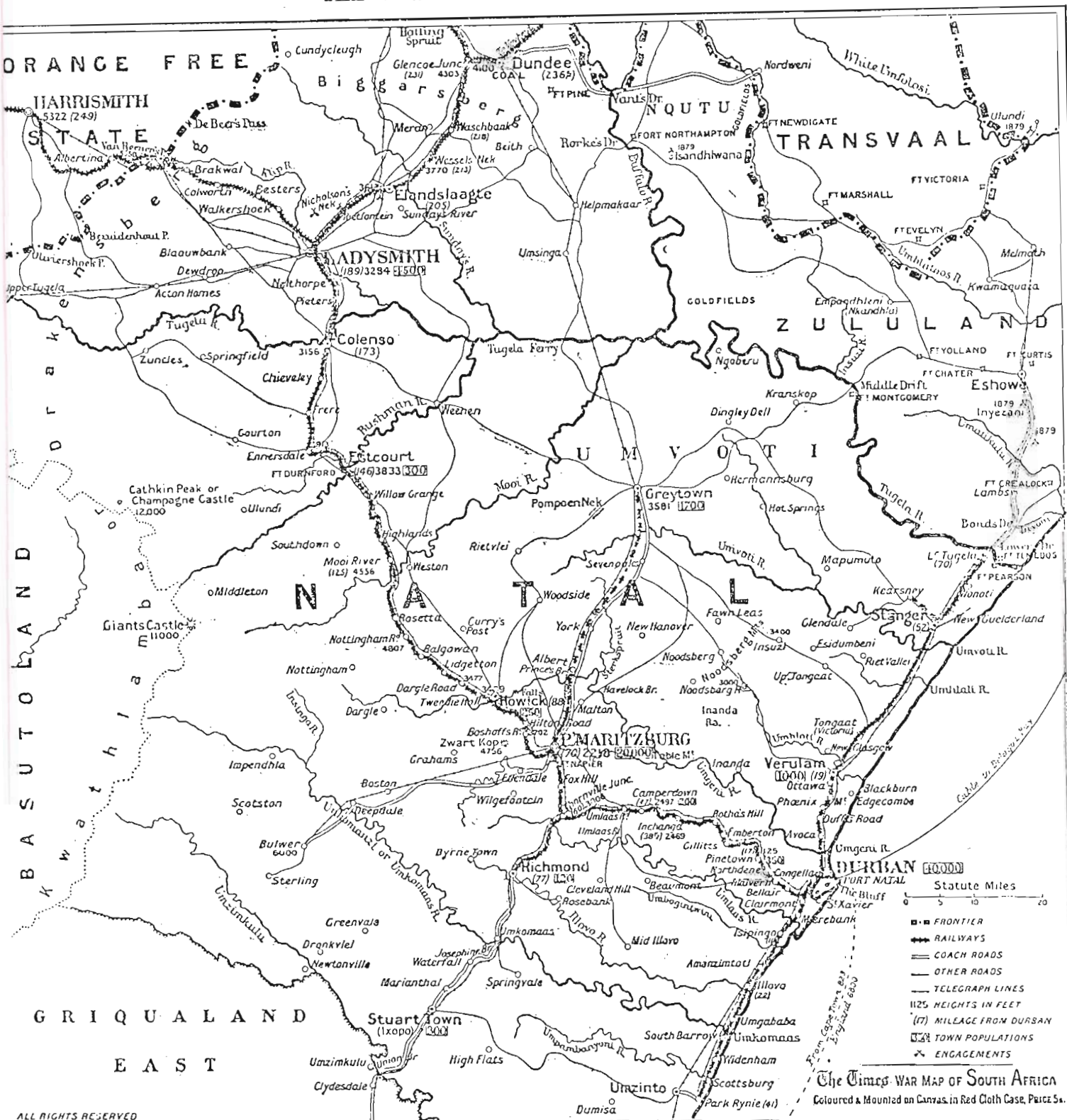
¹²⁸ Surridge, Managing the South African War, p57.

¹²⁹ Bennett Burleigh, The Natal Campaign, London, Chapman and Hall, 1900, p14.

¹³⁰ PRO, CAB (microfilm), 37/50/52, memorandum Wolseley, 17 August 1899; Benyon, 'Main Show or Side-Show', pp44-53; Surridge, Managing the South African War, pp22, 28-30 and 53-6; Wessels, 'Die Britse Militêre Strategie', pp274-5; Pakenham, The Scramble for Africa, pp568-9; Arthur Conan Doyle, The Great Boer War, London, Smith, Elder and Co, 1900, pp62-3; Keith Surridge, 'Lansdowne at the War Office', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, pp24 and 31. Also See Pieter C Ackermann, 'Aardrykskundige Invloede in die Stryd tussen Brittanje en die Boererepublieke met Besondere Verwysing na die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog', PhD thesis, UNISA, 1957, ii; Marwick, The Nature of History, pp161-4. The Natal campaign, with its crucial topography in the northern Natal wedge, and along the Tugela Line, was to differ markedly from the war on the Transvaal and Free State highveld (Ackermann, 'Aardrykskundige Invloede', iii, chapter 4, pp105-9, 128-9 and 192-4).

THE TIMES, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 1899.

THE THEATRE OF WAR IN NATAL.



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north as Dundee.¹³¹ There was, therefore, a strategic dilemma. Militarily the northern apex could not be defended with the forces at hand, but its abandonment would impact adversely on British prestige and the British political position, as well as on the moral high ground the Empire claimed for itself.¹³² Natal would have been incensed to learn that the War Office questioned the validity of defending Natal at all, and considered Pietermaritzburg and Durban to be of prestige value only.¹³³

Milner encouraged the Natal demands for military security through the defence of the northern extremities of the Colony, seeing an opportunity decisively to intimidate the Boers. There was even a call to mobilize the Volunteers and despatch them to Lang's Nek where a strategic railway tunnel was situated. This could have led to an early clash with Transvaal and Free State forces.¹³⁴ It is also important to consider the perceived threat of rebellion or collusion with the Boer cause that Milner feared in the Afrikaner population of the Cape Colony. In this context the Natal 'side-show' was seen as abandoning the location of the war's most serious threat to British interests in the region, and Milner was anxious to return to this 'priority' as soon as possible.¹³⁵ Perhaps he was faced with the same reality articulated by the military theorist, Emory Upton, that in the event of war 'all political considerations and realities became subordinate to military effectiveness'.¹³⁶

In mid-May 1899 Lieutenant-General Sir William Buller, Buller's predecessor as GOC in South

¹³¹ Amery (ed), The Times History, II, pp102-3; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p27; and see NAR, Leyds Archive 1042, No.8, Hely-Hutchinson to Chamberlain, 26 July 1899; Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Hamilton 2/2/2, Hamilton to Wilkinson, 11 October 1899; Duminy and Guest, 'The Anglo-Boer War and its economic aftermath, 1899-1910', in Duminy and Guest (eds), Natal and Zululand from Earliest Times to 1910, pp345-6.

¹³² Wessels, 'Die Britse Militêre Strategie', p276; Nasson, The South African War 1899-1902, pp84-5; and see Natal Witness, 1 March 1900.

¹³³ Ian FW Beckett, 'Buller and the Politics of Command', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, p47.

¹³⁴ Brookes and Webb, A History of Natal, p194.

¹³⁵ Surridge, Managing the South African War, pp76-81.

¹³⁶ Weigley, 'The Soldier, the Statesman and the Military Historian', p813; and see Michael Howard, Studies in War and Peace, London, Temple Smith, 1970, p23.

Africa, who was not in favour of war, scoffed at the idea of trying to intimidate the Republics with an aggressive forward stance with anything less than 40 000 men. As early as December 1898 he had proposed a withdrawal from the Natal frontier, as far as Estcourt if necessary, and an elastic defence incorporating the guarding of mountain passes, scouts, and the demolition of bridges.¹³⁷

By June 1899 Butler was in a position to transmit detailed observations on the proposed defence of the Cape and Natal. His plans included a limited though defined military presence in the far north of Natal. Glencoe Junction was to be occupied and the railway patrolled almost as far as Newcastle, and the Transvaal and OFS frontier patrolled in its entirety. Ladysmith was to be the focal point for the reinforcement of the region, and this included proposed entrenched posts along the railway between Newcastle and Estcourt. The mountainous region between Newcastle and Charlestown was, however, always regarded as something of a no-go area.

Butler was aware that uncertain political relations, and sensitive public opinion in the colonies, complicated planning.¹³⁸ In the context of the questionable loyalty of the Natal Afrikaner colonists, he also considered it risky to advance British troops too close to, or across, the Transvaal border, leaving a potentially hostile Afrikaner farming population at their backs in northern Natal.¹³⁹ Butler's defensive plan was preceded by reports on the frontier defence of Natal, submitted in 1896-7 by his predecessor, Lieutenant-General William Goodenough, recommending concentration at Ladysmith, with small detachments at Colenso and Estcourt - three Volunteer foci during the coming war.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Benyon, 'Main Show or Side-Show', p37; Miller, Lord Methuen and the British Army, p74; Beckett, 'Buller and the Politics of Command', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, p48.

¹³⁸ PRO, WO 6369, CR B/303/111 or 2661/Cape/36, Butler to Under Secretary, War Office, 14 September 1899; Surridge, Managing the South African War, pp37-8 and 47-53; and see Royal Commission on the War in South Africa, I, Report, Appendix C, pp189-190.

¹³⁹ Bizley, 'A Breath of Fresh Air at Government House', p38.

¹⁴⁰ NAR, Leyds Archive 1042, CD 44, enclosure 5 in No.20, Symons to Hely-Hutchinson, 21 July 1899; Hely-Hutchinson to Chamberlain, 13 September 1899, enclosure in Times of Natal, 1 March 1900; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, pp44-5; and see Royal Commission on the War in South Africa, I, Report, p170; Ackermann, 'Aardrykskundige Invloede', pp131-3; Halik Kochanski, 'Wolseley and the South African War', in Gooch (ed),
(continued...)

Despite the fact that Boer military strength had not been underestimated, the debate over a forward defensive strategy contributed to a crucial two-month delay during August and September 1899 in despatching substantial British reinforcements. The first contingent of a force of 5 600 troops left India only on 17 September. This uncertainty had a major bearing on the confused initial troop dispositions and on the crisis management that characterised the early engagements of the war.¹⁴¹ It should be borne in mind that military thought was still strongly biased in favour of offensive military action, but the hesitation by the British and Natal governments was to condemn them initially to a defensive campaign in South Africa.¹⁴²

The 2 000 reinforcements earmarked for Natal in August 1899 were not sufficient for the protection of the entire Colony, and did not satisfy the Colonists.¹⁴³ On 9 November General Sir Redvers Buller, the British Commander-in-Chief in South Africa from October 1899, amplified the political implications of holding positions in northern Natal:

- 'Since my arrival in the Colony I had been much impressed by the exposed position of the garrison of Glencoe and on the evening of 10 October I had an interview on the subject with HE the Governor at which I laid before him my reasons for considering it expedient

¹⁴⁰(...continued)

The Boer War, p58.

¹⁴¹ Benyon, 'Main Show or Side-Show', pp37 and 43; Amery (ed), The Times History, II, pp104-7; Surridge, Managing the South African War, pp40-56; Steele, 'Salisbury and the Soldiers', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, pp8-9; Surridge, 'Lansdowne at the War Office', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, p30. Lansdowne considered that these reinforcements adequately protected Natal (Royal Commission on the War in South Africa, I, Report, pp26-8). See Amery (ed), The Times History, II, pp88-9; Military Notes on the Dutch Republics of South Africa, compiled in Section B, Intelligence Division, War Office, 1899: reprint, York, Boer War Books, 1983, p18; and Breytenbach, Geskiedenis van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog, I, 1969, p35, for remarkably consistent, even exaggerated, estimates of Boer strength.

¹⁴² Shy, 'The Cultural Approach to the History of War', p20.

¹⁴³ Surridge, Managing the South African War, p46. Reports on the frontier defence of Natal, submitted in 1896-7, recommended concentration at Ladysmith, with small detachments at Colenso and Estcourt - three Volunteer foci during the coming war (NAR, Leyds Archive 1042, CD44, enclosure 5 in No.20, Symons to Hely-Hutchinson, 21 July 1899; Hely-Hutchinson to Chamberlain, 13 September 1899, enclosure in Times of Natal, 1 March 1900; Ackermann, 'Aardrykskundige Invloede', pp131-3; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, pp44-5; and see Commission on the War in South Africa, I, Report, p170).

from a military point of view to withdraw that garrison and to concentrate all my available troops at Ladysmith. After full discussion he recorded his opinion that such a step would involve grave political results and possibilities of so serious a nature that I determined to accept the military risk of holding Dundee as the lesser of two evils.¹⁴⁴

The forward defensive posture in Natal was initially to shift this strategy.¹⁴⁵ If the British intention was to 'permit' the Boer occupation of northern Natal, while advancing on Pretoria via Bloemfontein, then it was to be undone by the events in Natal during the first month of the war.¹⁴⁶

The view of the pro-Boer Michael Davitt, is revealing:

'Natal was also the nearest British Colony to the strongest and best-equipped of the allied [Boer] states. She had clamoured for war through her jingo governor in July, and it was thought proper, on political as on strategical grounds, to anticipate the British invasion of the Free State by a Boer advance into Natal.'¹⁴⁷

Until the arrival of Field-Marshal Lord Roberts in January 1900, Natal's military plight was to be the war's main focus.¹⁴⁸

Much of the comment on the divergent strategic concerns of the British and Natal governments

¹⁴⁴ PRO, WO 32/7882, 079/81, Buller to Under-Secretary of State for War, 9 November 1899; and see NAR, Leyds Archive 1042, CD44, enclosure 2 in No.18, Hely-Hutchinson to Symons, 11 July 1899; NAR, Leyds Archive 1042, CD44, Nos.5 and 6, Hely-Hutchinson to Chamberlain, 16 July 1899; NAR, Leyds Archive 1042, CD44, enclosure 1 in No.20, Hime to Hely-Hutchinson, 25 July 1899; NAR, Leyds Archive, 1042, CD44, No.26, Hely-Hutchinson to Chamberlain, 13 September 1899; British Library, Balfour Papers 49717/972c, telegrams, 'FSP'(Downing St) to Sanders, 3 November 1899; Ackermann, 'Aardrykskundige Invloede', pp129-130; Surridge, Managing the South African War, pp51-2.

¹⁴⁵ Benyon, 'Main Show or Side-Show', pp35 and 39.

¹⁴⁶ James Muller, 'At Large on the Veldt: Winston Churchill in the South African War', unpublished conference paper, UNISA, 1998, p7.

¹⁴⁷ Michael Davitt, The Boer Fight for Freedom, Freeport (NY), Books for Libraries Press, 1902, p84. Also see Lowry, "'The Boers were the beginning of the end'?", in Lowry (ed), The South African War Reappraised, p211, for more information on Davitt's support for the Boer cause.

¹⁴⁸ Benyon, 'Main Show or Side-Show', pp5-7, 42 and 45.

reflected on the performance of British military intelligence, and implicitly queried why local knowledge had not been better utilised.¹⁴⁹ After the war, when Buller was compelled to defend his war record, he stated that a division of forces would not have been necessary had cognisance been taken of available intelligence, and the colonies adequately garrisoned as a result.¹⁵⁰ Following the series of military disasters in October-December 1899, War Office intelligence received a lion's share of the blame.¹⁵¹ In fact, a considerable amount was achieved with few resources. An example was the remarkably accurate Military Notes on the Dutch Republics of South Africa, a handbook on the Republics, published in 1898 and revised in June 1899.¹⁵² Military intelligence had, in fact, warned of the capabilities of the Boer Republics from 1896 onwards, and the need for concerted and co-ordinated plans for defence, although Major-General Sir John Ardagh, Director of Military Intelligence from 1896 to 1901, believed that the British garrison in Natal, together with the Volunteers, were adequate for defensive purposes.¹⁵³

**Potential Comrades and Potential Opponents:
The Boer and British Forces, an Initial Assessment**

**'We are a simple nation, a simple nation we,
And we are merely struggling, are struggling to be free;
We do not dig for lucre, like England's sordid crew,**

¹⁴⁹ Thomas G Fergusson, British Military Intelligence, 1870-1914: The Development of a Modern Intelligence Organization, London, Arms and Armour Press, 1984, pp1,7,15-17 and 78.

¹⁵⁰ Lionel Swart, 'General Sir Redvers Buller and the Relief of the Siege of Ladysmith', BA Honours thesis, University of Natal, 1962, p37.

¹⁵¹ Fergusson, British Military Intelligence, pp103-4 and 112; Miller, Lord Methuen and the British Army, pp72-3.

¹⁵² Benyon, 'Main Show or Side-Show', pp41-2; Fergusson, British Military Intelligence, pp113-4; Nasson, The South African War 1899-1902, pp74-5; and see Military Notes on the Dutch Republics of South Africa, 'Preface', passim; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, p13; Kochanski, 'Wolseley and the South African War', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, p57.

¹⁵³ Royal Commission on the War in South Africa, I, Report, Appendix A, pp154-9, and Appendix B, pp163-6; Merriwether, 'The Uncertain Path', p76; Surridge, Managing the South African War, pp34-9.

We live as simple farmers, and bleed the fools who do.'¹⁵⁴

The British Army was unprepared for war in 1899.¹⁵⁵ A request by Field-Marshal Wolseley to Lord Lansdowne in September 1899, to assemble food and stores in South Africa was turned down, as was his request in August to despatch 10 000 men. This was because Lansdowne believed that peace was still possible and was reluctant to provoke the Boers.¹⁵⁶ In its overall military strategy the British War Office had charted an uncertain path from 1896 to 1899, and this was cause for concern to Natal.¹⁵⁷

It was widely recognised that successive wars against 'savage' opponents had a detrimental impact on the British Army, in the sense of over-confidence, neglect of strategy, and ill-advised promotions. The ill-effects were to be borne out in the opening months of the Anglo-Boer War.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ Times of Natal, 8 February 1900.

¹⁵⁵ Ian Knight, Colenso 1899: The Boer War in Natal, London, Osprey, 1995, p12; Best, War and Society in Revolutionary Europe, pp126 and 128-130. Best's topic of investigation is the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars of 1793 to 1815. Also see IG Thomas, 'Buller, the Man not the Barracks', RCT Review, 1/18, November 1974, p82; Miller, Lord Methuen and the British Army, pp74-5.

¹⁵⁶ NAR, Leyds Archive, 1042, CD44, No.12, Chamberlain to Hely-Hutchinson 3 August 1899; NAR, Leyds Archive, CD44, No.15, Hely-Hutchinson to Chamberlain 9 August 1899; Andrew Thompson, 'Pressure Groups, Propaganda and the State: the Manipulation of Public Opinion in Britain during the South African War', unpublished conference paper, UNISA, 1998, pp1-2; Miller, Lord Methuen and the British Army, pp72 and 74-5; and see PRO, CAB (microfilm), 37/50/60, Wolseley to Lansdowne 1 September 1899; Pakenham, The Scramble for Africa, pp561-2.

¹⁵⁷ PRO, CAB (microfilm), 37/50/49, Lansdowne Memorandum, 12 August 1899, and 37/50/56, Wolseley to Lansdowne, 24 August 1899; Merriwether, 'The Uncertain Path', pp75-7; Surridge, Managing the South African War, p21; Kochanski, 'Wolseley and the South African War', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, pp58 and 60-1.

¹⁵⁸ Amery (ed) The Times History, II, p26; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, p87; Dunlop, The Development of the British Army, pp69-70, 89-90 and 93-100; Times of Natal, 2 January 1900; and see Norman F Dixon, On the Psychology of Military Incompetence, London, Jonathan Cape, 1976, p54; John Childs, 'The Military Revolution I: The Transition to Modern Warfare', in Townshend (ed), The Oxford History of Modern War, p38; David French, 'The Nation in Arms II: The Nineteenth Century', in Townshend (ed), The Oxford History of Modern War, p82. Also see Black, 'The Military Revolution II', in

(continued...)

It was still felt that the regular army would suffice for small colonial wars against unsophisticated opponents armed with inferior weaponry.¹⁵⁹

On the other hand, Buller correctly anticipated that the war would be similar to the American War of Independence, in the sense that the Boers were regarded as a 'civilized' enemy in relation, for example, to the Dervishes in Sudan, and were equipped with modern weapons, but the campaign would be conducted in an 'uncivilized' country with a scattered population and a de-centralised political and military administration.¹⁶⁰ Such a dichotomy was reflected in the similarity, on the one hand, of the Natal Volunteer forces to the British Army in terms of sentiment, filial ties, and regimental structures and traditions, and on the other in the similar operational and tactical skills they shared with the Boer commandos.

While there existed in the colonies a realistic impression of the military capabilities of the Boers, they were still generally considered no match for the Imperial-colonial combination.¹⁶¹ Boer

¹⁵⁸(...continued)

Townshend (ed), The Oxford History of Modern War, pp43-7, for comment on the so-called 'organisational divide' in warfare.

¹⁵⁹ Dunlop, The Development of the British Army, p18; and see Philip Magnus, Kitchener: Portrait of an Imperialist, London, John Murray, 1958, p166; David Smurthwaite, The Boer War, 1899-1902, London, Hamlyn, 1999, p32; Haswell, Citizen Armies, pp124-6. British Army complacency prevailed despite the fact that since 1870 large-scale manoeuvres had been held on only four occasions, in 1871, 1872, 1873 and 1898 (EM Wessels, "'The Soldiers of the Queen': The Anglo-Boer War in Perspective', Despatches: The Magazine of the Friends of the Imperial War Museum, December 1999, p11).

¹⁶⁰ Miller, Lord Methuen and the British Army, p78.

¹⁶¹ IWM, 79/35/1, Lieutenant-Colonel PF Fitzgerald, 2nd King's Shropshire Light Infantry, p7; The Siege Diary of William Watson, 14 November 1899; and see Nasson, The South African War 1899-1902, p69; Charles N Robinson (ed), Navy and Army Illustrated, IX, London, Hudson and Kearns, 1900, p75; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, p68; Hervey de Montmorency, Sword and Stirrup: Memories of an Adventurous Life, London, G Bell, 1936, p113. Also see Times of Natal, 7 October 1899. For comment on General Penn Symons's attitude, see Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Hamilton Papers 2/2/2, Hamilton to Wilkinson 11 October 1899, as well as Godfrey Powell, Buller: A Scapegoat? (A Life of General Sir Redvers Buller 1839-1908), London, Leo Cooper, 1994, pp127-8.

military prowess was certainly underestimated by the British.¹⁶² JH Breytenbach, the most thorough historian of Boer operations, acknowledged that they largely lacked the strict discipline and unquestioning obedience evident in the British Army. Yet, although these deficiencies were sometimes costly, military operations were to demonstrate that they were to a certain extent compensated for by initiative largely absent in the Tommy.¹⁶³

This point suggests an important element of comparison between the burghers and the Natal Volunteers, namely, the tempering of discipline and obedience with educated but qualified use of initiative. There were other similarities: an emphasis on concealment; mounted mobility; and the retirement from positions, however hard-won, if tactical considerations suggested it.¹⁶⁴ Both Boer and Natal Volunteer came from sparsely-populated civilian societies and shared a reluctance to risk casualties in adverse tactical situations.¹⁶⁵

The British Army's efforts to adopt methods and structures capable of dealing with an opponent such as the Boers were compromised by resistance from an essentially traditional organisation in

¹⁶² See Amery (ed), The Times History, II, pp72-8; Jerold Taitz, The War Memories of Commandant Ludwig Krause 1899-1900, Cape Town, Van Riebeeck Society, 1996, p28. One revealing comment comes from the Volunteer chaplain in Ladysmith: 'They [the Boers] were thoroughly disorganised and did not know what to do. On the other hand they have completely upset the colonial opinions about them. We said they would never strike the first blow; they did. We said that they would never invade our country; they did: that they would never stand after a few were killed; they did: that they would be cruel and inhuman to the wounded; they were not' (Siege Museum, Ladysmith, Reverend GE Pennington, 'Anglo-Afrikaner War 1899-1900', p12; RJ McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, London, George Bell & Sons, 1900, p50).

¹⁶³ Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, I, pp50-1; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, pp72-3 and 77-8; Anon., The Mobile Boer: By Two Burghers, New York, The Grafton Press, 1902, p5.

¹⁶⁴ Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, pp71, 79-80; and see André Wessels, 'Afrikaners at War', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, pp88-91.

¹⁶⁵ Bryan Perrett, Against All Odds! More Dramatic 'Last Stand' Actions, London, Arms and Armour Press, 1995, pp98-101.

transition.¹⁶⁶ This partially explains the disputed utilisation of colonial mounted infantry, despite contemporary warnings against practices such as infantry operating against mounted opponents without the support of mounted troops.¹⁶⁷ It was only with the greatest difficulty that British infantry could engage and defeat the Boers, who would ride away to more advantageous positions before numbers and bayonets could sway the fortunes of an engagement against them.¹⁶⁸ The potential of mounted infantry tactics, as practiced by the Boers, applied particularly to the broken country of northern Natal.¹⁶⁹

Mounted infantry had, in fact, been used by the British Army since the 1830s, mainly in African contexts, and by 1888 was officially recognised as an element of the army, although not in distinct units.¹⁷⁰ During the Anglo-Boer War the stop-gap solution of the training of temporary mounted troops from regular infantry units was never entirely successful in the field.¹⁷¹ However, the use of regular infantry in a mounted role, thereby not utilizing irregulars, 'solved' one problem for British military authorities, namely the ingrained prejudice against Volunteer discipline that was perceived to be of a low standard.¹⁷² These soldiers, whose main duties were scouting, picqueting

¹⁶⁶ Tim Travers, 'The Hidden Army: Structural Problems in the British Officer Corps, 1900-1918', Journal of Contemporary History, 17/1982, pp524-5; Miller, Lord Methuen and the British Army, p2; Wessels, "'The Soldiers of the Queen'", p11; Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, III (1982), p406.

¹⁶⁷ Military Notes on the Dutch Republics, p49; and see Sternberg, My Experience of the Boer War, xxxii-xxxiii, pp205-7, 233-4, 211-17, 239-40 and p231.

¹⁶⁸ Elisaveta Kandyba-Foxcroft, Russia and the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902, Roodepoort, Cum Books, 1981, pp156-160; Christopher Dwyer, 'Raiding Strategy: As Applied by the Western Confederate Cavalry in the American Civil War', The Journal of Military History, 63/2, April 1999, p267.

¹⁶⁹ Military Notes on the Dutch Republics, p49.

¹⁷⁰ Michael Barthorp, 'The Mounted Infantry', Soldiers of the Queen, 99/December 1999, p7; and see G Tylden, 'Mounted Infantry', Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research, 22/1943-4, passim.

¹⁷¹ James Grierson, Scarlet into Khaki: The British Army on the Eve of the Boer War, London, Greenhill Books, 1988, p42.

¹⁷² DOW Hall, The New Zealanders in South Africa 1899-1902, Wellington, War History
(continued...)

and dismounted combat, fought regularly alongside colonial mounted infantry.¹⁷³

The Logistics of Mobilization

**'We will rouse them from their farms
If we've only half a chance,
All are keen of eye and ear,
And as rapid as a lance.'¹⁷⁴**

Despite a shift in official and popular sentiment since the Jameson Raid, the Natal government was even at this late stage reluctant to antagonise the Transvaal by mobilizing its Volunteer force prior to an actual declaration of war, or until there was 'evident intention' by the Boers to attack the Colony.¹⁷⁵ The situation was compounded by the British government's premature announcement in June 1899 of a military expedition to South Africa, followed by several crucial months of almost complete inactivity, motivated by a similar reluctance to demonstrate aggressive intent.¹⁷⁶

By September 1899 several Natal Volunteer regiments had already seen service that year, including a successful general encampment at Balgowan from 26 March to 4 April. These units

¹⁷²(...continued)

Branch, Department of International Affairs, p6; Barthorp, 'The Mounted Infantry', p7.

¹⁷³ Knight, Go to Your God, pp188-190. The Composite Regiment in Buller's Relief Army included mounted infantry companies of the 2nd King's Royal Rifles and 2nd Royal Fusiliers (Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers (Scottish Record Office), file 2, GD 233/141/1 and file 3, GD 233/124/2); McKenzie, Delayed Action, p186).

¹⁷⁴ Natal Witness, 30 September 1899.

¹⁷⁵ NAR, Leyds Archive 1042, CD44, No.13, Hely-Hutchinson to Chamberlain, 7 August 1899; NAR, Leyds Archive 1042, CD44, No.16, Hely-Hutchinson to Chamberlain, 8 August 1899; Times of Natal, 1 March 1900; Paterson, 'The Military Organisation of the Colony of Natal', p81; Frederick Rompel, Heroes of Boer War, The Hague and Pretoria, The Nederland Publishing Co, 1903, p96; Nasson, The South African War 1899-1902, pp69-70. See Natal Carbineers History Centre, Volunteer Act 1895, p9, for conditions of mobilization for the Volunteer force.

¹⁷⁶ Miller, Lord Methuen and the British Army, pp65 and 70-1.

were the Natal Carbineers, the Natal Mounted Rifles, the Border Mounted Rifles, the Natal Field Artillery, the Natal Royal Rifles, and the Durban Light Infantry.¹⁷⁷ The annual encampments for routine Volunteer training were based in a different centre or rural district every year. These annual encampments bonded the Natal Volunteers to the settler communities whose welfare they were tasked with securing.¹⁷⁸

Despite the apparent imminence of war with the Boer Republics, there was little deviation at the Balgowan encampment from the regular programme of regimental, squadron, battery, troop and company drills.¹⁷⁹ The Volunteers nevertheless sufficiently impressed British staff officers present to be considered the equivalent in effectiveness to the same number of regulars, and therefore not to require the supervision of attached regular officers.¹⁸⁰

In late September there were several local indications that war was imminent.¹⁸¹ The Volunteers were mobilized on 29 September.¹⁸² The news was greeted in the press with a combination of

¹⁷⁷ PAR, Natal Colonial Publications (NCP), 7/4/6, Departmental Report 1899, Commandant Volunteers; PAR, Natal Defence Records (NDR), 1/8, Natal Royal Regiment Letterbook, FS Tatham to Commandant Volunteers, 11 June 1902. During this encampment, joint 'field days' were arranged with British regular troops at nearby Nottingham Road (PAR, NCP 7/4/6, Departmental Report 1899, Commandant Volunteers).

¹⁷⁸ AC Martin, The Durban Light Infantry, I (1854 to 1934), Durban, 1969, p46; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, pp239-40,244-252,259-60,262-3,267-8 and 273-5.

¹⁷⁹ PAR, NCP 7/4/6, Departmental Reports 1899, Commandant Volunteers; PAR, NDR 2/8, Orderbooks Volunteer Camps 1898-1900, Orders, Balgowan Camp, 28 March 1899. Prior to the Anglo-Zulu War the Natal Volunteers appear to have enjoyed a more realistic preparation, see Laband and Knight, The War Correspondents: The Anglo-Zulu War, pp5-6.

¹⁸⁰ Paterson, 'The Military Organisation of the Colony of Natal', p80. For detail on further encampments in this vein, see Times of Natal, 26, 29 and 31 July, 21 August and 18 September 1899; and Natal Witness, 31 July, 16 and 22 August 1899.

¹⁸¹ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Peter Francis Papers, Natal Carbineers Chronicles 1855-1943, 'The Boer War', p1; PAR, CO 179/206, Hely-Hutchinson to Chamberlain, 7 October 1899; Natal Witness, 28 September 1899; Amery (ed), The Times History, II, p109; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p7. Campaign preparations such as serving out ammunition, for example, had already been completed (Natal Mercury, 28 September 1899).

¹⁸² The mobilization order for the Natal Volunteers was issued in terms of the Volunteer
(continued...)

surprise and relief.¹⁸³ Each man was called upon to agree 'to give my best services in whatever position those in authority may consider of most benefit to the Empire' and offered his services 'for any disturbance that may arise between HM Government and the Transvaal'.¹⁸⁴ The Natal Witness reported at length on Natal Carbineer preparations in Pietermaritzburg, as well as the mobilization procedures of the Greytown-based Umvoti Mounted Rifles and the Border Mounted Rifles from the Ixopo district. The Natal Mercury did the same for the Durban Volunteers (the Durban Light Infantry, the Natal Mounted Rifles, and the Natal Naval Volunteers).¹⁸⁵ The general reporting in colonial newspapers was imbued with an enthusiastic fervour.¹⁸⁶ In practice, however, the vacillating commitment of the Colony to war was to undermine the military undertaking.

It was only shortly before their departure from Pietermaritzburg station on 1 October 1899 that the Natal midlands components of the Volunteer force learnt that the immediate destination for

¹⁸²(...continued)

Act of 1895 (PAR, MJPW 88, minute paper L&W 5049/1901, Government House Notice 526/1899, 29 September 1899; PAR, CO (microfilm), 1/1/1/1/197 [PRO 179/206], Hely-Hutchinson to Chamberlain, 7 October 1899; PAR, NCP, 6/1/1/52, Natal Government Gazette, LI, No3053, 13 October 1899; and see PAR, NCP, 6/2/1/2/8, Government Notices, Government Notice No526/1900; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p151; Black and White Budget, II/14, 13 January 1900, p6).

¹⁸³ Times of Natal, 30 September 1899.

¹⁸⁴ PAR, MJPW 71, minute paper L&W 4341/1899, Lieutenant-Colonel R Benningfield to Hime, 4 October 1899, and see PAR, MJPW 70, minute paper L&W/1899, Hely-Hutchinson to Minister of Lands and Works, 29 September 1899.

¹⁸⁵ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Peter Francis Papers, Natal Carbineer Chronicles 1855-1943, 'The Boer War', p1; Natal Mercury, 2 October 1899; Natal Witness, 2 October 1899; and see Natal Volunteer Record, p129. For further detail on the mobilization of the Durban Volunteers, see Brian Kearney, 'Volunteers, Recruits and Scouts', in Johan Wassermann and Brian Kearney (eds), A Warrior's Gateway: Durban and the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902, Pretoria, Protea Book House, 2002, pp82-9.

¹⁸⁶ Natal Mercury, 2 October 1899. Also see Bennett, Absent-Minded Beggars, pp1-2, for comment on the very similar atmosphere that marked the departure for South Africa of the City of London Imperial Volunteers (CIV) in January 1900. Jeffery's Ireland and the Great War, p41, also records a similar euphoria on the departure of the 10th Irish Division from Dublin in May 1915. Interestingly, the response of the Natal Volunteers to mobilization for the Anglo-Zulu War was similarly positive (Laband and Knight, The War Correspondents: The Anglo-Zulu War, pp14-5).

most of the units was Ladysmith, rather than routine guard duty on the main Natal Government Railway line, as had been widely anticipated.¹⁸⁷ Guard duty along the line of communication was the fate of the unmounted Durban Light Infantry and the Natal Royal Rifles for much of the subsequent campaign.¹⁸⁸

On 7 October the Governor reported to Chamberlain on the success of the mobilization. Of the 1 881 Volunteers called out on 28 September, 1 844 had reported by the evening of 2 October. Less than one per cent were unaccounted for.¹⁸⁹ On 12 October the Volunteer force was placed under the command of Major-General Sir William Penn Symons, GOC Her Majesty's forces in Natal.¹⁹⁰ The Commandant of Volunteers, Colonel William Royston, was assured that there would be no interference with the actual operation of the Volunteer force.¹⁹¹ As early as 10 August steps had also been taken to augment Volunteer numbers, and to raise African scouts.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁷ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p9; Natal Witness, 19 and 20 May 1899. The immediate destination of the trains carrying the coastal Volunteers, which departed Durban on 30 September, was Colenso (Natal Mercury, 2 October 1899).

¹⁸⁸ FM Crum, With the Mounted Infantry in South Africa: Being Sidelights on the Boer Campaign 1899-1902, Cambridge, MacMillan and Bowes, 1903, p5; and see Grierson, Scarlet into Khaki, pp119-120. In the short term this task was undertaken by a Natal Government Railways Rifle Association contingent (Times of Natal, 28 September 1899). A unit called the Natal Bridge Guards was also raised from the ranks of NGR employees (Natal Mercury, 6 November 1900; Natal Volunteer Record, p185; Hurst, Short History of the Volunteer Regiments of Natal and East Griqualand, pp117-8).

¹⁸⁹ PAR, CSO 1634, minute paper 9680/1899, 15 November 1899, Despatch 151, Hely-Hutchinson to Chamberlain, 7 October 1899. In reply Chamberlain expressed his 'satisfaction at the efficiency with which the mobilization was carried out' (PAR, CSO 1634, minute paper 9680/1899, Chamberlain to Hely-Hutchinson 15 November 1899).

¹⁹⁰ This measure was enacted in terms of Army Act 1881 (Government Notice 452/1899), and the Natal Volunteer Act (No.23, 1895), for active service up until 11 April 1900 (PAR, CO (microfilm), Hely-Hutchinson to Chamberlain, 19 October 1899; PAR, CO (microfilm), 1/1/1/201 [PRO179/209], Government Notice 15/1900; and see Natal Witness, 14 July 1900).

¹⁹¹ PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Corps, Orderbooks, 15 October 1899; Natal Witness, 14 August 1899.

¹⁹² PAR, GH 1679, Diary of Events, p5, 10 and 17 August 1899; Who's Who in Natal, p216. One of these units of African scouts was raised by RCA Samuelson, a member of the
(continued...)

Financial Mobilization for the Colony of Natal

For the British government, an anticipated three or four month campaign, costing no more than £10 million, was to escalate into a 32-month war costing £230 million.¹⁹³ It was also to prove an expensive war for the Natal government which carried expenses such as pay for its Volunteers.¹⁹⁴ The issue of financial support by the South African colonies was to have a major bearing on political pressure leading to the demobilization of the Volunteer regiments in October 1900. Strachan terms this conflict a contest 'between war and cash'.¹⁹⁵

In October 1899 the Natal Ministry of Lands and Works presented a war budget of an estimated cost of £18 850 per month for pay alone.¹⁹⁶ In April 1902 debate still raged in government and

¹⁹²(...continued)

Natal Carbineers. It was unnamed, and was drawn from the 'Native Christian Settlement' of Driefontein near Ladysmith (RCA Samuelson, Long, Long Ago, Durban, Knox Printing and Publishing Co, 1929; reprint, Durban, TW Griggs, 1974, pp137-142).

¹⁹³ PRO WO32/7864, 079/9013 and 079/9134, Special Expenditure Necessary for British Reinforcements, July 1899 and 25 September 1899; Ian Beckett, 'Britain's Imperial War: a Question of Totality?', unpublished conference paper, UOFS, October 1999, p5.

¹⁹⁴ PRO WO 32/8157, anonymous communication to Treasury (079/1743 nd, c March 1900); and see Guest, 'It was the Best of Times, it was the Worst of Times', pp40-1. Natal also budgeted a figure of £28 000 towards the expenses of British forces in the Colony, comprising £12 000 for coal for the Royal Navy, £4 000 for allowances, and £12 000 in rebates on imports and customs (PAR, NCP, 6/1/1/53, Natal Government Gazette, LII, No.3096, 24 April 1901, Estimates of Expenditure, Colony of Natal, Year Ending 30 June 1901).

¹⁹⁵ Hew Strachan, European Armies and the Conduct of War, London, George Allen & Unwin, p6. Clausewitz also comments in this vein on the relationship between regular armies and 'popular forces' (Howard, Clausewitz, p56).

¹⁹⁶ The Colony's financial statistics, regarding the Volunteers, for the years 1900 to 1902, recorded a significantly increased burden on the treasury (PAR, NCP 7/3/7-9, Statistical Yearbooks, 1900-1902; and see Natal Mercury, 23 November 1899).

On unit level, the specific remuneration statistics for the Natal Carbineers read as follows:

27 @ 15/- per diem	£20.5.0
31 @ 8/- per diem	£12.8.0

(continued...)

Volunteer ranks over the matter of responsibility for the payment of rations for men and horses up to July 1900. The Natal government was not prepared uncomplainingly to agree to an onerous financial sacrifice.¹⁹⁷ Correspondence between the Natal Prime Minister and his Minister of Lands and Works during the course of 1900 confirmed that the Imperial government was responsible for such expenses as rations, forage and transport, with the colonial government liable only for pay.¹⁹⁸

The matter of local and British funding of the war effort in Natal, coupled with the questionable level of training of the Volunteer forces and divided settler opinion, raises several questions which would have been bundled by Clausewitz under the heading 'moral forces'.¹⁹⁹ They are relevant here because the financial strain of pay contributed to the erosion of the Colony's military commitment to the war in the medium to long term.

The six shillings per day for Volunteer troopers was to become a bone of contention for British regulars, who received only one shilling.²⁰⁰ However, then as now, the pay of a regular soldier,

¹⁹⁶(...continued)

31 @ 7/- per diem	£10.17.0
400 @ 6/- per diem	£120.0.0

489

£163.10.0

(PAR, MJPW 71, Department of Lands and Works, minute paper 4415/1899, Dept L&W, 18 October 1899).

¹⁹⁷ On 16 July 1900 the colonial government received a debit voucher for the sum of £1886-6-6, comprising 10 291 European rations (£707-10-1), 1570 African rations (£22-2-2), 10 099 horse rations (£1 030-18-9), and 2 744 mule rations (£125-15-4) (PAR, PM 28, Minute Paper PM 932/02, Debit Voucher, ASC, Mooi River, 16 July 1900).

¹⁹⁸ PAR, PM 28, PM 932/02, Correspondence, Minister of Lands and Works and Prime Minister, 19 March and 10 September 1900.

¹⁹⁹ Howard, Clausewitz, pp26-9.

²⁰⁰ PAR, MJPW 71, minute paper 4415/1899, Pay List, Volunteers; PAR, CSO 1640, Minute Paper, 1010/1900, Colonial Secretary, Smythe to GOC, Lines of Communication, 6 February 1900; Natal Witness, 24 August 1900; Black and White Budget, II/22, 10 March 1900, p4; Robinson (ed), Navy and Army Illustrated, XI, p126; McKenzie, Delayed Action, (continued...)

while low, was a steady income.²⁰¹ For the citizen-soldier military service has often meant the neglect or abandonment of business or farming interests, or of salaries, with consequent financial difficulties.²⁰²

The colonial government did not ignore its social responsibilities to the Volunteers. In June 1900 the report of a select committee to establish the provisions for pensions to the widows and dependents of Volunteer fatalities was submitted to the Minister of Lands and Works.²⁰³ Government efforts were supplemented by a Volunteer Relief Fund that provided monthly assistance for dependents of colonial Volunteers.²⁰⁴ Businesses in the Colony entered into the spirit of the fund by contributing a portion of the price of certain goods.²⁰⁵ As the war escalated, assistance even arrived from private sources in the metropole.²⁰⁶

Despite pay-scales considerably higher than those of the regular army, a perennial problem for the

²⁰⁰ (...continued)

pp162-3; Lieutenant-General the Earl of Dundonald, My Army Life, London, Edward Arnold & Co, 1926, pp99 and 111-2; Kandyba-Foxcroft, Russia and the Anglo-Boer War, p139. Even a trooper of the elite Household Cavalry was paid only 1/9 per day.

²⁰¹ Knight, Go to Your God Like a Soldier, p18.

²⁰² Natal Witness, 27 January 1900.

²⁰³ PAR, MJPW 75, minute paper 4293/1900; Lands and Works 2165/1900, Report of Select Committee regarding Provision to be made for Widows and Dependents of Volunteers, 7 June 1900.

²⁰⁴ Natal Witness, 12 January 1900.

²⁰⁵ Times of Natal, 15 and 27 March 1900. A Pietermaritzburg Relief Committee also operated in the capital, but more to assist the general refugee population generated by the dislocation attendant on the war than the Volunteers specifically (Michael Bollmann, 'War and Natal Urban Communities: The Socio-Economic Life of Pietermaritzburg and Dundee, during the first phase of the Anglo-Boer War, October 1899 to April 1900', BA Honours thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1987, pp44-5).

²⁰⁶ In November 1899 Lloyd's Patriotic Fund of London offered money to convalescent wounded (PAR, CSO 1634, minute paper 9712/99, Natal Government Agent-General to Colonial Secretary, 24 November 1899, and 16 March 1900). A Natal Volunteers War Fund was also established (PAR, CSO 1641, minute paper 1408, Manager Standard Bank to Permanent Under-Secretary, Pietermaritzburg, 23 February 1900).

many economically-productive Volunteers was the matter of compensation by employers. Once again support was forthcoming from businesses in Natal. One Durban firm was commended for establishing a fund to supplement the active service pay of employees at the front. This was an early indication of the high expectations by Volunteers of protection from both civil and political sources. Public support, such as that from commerce, was considered the next best thing to actual enlistment.²⁰⁷ In March 1900 the Economic Life Assurance Society was offering policies on the lives of Volunteers and irregulars at 'ordinary cost', with no penalty premium on account of the war.²⁰⁸

Civil servants were a particularly fortunate group in terms of compensation for war duty with the Volunteers, with voluntary field service for those on the permanent establishment regarded as leave with full pay.²⁰⁹ Officers in government service were permitted to enrol in the Volunteer forces provided that military duty was not detrimental to their work obligations.²¹⁰ When the duration of the war extended beyond a few months, indications emerged that such government generosity was not unlimited. In March 1900 the Natal Witness was to criticise the effective docking of a civil servant Volunteer's pay once this leave pay had been depleted. The government claimed that all professionals and the self-employed were in a similar situation, and one group alone could not be given preferential treatment. Provisions for leave may well have been generous, but the system was clearly intended primarily to take care of the routine Volunteer bivouacs and

²⁰⁷ Natal Mercury, 4 October 1899; Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, III, pp408-9.

²⁰⁸ Natal Advertiser, 5 March 1900; Natal Mercury, 6 March 1900.

²⁰⁹ PAR, Escombe Collection, A159/17, Circular, Principal Under Secretary, Lands and Works, 19 October 1899.

²¹⁰ PAR, CSO 1628, minute paper 8031/1899, Circular, Colonial Secretary, 5 September 1878; PAR, CSO 1628, minute paper 8031/1899, Natal Government Circular, 19 October 1899; PAR, CSO 1628, minute paper 8031/1899, Natal Government Circular, 19 October 1899. The duration of such leave pay was dependent on leave due to each relevant officer, and was also to re-emerge as a contentious issue when a calendar year of military service was completed in September-October 1900.

encampments rather than full-time field service.²¹¹

An example of the potential financial cost to colonists of military service was that of the Volunteer veterinary officer, Herbert Watkins-Pitchford, director of the Allerton Veterinary Laboratory in Pietermaritzburg. He took his 50 per cent reduction in salary in positive spirit, concluding that 'this is not a time for a man to be self-seeking or troubling about his personal affairs when such urgent and weighty matters are being settled'.²¹² RCA Samuelson, an advocate and attorney of the Supreme Court of Natal, was another leading colonist who risked financial disadvantage by abandoning businesses and careers.²¹³

The movement of armies is always significantly influenced by the 'shackles of supply' and the 'tyranny of logistics'. In this context, the most prominent example of the mobilization of the economic resources of the Colony was the successful adaptation of the Natal Government Railways (NGR) to the British and Natal war effort.²¹⁴

The successful mobilization of the Natal Volunteers, and subsequent general troop transport and

²¹¹ PAR, CSO 1628, minute paper 8031/1899, Natal Government Circular, Question of Pay to be Allowed to Government Officers who have been Called out for Service as Volunteers, 19 October 1899; PAR, CSO 1636, minute paper 8058/1899, Permanent Officers absent on Military Service, 20 October 1899; PAR, CSO 1640, minute paper 1148/1900, Increments of Messrs CNH Rodwell and RM Tanner, 12 February 1900; Natal Witness, 3 March 1900.

²¹² H Watkins-Pitchford, Besieged in Ladysmith, Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter, 1964, p19.

²¹³ Natal Witness, 19 November 1900; Who's Who in Natal, 1933, p216; Samuelson, Long Ago, pp137-8.

²¹⁴ The importance of the railways was reflected in two major campaigns bracketing the Anglo-Boer War, the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1 and World War I. See Martin Van Creveld, Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977, pp1,22-3,82-103 and 111; Jeremy Black, War and the World: Military Power and the Fate of Continents 1450-2000, New Haven, Conn, Yale University Press, 1998, p198; and see Harold FB Wheeler, The Story of Lord Kitchener, London, George G Harrap & Company, 1916, p194; Martin van Creveld, 'Technology and War I: to 1945', in Townshend (ed), The Oxford History of Modern War, p215; Richard Holmes, 'Battle: The Experience of Modern Combat', in Townshend (ed), The Oxford History of Modern War, pp236-7.

supply, proved to be a logistical triumph for the NGR, the economic pride of the Colony, and one of the driving forces of its prewar policies.²¹⁵ Concentrated effort would be required during November 1899 as Buller began his build-up of men and equipment for the relief of Ladysmith, and the NGR received credit from the British general for its effort in this regard.²¹⁶ For civilian transport this came at a cost of varying degrees of restriction until at least May 1900, although in economic terms the Colony and the NGR was to benefit from the war.²¹⁷ There was also extensive Boer looting of NGR property in the northern districts.²¹⁸

²¹⁵ PAR, MJPW 70, 7510/1899, Notice, NGR General Manager, Durban, 29 September 1899; Natal Witness, 4 and 16 October 1899; Times of Natal, 16 October 1899; and see PAR, MJPW 70, 7510/1899, Royston to Minister of Lands and Works, 2 October 1899; Natal Mercury, 27 October 1900. The story of the impact of the Anglo-Boer War on the NGR still awaits attention as the two histories of the Natal railways to date, Edward Donald Campbell, The Birth & Development of the Natal Railways, Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter, 1951, and Heinie Heydenrych and Bruno Martin, The Natal Main Line Story, Pretoria, HSRC Publishers, 1992, make no mention of the war at all.

²¹⁶ TT Jeans (ed), Naval Brigades in the South African War 1899-1900, London, Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1901, p237; WKL Dickson, The Biograph in Battle: Its Story in the South African War Related with Personal Experiences, London, T Fisher Unwin: reprint, Flick Books, 1995, p51. For Buller's positive comments on the NGR see Natal Volunteer Record, pp29-30. Also see Brian Kearney, 'Rail and Steam', in Wassermann and Kearney (eds), A Warrior's Gateway, pp168-177.

²¹⁷ PAR, MJPW 73, Hime to NGR, 4 January 1900; Times of Natal, 3 January 1900; Natal Witness, 9 and 16 February, 2,12,16 and 19 March, and 9 April 1900; Natal Carbineers History Centre, Woods newspaper cuttings scrapbook; Guest, 'It was the Best of Times, it was the Worst of Times', p43. See PRO, WO/108/120 with regard to military traffic statistics for December 1901-April 1902. The financial loss for October 1899, caused by the suspension of commerce with the Transvaal, was estimated at £37 000, while losses in local traffic totalled £13 000. Of the overall total of £50 000, £22 500 was recouped from the British government for the transportation of troops. This left a shortfall of £27 500. During the financial year ending 31 December 1900, an estimated 40 per cent of the NGR's system mileage had been unavailable due to the war. However, according to the Colony's Statistical Yearbook for 1900, overall NGR income actually increased from 1899 to 1900 (£940 100 to £1 242 280, a rise of 32.14 per cent, with passenger traffic up from 236 865 to 300 921) (PAR, MJPW 71, 4415/99, General Manager, NGR, Special Expenditure due to the present Boer Rebellion; PAR, NCP 7/4/7, Departmental Reports, 1900, pC2; PAR, NCP 7/3/7, Statistical Yearbook 1900, pp28-9).

²¹⁸ PAR, MJPW 72, L&W, 9236/99; PAR, MJPW 72, L&W, 9236/99, 28 November 1899, and L&W, 5151/99; PAR, Natal Civil Service List, 1899, p86; PAR, MJPW 72, 9236/1899 and GM 17269/99, 28 November 1899 and 22 August 1900.

Conclusion

The Natal Volunteers were always only a small force in the overall context of the Anglo-Boer War, and this chapter has sought to place them on the wider military stage with the lead actors in the impending conflict. Firstly, the history of the Volunteers suggests that the military reliability of this force was uncertain. They also emerge as a force drawn heavily from the ranks of the Natal English settler community, and consequently imbued with a clear agenda to preserve the interests of that community. The sectional interests of the English settlers was manifested in the suspicions they harboured towards Natal's Dutch-speaking community, and in their concerns regarding the continuing acquiescence of the African majority in time of war.

The ability of the Natal Volunteers to contribute meaningfully to a British Imperial war effort, which carried strong metropolitan motives, was strongly influenced by several socio-political, economic, and military factors. These included the strain caused by the demands of British confederation on Natal's material interests, associated pressure from Lord Milner, the Colony's vulnerable strategic geographic position in the event of a war, and the ominous indications of an uneasy relationship with British military structures. Furthermore, while the prospect of war with the Boer Republics was not taken seriously enough in all quarters, there were indications that both Natal's loyalty of sentiment and its financial support were not to be entirely relied upon. However, despite the obstacles listed above, the mobilization of the Volunteer force at the end of September 1899 was successfully completed.

CHAPTER II

DEPLOYMENT IN LADYSMITH AND INITIAL OPERATIONS IN

NORTHERN NATAL

Arrival of the Natal Volunteers in Ladysmith and First Prospects for a Role in the War

Before the start of the Anglo-Boer War the Natal Volunteers had already earned accolades from the English popular illustrated press for efficiency and preparedness. The Navy and Army Illustrated of 7 October 1899, for example, described the local forces as 'singularly efficient, and composed of the very finest material that can well be imagined'.¹ The reaction of the Natal settler population, now that their support for British military operations had been secured, was relief that the campaign was at last underway, and this was reflected in the colonial press.² Given the fact that Natal support for the war had not been spontaneous, and that the military capability of the Volunteers was questionable, this exposure - particularly in an English magazine such as the Navy and Army Illustrated, that would have circulated throughout the Empire, especially in military and political circles - may have had a propagandistic component, serving to provide reassurance that the Colony was 'on board', and that its military contribution would be meaningful.

The Natal Carbineers and the Natal Field Artillery arrived in Ladysmith, the small northern Natal town transformed by the logistics of war, on the evening of 1 October, and were joined by the Natal Mounted Rifles on the following morning.³ A special correspondent for the Cape Argus

¹ Navy and Army Illustrated, IX, 7 October 1899, p92, and see 4 November 1899, pp178-9. Also see HW Wilson, With the Flag to Pretoria, I, London, Harmsworth Brothers, 1901, pp23 and 35; GW Steevens, From Capetown to Ladysmith, Edinburgh and London, William Blackwood & Sons, 1900, p68; HW Nevinston, Ladysmith: The Diary of a Siege, London, Methuen and Co, 1900, p11.

² Natal Witness, 3 October 1899.

³ Natal Witness, 3 October 1899; Natal Volunteer Record, pp129-130; Owen S Watkins, Chaplains at the Front: By One of Them, London, SW Partridge & Co, 1901, p41; Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p14-15; BWM, 'Reminiscences of Ladysmith Fifty Years Ago',

Weekly Edition described a vibrant, purposeful garrison town.⁴ However, the historian of the 18th Hussars left a more caustic description of the town during October 1899, before the start of the siege:

'One dismal day follows another with painful regularity. It is a place to look back upon with horror, a chip from Dante's Inferno and one created for the damned. Such I found Ladysmith in times of peace.'⁵

Facilities for the Volunteers were poor, and disciplinary and health problems emerged.⁶ Initially, they were not even provided with wet and dry messing facilities.⁷ Tentage too, in the form of small two-man patrol tents, as against the bell-tents of the imperial troops, was inadequate.⁸ Even before the war Ladysmith had a poor reputation for sanitation. Enteric had flourished ever since a garrison was first established in the town in May 1897, and in 1898 became sufficiently endemic to necessitate the periodic removal of troops to Mooi River for recuperation.⁹ This situation suggests a lack of logistical planning that inevitably accompanies confused strategic planning such

The Carbineer, 1950, p34. For comment on the strategic importance of Ladysmith see Jane Carruthers, Melton Prior: War Artist in Southern Africa, 1895 to 1900, Houghton, The Brenthurst Press, 1987, p149; and Natal Witness, 23 September 1899.

⁴ Cape Argus Weekly Edition, 4 October 1899. At Ladysmith the Natal Volunteers augmented some 7 250 Imperial troops (Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p23).

⁵ Major Charles Burnett, The 18th Hussars in South Africa: The Records of a Cavalry Regiment during the Boer War 1899-1902, Winchester, Warren & Son, 1905, p1.

⁶ PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Camps, Orderbooks, 2-3 October 1899; Siege Museum, Ladysmith, Ladysmith Town Guard Papers, passim; Times of Natal, 11 and 19 October 1899; Natal Advertiser, 10 and 12 October 1899; Natal Witness, 12 October 1899; Natal Mercury, 5 September 1901; Dominy, 'The Imperial Garrison in Natal', p17; Nevinson, Ladysmith: The Diary of a Siege, pp11-12.

⁷ Times of Natal, 11 October 1899.

⁸ Maritzburg College Museum and Archive, Nicholson letters, JB Nicholson to mother, nd; Times of Natal, 11 October 1899.

⁹ PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Camps, Orderbooks, 28 October and 1 November 1899; Natal Witness, 19 May 1897; GW Lines, The Ladysmith Siege: 2nd November 1899-1st March 1900, 1900. p7; Amery (ed), The Times History, IV, p516; McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, p158.

as had existed for this region in the period leading up to the war. These indications that the town already had a poor reputation as a military centre is an important consideration when the enormous impact of the siege of Ladysmith on the utilisation, casualty figures and morale of the Natal Volunteers is taken into account.

Soon after their arrival in Ladysmith, the Volunteers were complimented by the GOC Natal, Major-General Sir William Penn Symons, on the celerity and smartness of their turnout.¹⁰ They were also reminded of the need for restraint, as hostilities had not yet been declared.¹¹ At noon on 3 October they were informed of their further service destinations. Three squadrons of the Natal Carbineers, together with components of the Natal Mounted Rifles and Border Mounted Rifles, were to proceed to the Drakensberg passes.¹²

The value of the reconnaissance that the colonial mounted infantry now embarked upon was highlighted by the dearth of reliable military maps.¹³ In the critical war district north of the Thukela it was even reported that a thorough pre-war Intelligence Department survey had been undertaken, assisted by local farmers and prospectors, yet no maps had been compiled.¹⁴

¹⁰ PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Corps, Orderbooks, 6 October 1899. PAR, NCP 6/1/1/52, Natal Government Gazette, LI, p1724, No.3051, 10 October 1899, Government Notice No.536/1899, Special District Order by Major-General Sir W Penn Symons, Pietermaritzburg, 4 October 1899.

¹¹ Natal Witness, 4 and 5 October 1899; Ruari Chisholm, Ladysmith, London, Jonathan Ball Publishers and Osprey Publishing, 1979, p95.

¹² Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p15; Natal Mercury, 3 October 1899; George Archibald to Rosie, 14 October 1899, in Ruth E Gordon, Honour Without Riches: The Story of an Archibald Family, Durban, TW Griggs & Co, 1978, pp260-2; John Stirling, The Colonials in Africa: Their Record Based on the Despatches, London, Blackwoods and Sons, 1903, p29.

¹³ Burleigh, The Natal Campaign, pp69,85, 87-8 and 371; JB Atkins, The Relief of Ladysmith, London, Methuen, 1900, p93; Edgar Holt, The Boer War, London, Putnam, 1958, p123.

¹⁴ PAR, CO (microfilm), 1/1/1/1/201 [PRO179/208], Intelligence Department, London to the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, 15 August 1899; Natal Witness, 3 March 1900; and see PRO, 30/40/16, Ardagh Papers, Statement of Intelligence Division, pp1-2 (London, HMSO, 1902); Mocke, 'Die Slag van Colenso', p45; JP Pennefather, 'The Map Scandal and

Fergusson has commented that the numerous relatively easy victories earned by the British Army over inferior colonial opponents in the mid- and late-Victorian era had masked flaws such as this.¹⁵ In this particular case, the Intelligence Office responded by turning the matter on its head, insisting that it was Natal's responsibility, as a self-governing colony, to produce these maps, and that the Colony had shrunk from the expenditure.¹⁶ Natal's claimed culpability in the overall deficiencies of the British Army's topographical intelligence was another poor advertisement for the colonial war effort. The shortage of reliable maps was regarded in England as one of the major scandals of the war.¹⁷

Settler Concerns for the Northern Natal Towns: Newcastle, Charlestown and Dundee

Mention has already been made of the subdued response of urban rifle associations to the war, and in September 1899 a correspondent to the Natal Mercury commented on the differences of opinion regarding this element of the colonial defence equation:

'I note the agitation which is passing over the Colony to form town guards. As usual, when 'danger' looms, there is a rush to protect our hearths and homes. The majority...are neither Volunteers or rifle association men. As a rule they have nothing but ill words and sneers for the Volunteers.'¹⁸

the Methuen Map', Military History Journal, 11, 3/4, passim; Miller, Lord Methuen and the British Army, pp72-3; Walter Temple Willcox, The Fifth (Royal Irish) Lancers, London, Arthur Doubleday, 1908: reprint, York, Boer War Books, 1981, p210; Raymond Sibbald, The War Correspondents: The Boer War, Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1993, p20; Fergusson, British Military Intelligence, p18; Martin Marix Evans, The Boer War: South Africa 1899-1902, London, Osprey Publishing, 1999, pp14,19 and 113.

¹⁵ Fergusson, British Military Intelligence, pp20 and 111.

¹⁶ PRO, PRO 30/40, Ardagh Papers, Intelligence Summary South Africa, p347; PRO 30/40/16, Ardagh Papers, Statement of Intelligence Division, pp13-14; PAR, NCP 8/2/1, Departmental Reports 1901, Commandant of Volunteers, p14; Natal Advertiser, 9 and 11 October 1901; and see Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, pp14-15.

¹⁷ Holt, The Boer War, pp123-4; and see Times of Natal, 13 October 1899; and Natal Advertiser, 30 October 1899.

¹⁸ Natal Mercury, 22 September 1899.

He did, however, qualify his statement as far as the northern Natal districts were concerned:

'The above remarks do not refer to the border spots like Dundee, Newcastle and Charlestown. There they are justified in forming defence guards...and every man is actually in daily training.'¹⁹

In August 1899 Hime, the Prime Minister of Natal, declined to commit government support to a locally raised 'reserve' troop of farmers, intended for purely defensive purposes. This decision was on the advice of the Commandant of the Natal Volunteers who, while expressing gratitude at the evident spirit, did not consider a further intermediary force between the Volunteers and the rifle associations to be advisable, and referred interested parties to either one of these structures.²⁰ In September the residents of Charlestown, north of Newcastle, also attracted little sympathy with a similar request.²¹ It was evident that colonial authorities did not share the more urgent response that existed in the northern Natal towns, compared to the less vulnerable midlands.

This official response did not generally bode well for the security of Newcastle, Charlestown and the northern wedge of the Colony, and these towns were abandoned soon after the outbreak of hostilities, causing considerable resentment in this region.²²

Concern about Newcastle, and local Volunteer forces, reflected settler fears about the insecurity and instability of the northern districts generally. The Newcastle troop of the Natal Carbineers, for example, was not mobilised with the rest of the regiment, but instead permitted to release

¹⁹ Natal Mercury, 22 September 1899.

²⁰ GR Richards to Hime 15 August 1899, and Royston to Hime 18/8/1899, in PAR, MJPW 69, minute paper L&W 3526/1899. Richards served as an attached officer with the Natal Carbineers during the siege of Ladysmith.

²¹ PAR, MJPW 69, minute paper L&W 3526/1899, Commandant of Volunteers to Minister of Lands and Works, 18 August 1899; PAR, CSO 1626, minute paper 7092/1899, Minister of Lands and Works to Colonial Secretary, 19 September 1899.

²² NAM, 7812/26, Diaries of Colonel Frank Rhodes, 17 October 1899; Natal Mercury, 6 October 1900.

members with vested interests in property and trade to defend their town as members of the local rifle association.²³ Numbers raised for this, the Newcastle Rifle Association, were low and a call was made by civic officials for at least 200-250 regular or Volunteer troops if they were to stand any chance against the Boers. Thomas Watt, a prominent resident of Newcastle, made the good point that in terms both of manpower and weapons 'places like Newcastle and Dundee ought to be considered before PMBurg and Durban, where the people are practically in no danger'.²⁴ The vulnerable local settler community was aggrieved that they had been allowed to make advanced preparations for Newcastle's defence, only to be informed at the proverbial eleventh hour that it was all in vain.²⁵

Newcastle, an obvious early target of a Boer invasion, was a barometer of settler opinion, and during October there was condemnation in the press over the effective military abandonment of the town.²⁶ On 4 October Hely-Hutchinson reported to Chamberlain on Natal government concerns over the defence of Newcastle should the Boers attack before British reinforcements arrived.²⁷ On 12 and 13 October the Times of Natal announced the evacuation of Charlestown, and all areas north of Newcastle, confirming government policy for the region.²⁸ Only a few days later, on 16 October, Newcastle fell. The Boer press presented a picture of an ordered occupation of the town that was at odds with Natal colonial reports of anarchy and looting.²⁹

²³ PAR, PM 23, minute paper PM 1402/1901, Defence of Newcastle, Watt to Bale, 31 August 1899, and Bale to Hime, 7 September 1901, quoting Watt to Bale, 31 August 1899; PAR, MJPW 70, Lands and Works, minute paper 4135/1899, Commandant of Volunteers to Minister of Lands and Works, 22 September 1899; Natal Advertiser, 11 September 1899.

²⁴ PAR, PM 23, Watt to Bale, 31 August 1899, enclosure in minute paper, PM 1402/1901, Bale to Hime, 7 September 1901, Defence of Newcastle.

²⁵ Cape Argus, Weekly Edition, 11 October 1899; and see Times of Natal, 2 December 1899.

²⁶ Times of Natal, 6 October 1899.

²⁷ NAR, FK 1762, file 9309, Hely-Hutchinson to Chamberlain, 4 October 1899.

²⁸ Natal Advertiser, 2 and 5 October 1899; Natal Mercury, 3 October 1899; The Times, 6 October 1899; Times of Natal, 12 and 13 October 1899.

²⁹ Friend of the Free State and Bloemfontein Gazette, 20 October 1899; and see Natal Mercury, 14 October 1899; Gustav Preller, Talana: Die Drie Generaals-slag by Dundee,

The situation of Dundee, and its local troop of the Natal Carbineers, illustrates a different regional manifestation of the initial mix of British resistance to Boer invasion in the strategic northern apex, vested settler interests, and Volunteer participation.³⁰ There were important differences from Newcastle and Charlestown. Firstly, Dundee was the only Natal town not to fall under the Colonial Defence Act, and responsibility for its defence therefore lay with the Imperial authorities.³¹ Secondly, in Dundee's case the influential local coal-mining lobby held sway over initial military strategic concerns.³² In general terms, though, the despatch of an expeditionary force from Ladysmith on 24 September was strategically risky, but followed the insistence by the Natal government that the northern districts of the Colony be defended.³³

The local troop of the Natal Carbineers at Dundee was attached to British regular troops for reconnaissance and manoeuvres.³⁴ The anxiety in Dundee as war approached reflected the wider security concerns of settler society. Gerard Chilton Bailey, the Anglican (Church of England) Vicar of Dundee, wrote:

'For many weeks before the declaration of war we in Dundee were having an anxious time. Every place in such times is prone to rumours, but Dundee would take a lot of

Kaapstad, *Nasionale Pers*, 1942, p183; Wilhelm Mangold, *Vir Vaderland, Vryheid en Eer*, Pretoria, HSRC, 1988, pp30-1 and 33; Breytenbach, *Geskiedenis*, I, pp182-3.

³⁰ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Peter Francis Papers, Natal Carbineer Chronicles, 'The Boer War', p2; *Natal Mercury*, 28 September 1899; Burnett, *The 18th Hussars in South Africa*, p4; Stalker, *The Natal Carbineers*, pp128 and 153.

³¹ *Natal Mercury*, 7 September 1899.

³² Talana Museum, Dundee, 'War in the Biggarsberg 1899-1902', nd, p3. For a brief introductory overview of the situation pertaining to Dundee in this period see Bollmann, 'War and Natal Urban Communities', pp5-28.

³³ Burnett, *The 18th Hussars in South Africa*, pp1-2; SL Norris, *The South African War 1899-1902: A Military Retrospect up to the Relief of Ladysmith*, London, John Murray, 1900, p72; Surridge, *Managing the South African War*, p59.

³⁴ Talana Museum, Dundee, Gerard Chilton Bailey, 'Seven Months under Boer Rule', p41; *Natal Advertiser*, 27 and 28 September, 2,4 and 7 October 1899; *Cape Argus, Weekend Edition*, 11 October 1899; Crum, *With the Mounted Infantry in South Africa*, pp8-9.

beating.³⁵

The Natal Carbineers and the Natal Police proved their worth by familiarising the British regular troops with the surrounding countryside, and in securing information from the local African population. Evidence is sparse, but this would appear to be one of the few occasions in the Natal theatre that Volunteer intelligence gathering potential was engaged.³⁶

In August plans were drawn up for defences such as trenches and redoubts, a deputation from the town was sent to Colonel Royston, the Commandant of Volunteers, who agreed to supply arms, and an exodus of civilians got underway.³⁷ On 17 October Penn Symons despatched to Lieutenant-General Sir George White, commanding the Ladysmith-based Natal Field Force, his appreciation of the situation facing him: 'I thoroughly understand that there must be no retirement from here; that if attacked we must fight it out on our own ground'.³⁸

The tenuous position of the Dundee garrison was illustrated by Penn Symons's concern about holding Glencoe-Dundee in sufficient strength to deter a Boer attack, despite his optimism that a Boer advance over open country in this district was unlikely.³⁹ Such optimism may also have been influenced by the effective contribution to reconnaissance of the small Natal Volunteer contingent.

Boer Operational Preparedness

'Bet to ersteg voor ons dat de Here ons tog help

³⁵ Bailey, 'Seven Months under Boer Rule', p5; Cape Argus Weekly Edition, 11 October 1899.

³⁶ Burnett, The 18th Hussars in South Africa, p5.

³⁷ 'War in the Biggarsberg', pp3 and 7; Natal Advertiser, 8 March 1900; and see Natal Mercury, 8 September and 7 October 1899.

³⁸ British Library, MSS Eur F108, Sir George White Papers, Penn Symons to White, 17 October 1899.

³⁹ British Library, MSS Eur F108, Sir George White Papers, Penn Symons to White, 17 and 18 October 1899.

en sterk, want ik denk de streid zal hard wees.'⁴⁰

The debate over the military prowess of the Boers must be briefly revisited here in the context of the characteristics shared with the Natal Volunteers, especially in the light of the widespread, almost mythological, aura of the fearless, rough-riding, Boer sharpshooter. At the other extreme was the low opinion in which the commandos were held by the British and colonial military establishments.⁴¹

Tactically, both Boer and Volunteer were mounted infantry, with horses used largely as a means of transportation.⁴² The basis of the Boer military system in the concept of a citizen's militia was not unlike the operational system underpinning the Natal colonial Volunteers.⁴³

It is also significant that the tactical mobility of the Boers did not necessarily translate into strategic mobility.⁴⁴ Their predilection for taking as much or as little of the war as they individually saw fit was to prove a tactical advantage but a strategic weakness.⁴⁵ During the

⁴⁰ ('Pray for us that God will help and strengthen us, because I think the fight will be difficult.') LJ Eksteen, 'Die Wedervaringe van JF van Eerden op die Natalse Front 1899-1900', BA Honours thesis, University of Pretoria, 1991, p91, JF van Eerden to his wife, Susanna, 11 October 1899.

⁴¹ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p16; Natal Witness, 27 October 1899; Amery (ed), The Times History, II, p48. Ian Knight, Queen Victoria's Enemies (1): Southern Africa, London, Osprey Men-at-Arms [212], 1989, pp40-2; General Ben Viljoen, My Reminiscences of the Anglo-Boer War, Cape Town, Struik, 1973, pp25-6; and see Haswell, Citizen Armies, chapter 6; and Nasson, The South African War, pp61 and 63. For a romanticised account of the Boers, 'disliking war and unwarlike, but reserved and deliberate' at the outbreak of war, see Anon., The Simple Boer, Sl, nd, p3.

⁴² Sibbald, The War Correspondents, p25.

⁴³ NC Hayes, 'British Tactics in the Early Anglo-Boer Conflicts, 1842, 1845 and 1848', Soldiers of the Queen, 92/March 1998, p4.

⁴⁴ Sibbald, The War Correspondents, p26; Military Notes on the Dutch Republics of South Africa, chapter 7; Sternberg, My Experience of the Boer War, pp202-3; Wessels, 'Afrikaners at War', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, pp82 and 92-3. Boer strategic disunity and the tenuous leadership of Commandant-General Joubert considerably weakened the invasion of October 1899 (Rompel, Heroes of the Boer War, p96).

⁴⁵ Smurthwaite, The Boer War 1899-1902, p82.

opening weeks of the invasion, for example, Boer forces displayed a remarkable lack of a determined and co-ordinated operational plan.⁴⁶

The Republics anticipated British assaults from northern Natal and concentrated most of their forces on that border, with the Transvaal commandos massed along the ZAR border as early as 2 October, while the Free Staters staked out the passes granting access to the eastern OFS.⁴⁷ It was fortunate for Natal and the Volunteers that Boer objectives were limited to neutralising British-colonial forces near the border, as they could never have hoped to plug all the possible invasion routes.⁴⁸

The First Shots and the Skirmish at Bester's Station

**'The Carbineers at the front are fit and well,
vigorous and happy, and only desirous of
a chance of distinguishing themselves.'**⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Willem Scholtz, 'Die Betrekkinge tussen die Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek en die Oranje Vrystaat, 1899-1902', MA thesis, RAU, 1971, pp70-4 and 87-90.

⁴⁷ Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, I, pp156-7; Natal Witness, 2 October 1899. This considerable force included the Krugersdorp, Bethal, Heidelberg, Johannesburg, Boksburg-Germiston, Standerton, Pretoria, Middelberg and Ermelo commandos, plus elements of the foreign volunteer corps, a total of about 11 300 men. Further east, on the border near Dundee, lay the Utrecht, Vryheid, Piet Retief and Wakkerstroom commandos, under General Lucas Meijer. North of the strategic Orange Free State Drakensberg passes (Botha's, Bezuidenhout, Tintwa, Van Reenen's and Olivier's Hoek), lay the Free State commandos from the Vrede, Heilbron, Kroonstad, Winburg, Bethlehem and Harrismith districts (Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, p49; Ackermann, 'Aardrykskundige Invloede', pp134-5; JH Cilliers, 'Die Slag van Spioenkop (24 Januarie 1900)', in Archives Yearbook for South African History, 23/1961, Part 2, p1; and see Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, I, pp156, 158 and 176, for further detail on Boer dispositions).

⁴⁸ Wessels, 'Die Britse Militêre Strategie', p391; and see André Wessels, 'The Boer Strategy at the Beginning of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902)', unpublished conference paper, UOFS, 12-15 October 1999, pp15-19.

⁴⁹ Natal Witness, 6 November 1899.

The military story of the Anglo-Boer War in Natal has been told in numerous historical works.⁵⁰ By September 1899 hostilities were imminent.⁵¹ Penn Symons's instructions to his cavalry were to concentrate on reconnaissance and interdiction.⁵² The Natal Carbineers were called out more than a week before hostilities opened for scouting and patrol work along the foot of the Drakensberg between Oliviershoek and Tintwa passes.⁵³

In fact, in early October there existed something of a 'phony war' in the foothills beneath the Free State border passes patrolled by the colonials, and their initial operations were cloaked in secrecy.⁵⁴ One Carbineer recalled that in the course of three weeks patrolling in the vicinity of the Tintwa Pass, his troop saw only one Boer.⁵⁵ Farmers in this area did not believe that the Orange Free State would take the offensive on that border, and would rather content itself with the

⁵⁰ On the popular history front, one such reference is Ian Knight's Go to your God like a Soldier, pp 86-92. An accomplished recent series of booklets on the major engagements in Natal is Battles of the Anglo-Boer War, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1999. Thomas Pakenham's The Boer War is also still considered an essential reference. The multi-volume The Times History of the War in South Africa is one of the most comprehensive official British histories of the war. Amongst the plethora of contemporary popular histories, many written by journalists, is The Natal Campaign, by Bennett Burleigh. The best source for the Boer angle on events is another multi-volume, but more recent, work, Die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog, by JH Breytenbach.

⁵¹ Penn Symons commented in a letter to White on 2 September: 'We are on tenterhooks. The situation is as critical as it can be, and I am ready to move troops into their positions, to do their best to protect Natal, in two hours' (British Library, MSS Eur F108, Sir George White Papers, Penn Symons to White, 2 September 1899).

⁵² British Library, MSS Eur F108, Sir George White Papers, Penn Symons to White, 2 September 1899.

⁵³ Natal Witness, 11 October 1899; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p35; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p151.

⁵⁴ Himeville Museum, Gordon letters, J Lang Gordon, BMR, to father, Ladysmith, 19 October 1899; Natal Mercury, 5 October 1899; The Times, 9 October 1899; Steevens, From Capetown to Ladysmith, pp28-9; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p35. For colonial comment on the task facing the Volunteer force also see Daily Mail, 8 September 1899, quoted in Natal Witness, 2 October 1899.

⁵⁵ 'The caterer', in Natal Witness, 28 February and 1 March 1900; Steevens, From Capetown to Ladysmith, p28.

defence of its own border in fulfilment of its alliance with the Transvaal.⁵⁶

This period of uncertainty could be ascribed to several factors, sometimes contradictory, on the military and political fronts. The Boer ultimatum was delayed from 4 to 9 October to allow for the assembly of the commandos. On 2 October the Boers also discovered that there were neither sufficient supplies nor ammunition stockpiled to justify a forward movement. Willem Scholtz also emphasises the point that until the eve of hostilities President Steyn of the OFS was actively striving for peace.⁵⁷

Military operations to the north-west of Ladysmith during October 1899 formed part of White's efforts to monitor the progress of the Free State commandos using a screen of Natal Volunteers. The overall Boer plan was to demolish the Colenso bridges to block reinforcement of Ladysmith and delay any British counter-offensive, and also to link with the Transvaal commandos invading via Newcastle.⁵⁸ In the process they hoped to cut off the British at Dundee and Elandslaagte from Ladysmith. White's task was to hold the Boers at bay, with an aggressive defence, until reinforcements arrived.⁵⁹

The Volunteers had by this point already reportedly impressed White with their 'soldierlike manner and spirit', and they played a leading part in this screening operation to detect the Boer incursion into Natal.⁶⁰ Some 600 men from the Carbineers, Border Mounted Rifles and Natal

⁵⁶ Steevens, From Capetown to Ladysmith, p32.

⁵⁷ JLC Erasmus, 'Die Ineenstorting van die Boeremagte op die Natalse Front', MA thesis, University of Pretoria, 1944, pp6-7; PJ Delpont, 'Die Rol van Generaal Marthinus Prinsloo Gedurende die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog', MA thesis, University of the Orange Free State, 1972, chapter 1; Scholtz, 'Die Betrekkinge tussen die Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek en die Oranje Vrystaat', pp15-17; AT Mahan, The Story of the War in South Africa 1899-1900, London, Sampson Low, Marston and Company, 1900, p35.

⁵⁸ Delpont, 'Die Rol van Generaal Marthinus Prinsloo', pp32-4; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, I, p196. For detail on the delayed and unco-ordinated Boer efforts, especially to effect a link with the Transvaalers at Elandslaagte, see Delpont, pp36-7 and 40-1.

⁵⁹ Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, I, pp176 and 205.

⁶⁰ PAR, GH 1679, Diary of Events, pp18-20, 16 October 1899.

Mounted Rifles were scattered in patrolling parties from Acton Homes to Bester's Station.⁶¹ Although this deployment was greeted with enthusiasm by the participants, it was considered in Ladysmith camp - as reported by the Natal Advertiser - to be a risky venture in the light of concerns about the likely Boer preponderance in numbers.⁶² Three Carbineer squadrons were despatched to the Free State border.⁶³ Also involved was a 150-strong unit of African scouts, 'The Driefontein Scouts', raised in Ladysmith on 3 October. These men scouted the Drakensberg between the Tintwa Pass and the Biggarsberg.⁶⁴ Despite variable weather conditions and spartan service conditions, the Volunteers quickly adapted to the demands of campaigning.⁶⁵ Scouts sent hourly despatches back to Ladysmith.⁶⁶ The constant alert for signs of the enemy, and the strain of four hours sleep a night, took its toll on the citizen soldiers.⁶⁷

In the lee of the Drakensberg passes the Volunteers formed part of an early-warning network directed from Ladysmith. This task was complicated by the ease with which the northern Drakensberg could be crossed. Harold Coventry, of a leading farming family in the Acton Homes-

⁶¹ Report on the Natal Government Railway, and on the Defence of them, and of the Inland Portion of the Colony, against possible Invasion from the South African Republic or Orange Free State, Intelligence Division, War Office A434, London, Harrison and Sons, 1896, p5; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p38.

⁶² Natal Advertiser, 4 October 1899.

⁶³ PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Camps, Orderbooks, 4 October 1899.

⁶⁴ Samuelson, Long, Long Ago, pp138,141 and 154-5; and see Ingrid Mary Machin, 'The Levying of Forced African Labour and Military Service by the Colonial State of Natal', PhD thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1995, p295.

⁶⁵ A Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith: Unpublished Letters, p2, Fanny Tatham to Polly, 10 October 1899; and see KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Museum Service, Pietermaritzburg, JB Nicholson diary, 9 and 12 October 1899; Maritzburg College Museum and Archive, Nicholson letters, JB Nicholson to father, 13 October 1899; Natal Advertiser, 11 October 1899; Times of Natal, 13 and 16 October 1899; Natal Witness, 13, 16 and 24 October 1899; Natal Mercury, 7 and 13 October 1899; Smurthwaite, The Boer War 1899-1902, p39. Following a visit from Colonel Royston, the rations suddenly improved, with the addition of meat and bread (Natal Witness, 16 October 1899).

⁶⁶ Times of Natal, 5 October 1899.

⁶⁷ Natal Witness, 11 October 1899; Natal Advertiser, 11 October 1899; Times of Natal, 13 October 1899.

Spionkop area, and a member of the postwar Carbineers, recorded that the military in Ladysmith

'had posted native guards at all the passes leading from the Orange Free State to Natal, with instructions that if any Boers came down any of the passes into British territory they were immediately to report the matter to my father (J Cecil Coventry, the local district Field-Cornet and a Justice of the Peace) at Acton Homes, who would phone General White in Ladysmith'.⁶⁸

Carbineer Dacre Shaw also mentions in his reminiscences the existence of a telephone-wire from a farmhouse near Acton Homes to Ladysmith, to relay warnings.⁶⁹

Despite these measures, local confidence in this defensive cordon, and by implication the Natal Volunteers involved, was lacking, with one farmer suggesting that the frontier vigil was porous and unenthusiastic, and that these troops would flee to Ladysmith at the first sign of the enemy, albeit with strict instructions from White not to engage the Boers.⁷⁰

During the first ten days of October the Ladysmith Volunteer camp was filled with expectant preparations for action amidst rumours of incursions suggesting premature contact by Imperial cavalry and colonial squadrons.⁷¹ This confused deployment and operational plan did not bode well for the Volunteers.

Increased precautions were put in place on the night of 10 October, when the Boer ultimatum was

⁶⁸ Natal Carbineers History Centre, 'Harold Coventry Journal: Anglo-Boer War', p5.

⁶⁹ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p20; and see Napier Devitt, Galloping Jack, London, HF & G Witherby, 1937, p39.

⁷⁰ 'Harold Coventry Journal', p5; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p18; AJ Crosby, Extracts from Notes taken on the Boer Campaign, 1899-1900: Arthur Joseph Crosby, Ladysmith, Ladysmith Historical Society, 1976, 4 and 6 October 1899; Times of Natal, 13 October 1899; Natal Witness, 16 October 1899; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p36; Willcox, The Fifth (Royal) Irish Lancers, p213.

⁷¹ PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Camps, Orderbooks, 9 October 1899.

due to expire, and there was a rumoured attack on a Carbineer patrol-camp at Acton Homes.⁷² The commandos crossed into the Colony on the 12th. This development was supposedly reported to British military intelligence in Ladysmith.⁷³ Apart from a half-hearted and abbreviated British reconnaissance, the information was largely ignored.⁷⁴ However, a strong flying column that included Volunteers did depart Ladysmith on the 13th, probably in response to Boer moves, although this is not specified.⁷⁵ However, the Boers did not move in significant numbers from the foot of the passes for several days.⁷⁶

On the 14th and into the 15th British and Natal Volunteer patrols ranged widely in an effort to snare the Boers in what was an optimistically wide-flung net.⁷⁷ According to the British headquarter staff-diary in Ladysmith, it was on the 14th that the first shots were fired in this vicinity when Boers encountered a colonial patrol beyond Blaauwbank.⁷⁸ Significantly, a British officer attributed this mission's uneventful outcome to

'the criminal ignorance and negligence of our Intelligence Department, who are above acting on news received from Colonial troops (who prove a jolly sight better scouts than our regular cavalry).'⁷⁹

⁷² PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Camps, Orderbooks, 10 October 1899; Times of Natal, 11, 13 and 14 October 1899; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, p157.

⁷³ Times of Natal, 13 October 1899; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p151.

⁷⁴ Stirling, The Colonials in Africa, p29; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p151; and see Maritzburg College Museum and Archive, Dacre Shaw in Pietermaritzburg College Magazine, 4/1, p21; Natal Mercury, 16 October 1899.

⁷⁵ PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Camps, Orderbooks, 12 October 1899; PAR, CSO 2609, Telegrams, GOC Natal to Governor, 13 October 1899.

⁷⁶ Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, I, pp156-7,162-4,166 and 205-6.

⁷⁷ Nicholson diary, 14 and 15 October 1899.

⁷⁸ NAR, FK 1876 (WO32/885) HQ Staff Diary, Ladysmith, 14 October 1899.

⁷⁹ UNISA Archives, Confidential diary, Lieutenant D Howard Gill, 21st Battery, Royal Field Artillery, 13 October 1899, opposite p15.

On 17 October an uneventful Natal Mounted Rifles patrol also penetrated to the north-east as far as Wasbank and Helpmekaar.⁸⁰

These scattered and fragmented episodes of reconnaissance and manoeuvre, aimed at securing a tactical advantage for the British forces based in Ladysmith, had not produced any tangible result. The skirmish at Bester's Station would confirm this lack of success.

Three squadrons of the Natal Carbineers moved to the vicinity of Bester's Station on about 10 October. There is no evidence of an immediate tactical connection to this deployment, and it seems rather to form a component of White's overall strategy outlined above.⁸¹ There were two intelligence reports that contributed to the evolution of a skirmish at Bester's. Firstly came a report from an African scout on the night of the 17th that the Boer army was to descend De Beer's Pass that night. Then there were reports from two squadrons of Carbineers stationed at Dewdrop, midway between Ladysmith and Acton Homes, suggesting an imminent Boer incursion in strength.⁸² The Harrismith Commando elements of this Boer force, under the overall command of Commandant CJ de Villiers, was to clash with the Volunteers at Bester's on the 18th.⁸³

Newspaper reports for the Natal press on fluid and obscure skirmishes such as that at Bester's, especially where British forces were not involved, often depended on the patchy and partisan accounts of colonial reporters and Volunteers. These reports, as well as contemporary popular histories, and sources emanating from regimental participants, were often exaggerated and misleading, or blandly empty of concrete information. Such a flawed documentary record had two contrasting implications. Firstly, as was the case in the reporting for the Natal newspapers in the

⁸⁰ Natal Volunteer Record, pp130-132; Stirling, The Colonials in Africa, p29.

⁸¹ Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p22; Natal Advertiser, 11 October 1899; Times of Natal, 16 October 1899; Willcox, The Fifth (Royal Irish) Lancers, p213.

⁸² NAR, FK 1876 (WO 32/885) HQ Staff Diary, Ladysmith, 13 October 1899; BWM, 'Reminiscences of Ladysmith', p34; Delport, 'Die Rol van Generaal Marthinus Prinsloo', pp31-3; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, I, pp195-6; Preller, Talana, p184; Jacques Malan, Die Boere-Offisiere van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog 1899-1902, Pretoria, JP van der Walt, 1990, p76.

⁸³ Delport, 'Die Rol van Generaal Marthinus Prinsloo', pp31-3; Preller, Talana, p184; Malan, Die Boere-Offisiere, p76.

Anglo-Zulu War, it contributed early, and in subsequent regimental folklore, to an inflated colonial perspective on the war and the participation of its soldiers, especially when it considered that much of the Volunteer participation was to be of a mundane nature.⁸⁴ The following newspaper report was typical:

'Some excitement was caused when the vedettes galloped into the camp, and stated that the enemy were posted on a hill not far away, and were \pm 300 strong. They at once saddled up... They were moved up and placed on a kopje, and their Maxim made ready for action'.⁸⁵

The only listed Boer casualty from the Bester's clash was a burgher of the Harrismith Commando, but the jingoistic Stott, writing from the British perspective, listed eight killed and fifteen wounded!⁸⁶ Then, an anonymous source in the Natal Carbineers History Centre, and John Stalker's 1912 regimental annals on the Natal Carbineers that does not identify its sources, state that the Carbineers were outnumbered, without artillery support, and retired on Ladysmith in accordance with instructions from White.⁸⁷ There is no evidence of the presence of artillery, so that detail is probably correct, and while a specific retirement standing order from White has not been located, this would fit the screening nature of this overall phase of British operations in the vicinity.

⁸⁴ Times of Natal, 20 October 1899. Here the Carbineer contingent was reported to be 180-200, and the Boer force topped 800 (plus 200 Basutos). Also see PAR, GH 1679, Diary of Events, p26, 18 October 1899; PAR, A72/1, Schoon Papers, De Anglo-Afrikaansche Oorlog (1899-1902): Dagelyksche Aanteekeningen van Ds HF Schoon, Nederduitsch Gereformeerd Predikant te Ladysmith, Natal, Zuid Afrika, 13 October 1899; PAR, MJPW 71, Note, District Inspector to Assistant Engineer, 13 October 1899; PAR, MJPW 71, Telegram, Assistant-Engineer, PWD to District Inspector, PWD, Ladysmith, 13 October 1899; PAR, MJPW 71, 4335/99, Chief Engineer, PWD, to Minister of Lands and Works, 16 October 1899; Natal Witness, 20 October 1899; Standard and Digger's News, 30 October 1899; Laband and Knight, The War Correspondents: The Anglo-Zulu War, vi-vii, pp34 and 40-1.

⁸⁵ Times of Natal, 20 October 1899; and see Natal Witness, 27 October 1899.

⁸⁶ Natal Witness, 21 and 24 October 1899; J Boshoff, 'Ererol', Ladysmith, 1979, passim; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p39; CR de Wet, Three Years War, Westminster, Archibald Constable & Co, 1902, pp15-6.

⁸⁷ Natal Carbineers History Centre, anonymous summary of service in the Anglo-Boer War, p1; and see Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p152.

Numbers, however, are a problem. Although the multi-commando Boer force of Commandant de Villiers was reported to be up to 2 200-strong, the Harrismith Commando contingent, under Field-Cornets de Beer and Pretorius, that encountered the Carbineers at Bester's, could have comprised as little as 50 men.⁸⁸ In the Natal Witness of 20 October, Boer figures of 700 and 2 000 are mentioned, while a trooper's account in the same newspaper of the 21st boosts this to 3 000.⁸⁹ What was the Natal Volunteer figure? Three squadrons of the Natal Carbineers despatched to the area on the 10th could have totalled up to 250 men. Then there was the unspecified Border Mounted Rifles element, which relieved one Carbineer squadron in this vicinity on the 16th.⁹⁰ In general terms a patrol is mentioned, but in subsequent reports, especially in the light of the negative outcome of the skirmish, this could easily have been manipulated. A trooper's report of the 21st mentions '80 or 90 strong', while the Times of Natal gives a figure of 180 to 200.⁹¹ A report from the Landrost of Harrismith, reported in the Natal Witness of 24 October, confirms the Boer figure of 50 and only 80 Volunteers.⁹² This debate over comparative strengths is complicated by a cryptic reference in Stalker to an effort at reinforcement by a vaguely defined force at Bester's drawn from two of the above-mentioned Natal Carbineer squadrons.⁹³ A Free State press figure of 300 Carbineers put to flight may not therefore have been an exaggeration, although there had not been six killed, as reported.⁹⁴ These contradictory reports illustrate the pitfalls in the contemporary sources, particularly newspapers, when it comes to the identification of numbers and dispositions in engagements, especially where secondary material can only provide circumstantial evidence in corroboration.

⁸⁸ Delport, 'Die Rol van Generaal Marthinus Prinsloo', pp31-4; Preller, Talana, p184; Malan, Die Boere-Offisiere, p76; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, I, p196.

⁸⁹ Natal Witness, 20 and 21 October 1899. The above-mentioned Stott has a relaxed Carbineer group at Bester's enjoying a meal when they were interrupted by no less than 12 000 Boers! (Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p38).

⁹⁰ See Natal Witness, 19 and 20 October 1899.

⁹¹ Times of Natal, 20 October 1899; Natal Witness, 21 October 1899; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p152.

⁹² Natal Witness, 24 October 1899.

⁹³ Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p152.

⁹⁴ Friend of the Free State and Bloemfontein Gazette, 31 October 1899.

Despite extensive patrol work, a possible preponderance in numbers, and the best efforts of the Natal press to suggest otherwise, the Natal Volunteers, who were probably not outnumbered to any significant extent, appear to have been easily dislodged from their position at Bester's and other patrol bases in the vicinity.⁹⁵ Although there had been time hastily to pack a half-dozen pack-ponies, most of the camp at Bester's was hurriedly abandoned.⁹⁶ The Volunteers failed to make an impression on the Boer commandos before and during the Bester's engagement, and this first Volunteer engagement of the war had not vindicated White's faith in them, and did not encourage confidence.

The Boers poured scorn on the Carbineer 'flight' into Ladysmith, and there was an equivocal response in British-colonial circles, although the skirmish was greeted with considerable bravado in Ladysmith and the Colony as a whole.⁹⁷ On 19 October the official Boer report on the skirmish was telegraphed to Pretoria:

'een hewig gevecht plaats aan deze zyde van Bester Statie ...Lieut Galloway werd gevangen genoemen...van Natal positie door burgers gehouden & Carbineers gevluicht naar Ladysmith.⁹⁸

The Volunteers were not welcomed into Ladysmith with enthusiasm, and one disgusted Carbineer commented that 'we are treated like Kafirs', with the destitute men denied entry to replenish

⁹⁵ Dacre Shaw in Pietermaritzburg College Magazine, 1/4, September 1900, p22; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p152; and see Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, pp38-9.

⁹⁶ Nicholson diary, 18 October 1899; Times of Natal, 19 October 1899; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p40; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, I, p196.

⁹⁷ Times of Natal, 19 October 1899; Natal Witness, 20 October 1899; FA Steytler, Die Geskiedenis van Harrismith, Bloemfontein, Nasionale Pers, 1932, pp156-7; JD Kestall, Through Shot and Flame, London, Methuen & Co, 1903, p11. The generally dismissive tone of accounts of the skirmish endured in the press well into 1900 (Natal Advertiser, 25 August 1900).

⁹⁸ ('A heavy fight takes place on this side of Bester['s] Station...Lt Galloway [Gallwey] is taken prisoner...Natal positions held by burgers and Carbineers retreated to Ladysmith.') NAR, Leyds 709(ii), p130 and 139, Telegram, 19 October 1899.

equipment.⁹⁹ The exhausted men had been three days and two nights in the saddle, and the last 24 hours without food.¹⁰⁰ There was a feeling of relief too, as it was felt that, with cleverer tactics, the Boers could have cut off and destroyed the outnumbered force.¹⁰¹

In official circles the skirmish was dismissed as little more than a delaying action.¹⁰² However, it is possible that the skirmish did contribute to a delay in the subsequent intended deployment of Free State commandos in the direction of Elandslaagte on 21 October, thereby facilitating the British success at Elandslaagte and the successful retirement of the force at Dundee the following day.¹⁰³

The Capture of Lieutenant Gallwey

**'The news that Lieutenant Gallwey, son of our
Chief Justice, Sir Michael Gallwey,
is reported missing, is extremely sad for the whole
Colony, and in particular for his honoured
family and friends.'**¹⁰⁴

Natal interest in the Bester's skirmish centred on the capture of a single Natal Carbineer officer, Lieutenant WJ Gallwey, who happened to be the son of the Chief Justice, Sir Michael Gallwey.¹⁰⁵ A solemn report was despatched by his commanding officer, Colonel Greene:

⁹⁹ Natal Witness, 25 October 1899.

¹⁰⁰ Natal Witness, 20 October 1899; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p40.

¹⁰¹ Times of Natal, 20 October 1899; Natal Advertiser, 21 October 1899.

¹⁰² PAR, GH 1679, Diary of Events, p27, 19 October 1899.

¹⁰³ Erasmus, 'Die Ineenstorting van die Boeremagte', pp11, 21-2; Willcox, The Fifth (Royal) Irish Lancers, p215; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, p159; Pam McFadden, The Battle of Elandslaagte: 21 October 1899, Randburg, Ravan Press, 1999, p4; Davitt, The Boer Fight for Freedom, p144. Also see Delpont, 'Die Rol van Generaal Marthinus Prinsloo', pp45-6; and Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, I, pp196-7, 289-90.

¹⁰⁴ Natal Mercury, 20 October 1899.

¹⁰⁵ Natal Mercury, 20 and 26 October 1899.

'Lieutenant Gallwey occupied a small kopje with a portion of the patrol, and upon their being ordered to retire, they left in small parties to the main position held by the Carbineers. About 600 yards [540 metres] away they had to cross a donga, and it was noticed that Lieutenant Gallwey's horse on appearing on our side of the bank was riderless.'¹⁰⁶

Speculation suggested that Gallwey had been thrown from his horse, and even shot and killed.¹⁰⁷ Efforts to rescue him were, it was reported, abandoned in the face of Boer fire.¹⁰⁸ Gallwey's own description of the incident, in a letter to his wife, was not the stuff of heroic saga:

'I was kicked by my horse and lamed, and had to stay in the kopje where I was captured. Some of our fellows made an attempt to come to my help but were driven off by heavy fire.'¹⁰⁹

Gallwey was held in the State Model School in Pretoria, the same internment centre which was to become famous when it played host to Winston Churchill, following his capture on 15 November 1899, and was freed by British forces on 6 June 1900.¹¹⁰ Sir Michael Gallwey was

¹⁰⁶ Natal Mercury, 23 October 1899.

¹⁰⁷ Himeville Fort Museum, Gordon letters, Gordon to father, 19 October 1899; Times of Natal, 19 and 20 October 1899; Natal Witness, 20 October 1899; Natal Advertiser, 21 October 1899; My Diocese during the War: Extracts from the Diary of the Right Reverend Arthur Hamilton Baynes DD, Bishop of Natal, London, George Bell & Sons, 1900, p20.

¹⁰⁸ PAR, CO (microfilm), 179/208, Hely-Hutchinson to Chamberlain, 19 October 1899; Times of Natal, 20 October 1899; Natal Witness, 20 October 1899; Standard and Digger's News, 30 October 1899; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p152; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p39.

¹⁰⁹ Natal Witness, 25 October 1899.

¹¹⁰ PAR, CO (microfilm), 1/1/1/203 [PRO 179/210], enclosure in confidential despatch, 15 March 1900, Major Adye to Governor, 11 March 1900; PAR, CO (microfilm), 1/1/1/205 [PRO 179/211], enclosure 1 in confidential despatch, 27 April 1900, Treatment of Prisoners-of-War, Pretoria; PAR, NCP, 6/1/1/53, Natal Government Gazette, LII, No3113, 10 July 1900, pp759-761, List of Officers released at Pretoria, 6 June 1900; The Times, 11 December 1899. For further detail on Gallwey's imprisonment see Aylmer Haldane, How We Escaped from Pretoria, Edinburgh, William Blackwood and Sons, 1901: reprint, Johannesburg, Africana Book Society, 1977, pp35, 36 and 59; The Earl of Rosslyn, The Gram, London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, No.2, 24 May 1900.

informed of his son's capture by none other than President Steyn of the Orange Free State.¹¹¹ Then, after his release, probably in about June 1900, Lieutenant Gallwey was reported to have become Secretary to the British military governor of Pretoria.¹¹² The two separate experiences of Gallwey, father and son, reflected the public status of both these players in this drama, especially in Natal, as well as the exaggerated emphasis on an undistinguished episode in an obscure skirmish.¹¹³

It is significant that in British colonial wars up to that time, surrender had been anathema on racial grounds and usually futile.¹¹⁴ Fortunately for Gallwey, 'there was less shame in surrendering to a white enemy, and a far greater chance of being well treated'.¹¹⁵ However, this conflict was also to invoke contradictory challenges to several symbolic conventions of war, such as good treatment of prisoners, inspired particularly by Boer resentment at conflict with fellow white colonists.¹¹⁶

The attempt of the Carbineer medical officer, Dr Robert Buntine, to rescue an un-named trooper during the retreat from Bester's led to unfulfilled talk of a Victoria Cross. British policy against 'rescue VCs' was again to act against the Natal Volunteers at the battle of Colenso in December 1899.¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ Natal Witness, 20 and 25 October 1899.

¹¹² Natal Mercury, 29 November 1900. In September-October 1901 Gallwey emerged to play a small part in operations of a colonial mobile column in the Kranskop district of the Colony's border with Zululand (PAR, NCP 8/2/1 Departmental Reports, Commandant Volunteers, p17, Lieutenant-Colonel GA Mills, 30 October 1901).

¹¹³ For a brief résumé of Sir Michael and Lieutenant William Gallwey, see Ruth Gordon, Victorian Pietermaritzburg, Springfield, Village Publishers, 1984, p39.

¹¹⁴ Knight, Go To Your God Like a Soldier, p238.

¹¹⁵ Knight, Go To Your God Like a Soldier, p238; and see Celia Sandys, Churchill: Wanted Dead or Alive, London, Harper Collins Publishers, 1999, pp40 and 54.

¹¹⁶ See Clark, Waging War, p7.

¹¹⁷ Killie Campbell Africana Library, KCM 1791, Sam Campbell to wife, Ladysmith, 21 October 1899, in Dr SG Campbell, 'Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith', p220; Donald Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, London, Ward, Lock & Co, 1900, p24; William

The Volunteers, Settler Natal, and the Press

The second significant implication of the flawed newspaper coverage of the Bester's skirmish lies in the reliance of the Colony of Natal on the local and British press for coverage, albeit often embellished, on the conduct and welfare of its soldiers in the Natal theatre. This is especially important when the tentacles of the settler ruling elite is borne in mind, an embrace that included the local press. This dependence was to become a bone of contention during the Spioenkop campaign when strict British military press censorship was imposed. The justification of military necessity competed with the evolution of the conflict as the first major media war.¹¹⁸ In the previous major war in the region, the Anglo-Zulu War, the Zulus had not been equipped to glean intelligence from the newspapers.¹¹⁹ The Boers, however, were a literate European enemy, and the British considered it prudent to restrict the dissemination of news. On 22 September 1899, for example, two London newspapers printed a Reuters news agency despatch that itemised the exact composition of the British garrison at Dundee, a garrison that included a small Natal Volunteer component. Newspapers, however, had not experienced censorship of this kind before, and the indignant response was, at least in part, an instinctive reaction to restrictions of any kind.¹²⁰ The Daily Telegraph complained: 'The arrangements at headquarters in Natal restricting the transmission of unofficial news at this important juncture are simply ridiculous.'¹²¹

Many senior British officers, including Buller, harboured a dislike of correspondents, and severely

Harding, War in South Africa, Melbourne, The Australian Publishing Co, 1900, p554. For a similar incident involving Volunteer troops, at Rietfontein/Tinta Inyoni on 24 October 1899, see the Times of Natal, 26 and 27 October 1899; and George Lynch, The Impressions of a War Correspondent, London, George Newnes, 1903, pp4-5.

¹¹⁸ Natal Mercury, 17 October 1899; WH Bizley, 'Maritzburg during the Siege of Natal: as reflected in The Natal Witness from October 1899 to March 1900', Natalia, 29/December 1999, pp70-1; Lowry, 'Introduction: not just a "teatime war"', in Lowry (ed), The South African War Reappraised, pp5-6.

¹¹⁹ Laband and Knight, The War Correspondents: The Anglo-Zulu War, v.

¹²⁰ Natal Witness, 29 November 1899 and 27 January 1900; and see Stephen Badsey, 'War Correspondents in the Boer War', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, pp187-8.

¹²¹ Daily Telegraph, quoted in Natal Witness, 29 November 1899.

restricted their access to war news. This was particularly noticeable during the British advance to Spioenkop, and the colonial newspapers, and war correspondents, complained bitterly.¹²² This Military suspicion was rooted in the Crimean War when pioneer war correspondent, William Howard Russell of The Times, had despatched graphic detail of the British Army's position and problems.¹²³

Ironically, debate in Natal about censorship and public access to reliable information on the conflict drew attention to the negative impact resultant rumour and conjecture had on civilian morale.¹²⁴ This rumour and conjecture was precisely what the colonial press had thrived on in relation to Bester's. The impression also existed that Natal was becoming flooded 'with generals and top brass who had minimal concern with what the colonists thought or felt.'¹²⁵ The editorial in the Times of Natal on 11 October 1899, commenting on the futility of censorship, regarded as 'un-English', when the Boers in any case received information before newspapers could print it, and occupied geographical features that facilitated observation of British dispositions, may therefore have been a smokescreen.¹²⁶

¹²² PRO, WO 32/7137, 40195/177, Buller to Adjutant-General, 1 October 1899; Natal Mercury, 30 November 1899; Times of Natal, 25 January and 11 June 1900; and see PRO 30/67/8, Managing Editor, Daily Mail, to Broderick, 16 July 1901; UNISA Archives, Accession 116, GW Steevens, 'Notes on the South African War', passim; Natal Witness, 3 February 1900; Roger T Stearn, 'Ernest Bennett and War', Soldiers of the Queen, 105/June 2001, passim; Philip J Haythornwaite, The Colonial Wars Source Book, London, Caxton Editions, 2000, p333; Badsey, 'War Correspondents and the Boer War', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, pp195-6.

¹²³ Fergusson, British Military Intelligence, p137.

¹²⁴ PAR, CSO 1628, minute paper 7796/99, Scott to Colonial Secretary, 11 October 1899; and see Beaumont, 'The Times at war, 1899-1902' in Lowry (ed), The South African War Reappraised, pp73-4. The 'false news' in turn incurred the displeasure of the military (PRO, 30/57/22, Kitchener Papers, Y61, Kitchener to Broderick, 14 June 1901; PRO, WO 32/7138, 40195/232, 'Revised rules for newspaper correspondents'; PRO, WO 108/262, Stanley to Roberts, 7 July 1900).

¹²⁵ Bizley, 'Maritzburg during the Siege of Natal', pp71 and 87-8.

¹²⁶ Times of Natal, 11 October 1899, and see 10,21,25 and 29 November 1899; C Holmes Wilson, The Relief of Ladysmith: The Artillery in Natal, London, William Clowes & Sons, 1901, p18.

The Times of Natal, as well as the Natal Mercury, the Natal Witness, and the Natal Advertiser, had correspondents attached to the Natal Volunteer Staff, but it is not known whether these newspapers enjoyed a more favourable status than they did from the British Army.¹²⁷ Perhaps the real issue here was that, as was the case throughout this story of the Natal colonial war effort, settler sensibilities were once again offended.

The issue of censorship on the Natal front must also be considered in the context of the depiction of military achievement in the British Edwardian press. Correspondents complaining about censorship were feeding a voracious readership back in Britain, and in the case of the Natal Witness and others, the equally eager readership of Natal, experiencing the war through their eyes.¹²⁸ This vicarious experience of war was reinforced by the strong military flavour evident in the Edwardian press.¹²⁹ In the decades before World War I warfare was widely considered necessary to stimulate and invigorate a lethargic country, and in this regard war correspondents played a prominent role in determining the way non-professionals and non-élites viewed military force.¹³⁰ Associated circumstantial evidence in this regard was the matter of the opening of private mail under the provisions of martial law. Colonists objected and the issue went all the way to the Natal Supreme Court in April 1900, with an application for an interdict against the practice being refused.¹³¹

General White, in response to the above complaints, was non-committal, promising a staff officer

¹²⁷ Natal Volunteer Record, p36.

¹²⁸ Glenn R Wilkinson, 'The Blessings of War: The Depiction of Military Force in Edwardian Newspapers', Journal of Contemporary History, 33/1, January 1998, p97.

¹²⁹ Glenn R Wilkinson, "'To the Front': British Newspaper Advertising and the Boer War", in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, pp203-6.

¹³⁰ Wilkinson, 'The Blessings of War', pp98-9 and 100-2; and see Greg Cuthbertson, 'God, Empire and War: The Nonconformist Conscience and Militarism in Britain 1850-1900', Theoria, 65/October 1985, pp35 and passim.

¹³¹ Natal Advertiser, 2 April 1900. In a British Army Order dated 28 December 1899, residents of Ladysmith were instructed that all outgoing correspondence was to be censored by the military authorities. Some objected so strongly that they preferred to destroy their letters (Natal Witness, 27 January 1900).

to telegraph daily situation reports to the government for dissemination.¹³² Recommendations for correspondents, dated July 1900, urged restrictions regarding mention of the composition, strength or intended movement of own forces, telegrams 'likely to raise unnecessary alarm', casualties, care in reporting 'heroic deeds' by telegram, and the restriction of reporting on own forces.¹³³ Field censorship remained strict, and The Times bemoaned the secrecy surrounding military events concerning Buller's advance to the Biggarsberg in May 1900.¹³⁴

Elandslaagte, and a Question of Volunteer Participation

**'Our boys have proved that when Natal threw herself
into the cause and promised her whole support,
that this was no empty promise, no mere flag-wagging,
no mere urging of the Imperial authorities to pull
the chestnuts out of the fire for Natal's
future profit.'**¹³⁵

The Volunteers were little more than observers at the battle of Talana on 20 October, in which a Boer attack was repulsed.¹³⁶ On the same evening, Major-General JH Yule, who had succeeded to the command of British forces in Dundee after the death in action of Symons, was informed by White that the Dundee garrison could not be reinforced without risking Ladysmith and the rest

¹³² PAR, CSO 1628, minute paper 7796/1899, White to Governor, 15 October 1899.

¹³³ PRO, WO 108/262, Stanley to Roberts, 7 July 1900; and see Natal Witness, 5 June 1900.

¹³⁴ The Times, 11 May 1900.

¹³⁵ Times of Natal, 19 October 1899.

¹³⁶ Natal Mercury, 20 October 1900; Natal Witness, 21 October 1899; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p48; Conan Doyle, The Great Boer War, p87; Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, pp16-7; 'War in the Biggarsberg', p9; Richard Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War 1899-1901, London, Cassell and Co, 1901, p5; Bailey, 'Seven Months under Boer Rule', p24; Crum, With the Mounted Infantry in South Africa, pp10-11; Gustav Preller, quoted in Smurthwaite, The Boer War 1899-1902, p66.

of the Colony. He had no choice but to retire on Ladysmith.¹³⁷ This demoralising retreat commenced early on 22 October.¹³⁸

Yule was assisted to a significant degree in this retirement by the Volunteers through their knowledge of the country, and the likely anticipation they would have had of Boer movement after the British evacuation of Dundee.¹³⁹ There was much to criticise about British tactics, let alone strategy, during this retreat, which included neglecting to demolish important railway bridges that would have hampered Boer operations. Amery's The Times History intoned:

'Nor does there seem any reason why, without prejudicing the general policy of concentration, patrols of mounted troops, especially of the Natal Volunteer corps, might not by demonstrating in front of the advancing enemy have helped very materially in delaying his [the Boers'] advance.'¹⁴⁰

Although White was unable to reinforce Yule, he attempted to delay commandos pursuing the Dundee column retiring towards Ladysmith, while the Boers sought to prevent its junction with the Ladysmith garrison.¹⁴¹ Natal Volunteer involvement in the first consequent clash, at Elandslaagte on 21 October, was negligible. For the Natal Carbineers this entailed an uneventful reconnaissance-in-force under the command of Major-General Sir John French, on the 20th,

¹³⁷ PAR, CSO 2609, Telegram, Yule (probably to White, and intended for publication), 27 October 1899; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, p146; and see Natal Witness, 24 October 1899 and Times of Natal, 25 October 1899.

¹³⁸ PAR, CSO 2609, transcript telegrams, Yule (probably to White, and intended for publication), 27 October 1899; Natal Carbineers History Centre, Trooper WS Warwick notebook-diary, 25 October 1899; Pennington, 'Anglo-Afrikander War 1899-1900', p6; Times of Natal, 27 October 1899; Natal Advertiser, 27 October 1899; Edgar Holt, The Boer War, p96.

¹³⁹ Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p62.

¹⁴⁰ Amery (ed), The Times History, II, p145.

¹⁴¹ NAR, Leyds 1043, CD458, South African Despatches, White to Secretary of State for War, p4, 2 December 1899; Delport, 'Die Rol van Generaal Marthinus Prinsloo', p46; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p79; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, I, p296.

followed by a stand-to-arms, as an emergency reinforcement, on the 21st.¹⁴² The Carbineers had been told that although White wished to send some squadrons of the regiment forward on the 21st, it was considered inadvisable to split the regiment again, following the detachment of a squadron to Colenso at the beginning of October.¹⁴³ However, claims of a substantial Carbineer presence (up to two squadrons) emerged, as well as uncertainty over the extent of a presence by the Natal Mounted Rifles. Eric Goetzsche, in Rough But Ready: An Official History of the Natal Mounted Rifles, quotes two contradictory eyewitness accounts which embellish the vague references in The Times History and Maurice's History of the War in South Africa to a Natal Mounted Rifles squadron accompanying the 5th Dragoon Guards during the battle, and the arrival of a troop escorting Sir George White.¹⁴⁴ Following the debate over sources concerning the skirmish at Bester's, this knot of uncertainty also illustrates the difficulty in assessing the role of what was an ancillary contribution by Natal forces to this battle, and in fact to all engagements in the Natal theatre more extensive than a skirmish.

The Elandslaagte force did include the Imperial Light Horse, whose excellent performance earned respect and admiration.¹⁴⁵ It must be remembered that this regiment had been raised in Pietermaritzburg from the civilian ranks of exiled Johannesburg 'Uitlanders' only a month

¹⁴² Natal Carbineers History Centre, Paul Raw, letter, James Raw Smith to sister, 22 October 1899; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', pp26 and 29; Natal Witness, 24 and 27 October 1899; Natal Mercury, 20 November 1900.

¹⁴³ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p28; Stirling, The Colonials in Africa, p30. Consideration was probably given to the previous separation of the Estcourt-Weenen Squadron from the main body of this unit.

¹⁴⁴ Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p153; Goetzsche, Rough But Ready: An Official History of the Natal Mounted Rifles, p55; Amery (ed), The Times History, II, p180; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, pp164 and 171; and see Natal Volunteer Record, pp134-6. According to Stalker, elements of the Ladysmith Troop were present at Elandslaagte. He was probably misled by a report in the Natal Witness of the supposed presence of two Carbineer squadrons at Elandslaagte (Natal Witness, 23 and 26 October 1899; and see Nevinston, Ladysmith: The Diary of a Siege, p32; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p28; The Times, 23 October 1899. Navy and Army Illustrated, X, p325, also has reference to the Carbineers, and the BMR, at Elandslaagte).

¹⁴⁵ Richard Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War 1899-1902, London, Cassell and Co, 1901, p47; Stirling, The Colonials in Africa, pp3-5.

previously, suggesting that the Natal Volunteers could have at least matched this achievement if they had been given the opportunity. The Imperial Light Horse were, however, commanded by a British officer, Lieutenant-Colonel JJ Scott-Chisholme of the 5th Lancers. This matter of command raises the question of whether the British Army placed confidence in colonial troops only when they were serving in the capacity of levies under British command, rather than under their own colonial officers. This thesis will also suggest that Natal would not have been prepared to accept the high casualties such as those suffered by the Imperial Light Horse at Elandslaagte - 68 killed and wounded, including the death of Scott-Chisholme.¹⁴⁶

As events transpired, the battle of Elandslaagte was far from the 'warm testimony to the Natal colonial troops' asserted by GW Steevens, war correspondent for the Daily Mail.¹⁴⁷ One disappointed Carbineer wrote home from Ladysmith on this lost opportunity:

'It was maddening yesterday to listen to the big guns eight miles away and to be merely waiting for orders. By Jove, we are working hard, but so long as we are not laughed at as "playing soldiers" we are game for anything.'¹⁴⁸

Despite evidence to the contrary, the descendants of Carbineer Corporal Charles Carbutt are adamant that he was one of that regiment who was not only present at the battle, but played a prominent part.¹⁴⁹ There is certainly no evidence to support the claim of any colonial Volunteer

¹⁴⁶ Harry Klein, Light Horse Cavalcade: The Imperial Light Horse 1899-1961, Cape Town, Howard Timmins, 1969, p26; and see Roy L Jackson, Under the Crossed Flags: A Pictorial History of the Imperial Light Horse and the Light Horse Regiment, Kelvin, The Council of the Light Horse Regiment, 1999, passim.

¹⁴⁷ GW Steevens, quoted in Natal Witness, 20 November 1899.

¹⁴⁸ Natal Witness, 27 October 1899.

¹⁴⁹ Local legend in the Elandslaagte district asserts that Carbutt was rewarded for his efforts with a berth in the 1902 Coronation contingent. This is probably confused with the 1897 Diamond Jubilee contingent, of which he was a part (Mrs Sheila Henderson, personal communication, 22 October 1999; Natal Witness, 11 May 1897; McFadden, The Battle of Elandslaagte, pp7 and 30-1).

presence in the cavalry charge which formed the climax of the battle.¹⁵⁰

In 1902 a speculative application was made for the award of the Elandslaagte clasp to those members of the Natal Volunteer force who paraded under orders in Ladysmith throughout the day of the battle.¹⁵¹ Unfortunately for the credibility of the Volunteers, the only unit present in substantial documented force at Elandslaagte, the Natal Field Artillery (NFA), found their 7-pounder muzzle-loaders so outclassed by the Boer artillery that they were withdrawn, and were to see no further significant action in the campaign.¹⁵² This fate earned them the cruel nickname of the 'Never Fight Agains'.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ See Siege Museum, Town Guard, File 9, Trotter to Mrs Henderson, 14 August 1884; McFadden, The Battle of Elandslaagte, pp30-1; Willcox, The Fifth (Royal Irish) Lancers; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, chapter 9; Amery (ed), The Times History, II, chapter 5; St John Gore (ed), The Green Horse in Ladysmith, London, Sampson, Low, Marston & Company, 1901, pp6-8. The NMR is indicated in the British official history as acting in support of the 5th Dragoon Guards (Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, p171; and see Amery (ed), The Times History, II, p180; Natal Mercury, 3 November and 13 December 1900). The ILH is also credited with 'clearing the way' for the charge (Holt, The Boer War, p95).

¹⁵¹ PAR, MJPW 97, minute paper L&W 5658/1902, Natal Volunteer Force [and] the battle of Elandslaagte, Adjutant-General, War Office, to Lieutenant-Colonel W Molyneux, 22 August 1902, and see Lands and Works, minute paper 5658/1902, 1 September 1902. The reason no doubt had something with the general requirement of a minimum physical presence at an engagement in order to qualify for a campaign honour. Molyneux was also berated for breaking the chain of command, and raising the matter directly with the War Office (PAR, MJPW 97, minute paper, Commandant Volunteers to Secretary of Lands and Works, 3 October 1902).

¹⁵² G Tylden, The Armed Forces of South Africa 1659-1954, Johannesburg, Africana Museum, 1954: reprint, Trophy Press, 1982, p119; Natal Mercury, 16 March 1900; and see UNISA Archives, Gill diary, p23. Diarist Harry Phipps commented: 'The Natal Artillery are at Estcourt, but what earthly use they are is quite beyond my comprehension. The guns are old, muzzle-loading 7 pounders and have a range of 4 000 yards [3 600 metres]. General White sent them from Ladysmith because they were of no use' (National Army Museum, NAM 8302/15, Diary of Private Harry Phipps, 1st Border Regiment, p6, 3 November 1899; and see PAR, NCP 8/2/1, Departmental Reports 1901, Commandant of Volunteers, pp3,8 and 16; and Hurst, Short History of the Volunteer Regiments of Natal and East Griqualand, p33).

¹⁵³ Natal Witness, 6 and 9 February and 14 June 1900; Natal Mercury, 12 January 1900; and see UNISA Archives, Gill diary, p35, 30 October 1899. The Natal Volunteer Record, pp116-8, the unashamedly patriotic chronicle of the Volunteer war effort, deftly skirted such awkward details.

For the British, the success of the cavalry charge at Elandslaagte validated mounted shock action or 'dash'. This conviction came at a time when the cavalryman was viewing with dismay the pressure on this traditional role of his arm of service.¹⁵⁴ The Boers, however, learned from their Elandslaagte disaster, and were not to present such perfect targets again. It was to take some hard lessons to educate the British about the improved defensive and retaliatory power of infantry and mounted infantry - qualities potentially available in the Natal Volunteers.¹⁵⁵

Rietfontein/Tinta Inyoni and Nicholson's Nek

After Elandslaagte additional Free State burghers were sent to the vicinity, and White remained concerned for the Dundee column. He therefore determined to make a further attack on the Boers.¹⁵⁶ His intention was to demonstrate in force against the Free Staters in the vicinity of 'Rietfontein' farm, owned by Walter Pepworth, a member of the Natal Colonial Legislature.¹⁵⁷ The ensuing battle took place on 24 October.

Colonial mounted infantry (the Natal Carbineers, the Natal Mounted Rifles and the Border Mounted Rifles) furnished a scouting screen on the left flank as the Ladysmith column headed out

¹⁵⁴ See UNISA Archives, Gill diary, 21 October 1899, p10; S Badsey, 'Fire and Sword: the British Army and the Arms Blanche Controversy, 1871-1921', PhD thesis, Cambridge, 1982, passim; Strachan, European Armies and the Conduct of War, pp84-5; Nasson, The South African War 1899-1902, pp89 and 247; Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, III, pp405 and 407, and IV, pp36-7, 57, 60 and 402-3; Michael Glover, preface to Major-General Sir ED Swinton, The Defence of Duffer's Drift, 1907: reprint, London, Leo Cooper, 1990, p6; Haythornwaite, The Colonial Wars Source Book, pp55-6.

¹⁵⁵ Erskine Childers, War and the Arms Blanche, London, Edward Arnold, 1910, pp25-8 and 30; and see Sternberg, My Experience of the Boer War, xxxi-xxxii, and p241; Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, III, p399, and see pp378-386, for an account of the bloody charge of the 21st Lancers at Omdurman on 2 September 1898, where the charge itself had been comparatively useless compared to the secondary employment of carbines.

¹⁵⁶ See Steve Watt, The Siege of Ladysmith: 2 November 1899-28 February 1900, Randburg, Ravan Press, p2; Watkins-Pitchford, Besieged in Ladysmith, p10.

¹⁵⁷ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Woods newspaper cuttings scrapbook, passim; NAR, Leyds 1043, CD 458, South African Despatches, volume 2, White to Secretary of State for War, 2 December 1899; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p30; Amery (ed), The Times History, II, p202.

on the Newcastle road.¹⁵⁸ There seems to be some confusion over precise Volunteer dispositions at Rietfontein, although it would appear that their mobility was employed to thwart a Boer effort to outflank White's expeditionary force, and cut it off from Ladysmith.¹⁵⁹ The Volunteers stormed Boer hillside positions across exposed ground and under heavy fire, and then engaged the burghers in an extended exchange of fire.¹⁶⁰ Once again glowing reports emerged, but with more justification this time:

'The Volunteers carried the first of the positions they were sent against, and had gained the base of Tinta Inyoni itself when they came under a hot cross-fire and suffered somewhat severely. The Boers were ensconced behind boulders and bushes along and up the face of Tinta Inyoni; but notwithstanding their vantage point our boys, shooting straight and with the utmost coolness, accounted for numbers of Boers.'¹⁶¹

Popular accounts of the battle were replete with exaggerated praise and depiction of the danger the men had passed through.¹⁶² Nevertheless, the Volunteers had played a small but pivotal and conspicuous role in the action.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁸ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p30; Natal Witness, 28 October 1899; Natal Volunteer Record, p136; Davitt, The Boer Fight for Freedom, p145; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p132; Goetzsche, Rough But Ready: An Official History of the Natal Mounted Rifles, pp56-7.

¹⁵⁹ NAR, Leyds 1043, CD 458, South African Despatches, White to Secretary of State for War, p3, 2 December 1899; NAR, Leyds 1043, CD 458, South African Despatches, White to Secretary of State for War, p4, 2 December 1899.

¹⁶⁰ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', pp31-2; and see Artee, 'Reminiscences of an ex-Carbineer', The Carbineer, 1949, p8; Natal Advertiser, 25 October 1899; Times of Natal, 27 October 1899; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p82; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p128.

¹⁶¹ Nicholson diary, 24 October 1899; Natal Witness, 28 October 1899; Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p116; and see Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p31; Natal Witness, 25 October 1899.

¹⁶² Natal Advertiser, 25 October 1899; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p82-3; Extracts from Notes taken on the Boer Campaign, 24 October 1899; and see Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', pp32-3; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, p155.

¹⁶³ Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, I, pp295-6.

Natal Carbineers casualties were comparatively heavy: two men killed and nine wounded.¹⁶⁴ Sergeant Colville earned the dubious distinction of becoming the first Natal Carbineer to be killed in the war.¹⁶⁵ It was also apparently the first time in their history that the Natal Volunteers had come under artillery fire.¹⁶⁶ According to the Times of Natal, praise for the 'usefulness and steadiness' of the Volunteers was received from British officers.¹⁶⁷ The following account, although not bound to reassure settler opinion, was the epitome of the dramatic picture of heroic sacrifice that devotees of Empire thrived on:

'The dead with their blood-spattered faces, rigid arms, outstretched fingers steeped in blood, and loosened tunics are a sight that everyone may pray to be spared.'¹⁶⁸

On the 25th a message of sympathy was received from the Natal Prime Minister, Hime, exhibiting a depth of compassion almost out of proportion to what were in the overall context of the campaign, light casualties:

'The government has heard with deep regret of yesterday's heavy casualties amongst Volunteers, who appeared to have behaved with conspicuous gallantry. We sympathise deeply with the relatives and friends of those who fell in the action, nobly doing their duty.'¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁴ Sergeant Andrew Colville and Trooper W Cleaver were those killed. The NMR were more fortunate, suffering only three wounded (PAR, CSO 1636, minute paper 8191/1899, Telegram, Commandant Volunteers to Hime, 24 October 1899; Natal Witness, 25 and 26 October 1899; Times of Natal, 25 October 1899; Natal Advertiser, 25 October 1899; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, pp132 and 154; Goetzsche, Rough But Ready: An Official History of the Natal Mounted Rifles, p56).

¹⁶⁵ Trevor Rutter, personal communication, 1 June 1992 and 1 March 1993; Natal Carbineers History Centre, diary, Trooper HJ Catchpole, 26 October 1899; Himeville Fort Museum, Gordon letters, Gordon to sister, 27 October 1899.

¹⁶⁶ Natal Carbineers History Centre, 'Natal Carbineers', a summary of service in the Anglo-Boer War, p2; Natal Volunteer Record, p149.

¹⁶⁷ Times of Natal, 26 October 1899.

¹⁶⁸ Dacre Shaw, Pietermaritzburg College Magazine, 1/4, September 1900, p23.

¹⁶⁹ PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Camps, Letterbooks, 25 October 1899.

However, in a pointed comment on their position in the British Army's 'pecking order', the Volunteers were apparently 'forgotten' in the retirement of the British force into Ladysmith, and were compelled to retrace their steps without support.¹⁷⁰

Despite the inconclusive result of the battle, the Dundee column was successfully escorted by British and colonial troops into Ladysmith the following day.¹⁷¹ The overly enthusiastic conclusion of a victory, penned by a lady resident of the town, would appear to typify the settler response to military setbacks or stalemates.¹⁷² The view of British soldier, D Howard Gill, was probably more accurate:

'At the grey of early dawn the Dundee column begins to come in. I never saw, and never hope to, a more pitiable sight... They look simply too wretched for words, yet all seem wonderfully cheery now they've met us and are looking forward to a good feed and rest in Ladysmith and then to beat the Boers back with us.'¹⁷³

In operations planned for Nicholson's Nek on 30 October, White intended to strike a crushing blow against the Boers concentrating around Ladysmith, hoping to remove the threat to the town.¹⁷⁴ At the battle of Nicholson's Nek the Natal Volunteers again played only a small part as White strove unsuccessfully to stave off encirclement. The Carbineers, for example, did duty on the British right flank, in the vicinity of Lombard's Kop, part of a cavalry brigade under the command of Sir John French.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁰ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p33.

¹⁷¹ NAR, Leyds 1043, CD 458, South African Despatches, White to Secretary of State for War, p4, 2 December 1899; Nicholson diary, 25 October 1899; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p35; Catchpole diary, 27 October 1899; and see Natal Mercury, 27 October 1899; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p154.

¹⁷² Himeville Fort Museum, Harding diary, 24 October 1899.

¹⁷³ UNISA Archives, Gill diary, 25 October 1899, p28.

¹⁷⁴ Mocke, 'Die Slag van Colenso', p8; Delport, 'Die Rol van Generaal Marthinus Prinsloo', pp50-1 and 53; McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, p3; Evans, The Boer War, pp25-8.

¹⁷⁵ UNISA Archives, Gill diary, 30 October 1899, p32; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p37; Amery (ed), The Times History, II, p210; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, pp174 and 176; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, pp133 and 155; Stott, The

The mounted infantry were tasked with securing the Nek to ensure passage for the 5th Lancers and 19th Hussars for an intended charge on the Boer left that never materialised.¹⁷⁶ This part of the operation was a shambles.¹⁷⁷ The cavalry and mounted infantry had been ineffectively deployed because their intended supporting role had been an offensive rather than defensive one. They were compelled to retire following the large-scale surrenders on the British left flank.¹⁷⁸

The Boers failed to exploit the hard-won victory and intercept the British-colonial force retiring into Ladysmith.¹⁷⁹ After 30 October the Boers were in a good position to complete their strategic mission, namely the elimination of British forces in the Colony. However, Commandant-General Joubert fully anticipated a renewed assault by the British on his forces on 1 November, and this distracted the Boers from their task of cutting British communications to the south.¹⁸⁰ The lack of commitment, discipline and conviction displayed by the Boers here, and in several other later engagements involving the Natal Volunteers, such as at the battles of Willowgrange and the Tugela Heights, saved the British-colonial forces from more severe embarrassment, as well as

Boer Invasion of Natal, p97. For a brief summary of the battle see David Humphry, 'Nicholson's Nek: A Disastrous Defeat', Medal News, December 2001/January 2002, pp26-7.

¹⁷⁶ NAR, Leyds 1043, CD 458, South African Despatches, White to Secretary of State for War, p5, 2 December 1899.

¹⁷⁷ Colonel Sir Percival Marling, Rifleman and Hussar, London, John Murray, 1935, p253; and see Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, pp180-1.

¹⁷⁸ Nicholson diary, 30 October 1899; Amery (ed), The Times History, II, chapter 6.

¹⁷⁹ Holt, The Boer War, pp99-100; Dietlof von Warmelo, On Commando, London, Methuen & Co, 1902, p18; Generaal Chris H Muller, Oorlogsherinneringe, Kaapstad, Nasionale Pers, 1936, p35; Jeans (ed), Naval Brigades in the South African War, p197.

¹⁸⁰ Delport, 'Die Rol van Generaal Marthinus Prinsloo', pp52,55-6 and 58. For detail of the arrival and deployment of British naval artillery in Ladysmith between 31 October and 2 November 1899, see Tony Bridgland, Field Gun Jack versus the Boers: The Royal Navy in South Africa 1899-1900, London, Leo Cooper, 1998, pp19-20; and Jeans (ed), The Naval Brigades in the South African War, pp187-9 and 204. It was also on this latter date that a joint krygsraad of the Transvaal and Orange Free State decided to lay siege to Ladysmith (De Wet, Three Years War, p29; EJ Weeber, Op Die Natalse Front, Kaapstad, Nasionale Pers, 1940, pp34-5, and see p36, with regard to the battle of Colenso) Initially, though, Joubert favoured the retention of only a token force around Ladysmith in favour of a pressing on further into the Colony (HJC Pieterse, My Tweede Vryheidstryd: Herinneringe van PC Joubert, Kaapstad, Nasionale Pers, 1945, pp34-5).

criticism from quarters such as the Natal government and settler population.¹⁸¹

In London the War Office put the best possible face on the defeat at Nicholson's Nek by dismissing it as a 'reconnaissance-in-force', but it was a severe setback.¹⁸² On 2 November the last train departed south from Ladysmith.¹⁸³ HHS Pearse was one observer who was of the opinion that communications

'might have been kept open for days longer by an energetic use of artillery and mounted troops, but now it is too late to reopen them without incurring risk of serious losses'.¹⁸⁴

Although his army had failed to avoid encirclement and the Natal Volunteers had played only a minor part in military operations and even then with mixed performance and results, in White's opinion, the Commandant of the Natal Volunteers, Colonel William Royston, and his men had performed well:

'Employed on arduous duty from the commencement of the campaign, in touch with the enemy, I have found him prompt and ready for every emergency; he and his force reflect the greatest credit on the Colony of Natal.'¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ Wessels, 'The Boer Strategy at the Beginning of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902)', p10.

¹⁸² Holt, The Boer War, p100; Cilliers, 'Die Slag van Spioenkop', Archives Yearbook, p2. In the Carbineer ranks Trooper Jack Nicholson was very aware that all had not gone well, despite the minor involvement of the Volunteers (Maritzburg College Museum and Archive, Nicholson letters, Nicholson to [recipient unclear], 2 November 1899, and Nicholson to mother, 10 November 1899; and see UNISA Archives, Gill diary, 30 October 1899, p49).

¹⁸³ NAR, FK 1876 (WO32/885), HQ Staff Diary, Ladysmith, 2 November 1899; Natal Witness, 3 November 1899; Creswicke, South Africa and the Transvaal War, II, p73; Weeber, Op Die Natalse Front, p90; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, pp95-6; Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, IV, p64.

¹⁸⁴ HHS Pearse, Four Months Besieged: The Story of Ladysmith, London, MacMillan, 1900, p24.

¹⁸⁵ Stirling, The Colonials in Africa, p32; Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, IV, p61.

However, White was in sombre mood when he reported to Buller 31 October: 'I wish I had pleasanter news to give you, but the results of the last day's fighting has not been a gain to us.'¹⁸⁶

Conclusion

Natal's support for a war against the Boer republics had been secured with difficulty, but both military and political factors quickly conspired against the Colony playing a major part in this opening phase. The bulk of Natal's Volunteer force, based at Ladysmith, did not distinguish itself as a screen against Boer incursion along the foot of the Drakensberg passes, a phase marked by an ignominious skirmish and retirement at Bester's Station. The impressionistic and often unreliable quality of the newspaper coverage of Volunteer military operations is also introduced in the context of the Bester's skirmish. This is firstly to illustrate the overt difficulties that prevailed in providing accurate coverage of the minor engagements that the Volunteers were often involved in, as well as the peripheral Volunteer part in larger engagements. Secondly, and particularly in the context of the application of British military censorship during the Spioenkop campaign, newspapers, especially the Natal colonial press, as a medium of public opinion, is considered as one of the settler interests threatened by the British military administration.

Natal settler concerns were at this point focussed on the northern towns of Newcastle, Charlestown and Dundee, which the Colony had insisted be defended. The British abandonment of the first two to the Boers did nothing to cement Natal support for the war effort. On the other hand, the Natal government itself resisted local defence initiatives in the region, at an early stage placing its defence eggs in the Volunteer and rifle association basket. Natal's strategic naiveté was revealed when a hopelessly isolated British garrison at Dundee was easily dislodged by the Boers after the battle of Talana on 20 October 1899, and driven back to Ladysmith. Natal's soldiers only had a peripheral presence at the major battles culminating in the Boer investment of Ladysmith: Talana, Elandslaagte, Rietfontein/Tinta Inyohi and Nicholson's Nek.

Natal settler society, especially in the form of the colonial press, responded to the generally negative first month of the war by considerably embellishing the performance of its Volunteers

¹⁸⁶ NAR, FK 1765, file 83, White to Buller, 31 October 1899.

in the these engagements, as well as in the skirmish at Bester's. This was most clearly illustrated by the attention given to the capture of Lieutenant Gallwey at Bester's. The press emerged as an important conduit of Natal interests and opinion, and its coverage of the initial phase of the war presaged a relationship with the British military authorities that wavered between tension and hostility.

Reports of the poor sanitation conditions in Ladysmith, the Colony's major military base in the war, and the Natal's government's culpability in the inadequacies of topographical intelligence, also suggested that preparation for war was far from adequate. On a positive note, the Volunteers had adapted well to field service, and when given the opportunity, as in the Dundee district prior to Talana, had shown that they could contribute meaningfully to British intelligence gathering and reconnaissance.

CHAPTER III

ESTCOURT UNDER SIEGE

Retirement From Colenso

'Local interest will greatly attach itself to all tidings that come from and concerning Colenso just now.'¹

During October there was continued confusion and uncertainty in British ranks over what could be defended against superior Boer numbers in Natal with the limited resources available. Sir George White, for example, who had arrived in Natal only on 7 October, wished to hold only Dundee and Ladysmith, and, if driven from these, Pietermaritzburg and Durban. Accordingly, he wanted to withdraw troops from Colenso and Estcourt, because they were too isolated.² Governor Hely-Hutchinson, on the other hand, with local political considerations in mind, preferred to vacate Dundee, concentrate at Ladysmith, and strengthen Estcourt and Colenso.³

The initial role of the composite Natal Volunteer force (with special emphasis here on the Estcourt-Weenen Squadron of the Natal Carbineers) that began its Anglo-Boer War service at Colenso in October 1899, was as a roving garrison force. This manner of deployment appeared to vindicate White's conclusion that

¹ Natal Mercury, 3 November 1899.

² PAR, GH 1679, Diary of Events, p12, 7 October 1899; Natal Witness, 13 October 1899; Times of Natal, 2 January 1900; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, I, pp207-8. White, the designated second-in-command to General Sir Redvers Buller, Commander-in-Chief in South Africa, was despatched to Natal in September 1899 to take command there. His predecessor was Major-General Sir William Penn Symons, killed at Talana on 20 October (Beckett, 'Buller and the Politics of Command', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, pp41 and 46-7).

³ PAR, GH 1679, Diary of Events, pp12-14, 20-21 and 26, 10 and 17-18 October 1899; and see Wessels, 'Die Britse Militêre Strategie', p279; Surridge, Managing the South African War, pp58-60.

'a mobile force, concentrated north of the Tugela, afforded better protection to the central and southern portions of the Colony than any number of detachments stationed on the lines of communication'.⁴

While October 1899 at Colenso was quiet, a crisis was approaching as British forces were pushed south by invading Boer commandos. The only British regular unit on the line of communication in Natal at this time was the 1st Battalion of the Border Regiment, that had arrived in Pietermaritzburg on 30 October.⁵ In these circumstances Hely-Hutchinson was not optimistic that a Boer incursion could be effectively resisted.⁶

Volunteer patrols northwards from Colenso were active, and an optimistic spirit prevailed.⁷ A three-day mounted expedition on 6-8 October penetrated as far as Springfield in the Upper Tugela region. Nothing of military significance transpired and no Boers were sighted.⁸ The exacting patrol work was a challenging introduction to active service for both the men and horses of this Natal Volunteer contingent.⁹ On the 31st reinforcements arrived at Colenso in the form of 100 men of the 2nd Battalion, Royal Dublin Fusiliers, and a battery of the Natal Field Artillery.¹⁰ Overall command of the Colenso garrison was held by a British officer, Colonel CD Cooper of the 2nd Battalion, Royal Dublin Fusiliers.

Critics of Sir George White's decision to defend Ladysmith were puzzled by his despatch of the

⁴ Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, p261.

⁵ Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, p261; but also see Powell, Buller: A Scapegoat?, p136, who claims that this regiment was the Royal Dublin Fusiliers.

⁶ Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, p261.

⁷ Natal Witness, 4 and 11 October 1899; Natal Advertiser, 10 October 1899; Times of Natal, 17 October 1899; Natal Mercury, 17 October 1899. Again, consideration should be given to the source of this reported optimism - the Natal colonial press.

⁸ Natal Witness, 11 October 1899.

⁹ Natal Witness, 5,9,11 and 28 October 1899.

¹⁰ Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, p342; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, I, pp242,342 and 364.

Dublin Fusiliers to Colenso, rather than a cavalry regiment, which, it was argued, would be more useful outside Ladysmith than within.¹¹ It was a comment on the parlous defence situation in the Colony when the GOC Natal (White) notified Hely-Hutchinson that the Fusiliers and the 'Natal Volunteer Artillery' were 'the best measure that can now be taken for the preservation of the Colony'.¹² The colonists were alarmed and, according to diarist Louis Irvine, were 'pretty outspoken in condemning the delay of the Imperial government in sending out a sufficient number of troops in time'.¹³

The Ladysmith garrison was not expected to hold the attention of the entire Boer army for long. A Boer probe further south, in some strength, was anticipated, and it would be at least two weeks before the first British and dominion reinforcements would arrive in Natal.¹⁴ On 2 November a Boer force attempted to cut off an outlying fort from the main force at Colenso, but the small garrison was withdrawn timeously under pressure, with support from the Dublin Fusiliers, elements of the Durban Light Infantry, and the Natal Naval Volunteers.¹⁵ Later that morning a patrol clashed with the Boers north of the village.¹⁶

Boer shelling, a low river which facilitated fording, and anticipated encirclement by the commandos, prompted an immediate retirement on Estcourt, and the post in Colenso had been evacuated by dawn on 3 November. This move was defended in some circles and condemned in

¹¹ Wilson, With the Flag to Pretoria, II, p488.

¹² PAR, CO (microfilm), 1/1/1/1/199 [PRO 179/207], GOC Natal to Hely-Hutchinson, 31 October 1899.

¹³ KCAL, KCAL 4158, diary, Louis Godfrey Irvine, 29 October 1899.

¹⁴ IWM, 77/118/1, Colonel KC Weldon, Service with 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers, p24; Natal Mercury, 2 November 1899; Mocke, 'Die Slag van Colenso', p4; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, pp262-3; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, I, p352.

¹⁵ Times of Natal, 3 November 1899; Natal Mercury, 4 and 13 November 1899; Natal Volunteer Record, pp123-4.

¹⁶ 'Natal Carbineers Record-Estcourt Squadron, No.5', in McKenzie, Delayed Action, p180.

others.¹⁷ According to the Natal Witness of 27 October, a previous order to evacuate Colenso and its forts had been issued and rescinded after the fortifications had been partially demolished a week earlier.¹⁸ Brigadier-General Wolfe Murray, OC Lines of Communication in Natal, was one who supported the retirement if the position became untenable.¹⁹

Natal strategic concern was already focussed on the defence, if necessary, of the hills south of Estcourt, before a retirement on Pietermaritzburg, which was to be fortified.²⁰ Urgent measures were taken in the colonial capital, including the imposition of a curfew and the registration of non-residents.²¹ Bizley describes the settler concern for their capital as 'a sort of parochial megalomania'.²² Detachments of the Umvoti Mounted Rifles, whose reliability was doubted in

¹⁷ PAR, GH 1679, Diary of Events, pp52-3, 3 November 1899; Natal Witness, 3 and 4 November 1899; Natal Mercury, 4 November 1899; Times of Natal, 4 November 1899; De Zuid Afrikaan, 4 November 1899; Natal Volunteer Record, p151; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, pp263-4; McKenzie, Delayed Action, p154; CF Romer and AE Mainwaring, The 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers in the South African War, London, AL Humphreys, 1908, pp26-7; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p96.

¹⁸ Natal Witness, 27 October 1899.

¹⁹ PAR, CO (microfilm), 1/1/1/199 [PRO 179/207], Hely-Hutchinson to Chamberlain, 7 November and 5 December 1899; Natal Witness, 4 and 7 November 1899; Times of Natal, 13 November 1899; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, p263.

²⁰ PAR, GH 1679, Diary of Events, pp52-3, 3 November 1899, p53; NAR, FK 1764, file 9788, Hely-Hutchinson to Chamberlain, 3 November 1899; and see Surridge, Managing the South African War, p59.

²¹ Natal Witness, 3 November and 2 December 1899; Alan F Hattersley, Pietermaritzburg Panorama: A Survey of One Hundred Years of an African City, Pietermaritzburg, Shuter & Shooter, 1938, pp106-7.

²² Bizley, 'Maritzburg during the Siege of Natal', pp68 and 69. Also see Bollmann, 'War and Natal Urban Communities', pp35-6. These preparations do not appear to have reached the urgent proportions evident in Pietermaritzburg and Greytown in the wake of the battle of Isandlwana in January-February 1879 (Laband and Knight, The War Correspondents: The Anglo-Zulu War, pp64-7 and 112-3, and see pp70-2, for measures taken for the defence of Durban in 1879). For comprehensive detail on the measures taken for the defence of Natal, including Pietermaritzburg and Durban, during the Anglo-Zulu War, see PS Thompson, 'Town and Country and the Zulu threat, 1878-9', 'Weenen County and the War, 1879', '"The Zulus are coming!" The defence of Pietermaritzburg, 1879', and 'The defence of Durban, 1879', in
(continued...)

settler circles on account of the significant Dutch-speaking population of the Umvoti district, was, according to Hattersley, tasked with the security of the strategic northern approaches to the city.²³

Cassell's History of the Boer War is specifically critical of the Natal Volunteers, suggesting that they had abandoned a strong position at Colenso at that time, 'smitten with something very like a panic'.²⁴ A recently arrived Buller, the Commander-in-Chief in South Africa, had also urgently requested continued occupation of the village until relief arrived.²⁵ A Boer commentator, EJ Weeber, also painted a disparaging picture of an undignified flight by the Colenso garrison.²⁶ Hely-Hutchinson penned the official 'explanation' to Chamberlain on 3 November:

'In consultation with OC lines of communication and the PM, it has been decided to hold hills this side of Estcourt as long as possible...and fall back from Estcourt on Pietermaritzburg as slowly as possible, breaking bridges on the way.'²⁷

The simmering tension between Natal officials and the British government was typified in the debate over alleged procedural irregularities in the evacuation.²⁸ The exchange of telegrams between Chamberlain and Hely-Hutchinson is especially important in this regard. The former fired off this salvo on 6 November:

'I understand that Colenso was evacuated without Sir Redvers Buller having been

²²(...continued)

Laband and Thompson, Kingdom and Colony at War, pp226-336.

²³ Hattersley, Pietermaritzburg Panorama, p107.

²⁴ Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p192.

²⁵ PRO, WO 32/7881, 079/9989, Buller to War Office, 1 November 1899; Natal Witness, 27 November 1899; Amery (ed), The Times History, II, pp279-285; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, p263; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, I, p365.

²⁶ Weeber, Op die Natalse Front, pp92-3.

²⁷ PAR, CO (microfilm), 1/1/1/1/199 [PRO 179/207], Hely-Hutchinson to Chamberlain, 3 November 1899.

²⁸ PRO, WO 32/7859, 079/9788, Lansdowne to Buller, 4 November 1899; PAR, CO (microfilm), 1/1/1/1/199 [PRO 179/207], Hely-Hutchinson to Chamberlain, 6 November 1899.

consulted...I gather that you have taken part in the decision to evacuate Colenso and hold Pietermaritzburg. I desire that in no circumstances will you take any responsibility of settling military movements as to which Sir R Buller is not consulted. It is essential that he should have the control of movements by which the whole military situation in South Africa may be affected.²⁹

Hely-Hutchinson replied:

'You appear to have been misled by my telegram (of the 3rd). I take no responsibility for settling military movements. My telegram merely reports facts. PM and myself were informed by GOC Lines of Communications of the decision he proposed to take in view of the evacuation of Colenso, and our opinions asked in view of local political effect. The decision was taken therefore after consultation, but I did not take part in it in any other sense.'³⁰

Hesitation in the Boer ranks saw any expedition further south postponed from early November. The likely reasons for this are varied. The primary cause can probably be found in the divisions in the Boer forces between the Transvaal and Free State commandos. The venture did not enjoy the full confidence of the OFS commandos. The Boers also anticipated British attacks from the besieged British force in Ladysmith, and there was also concern about the generally poor quality of the Boer horses on account of the deteriorating quality of late spring grazing. It is also possible, upon finding abandoned Colenso to be, in their opinion, strongly fortified, that they suspected a trap. It was even considered by correspondent, GW Steevens, that the Boers were more interested in plundering the village.³¹ It is very unlikely that this Boer caution was on account of the reputation of any Natal Volunteer regiment, as extravagantly claimed by correspondent Bennett

²⁹ PRO, WO 32/7859, 079/9864, Chamberlain to Hely-Hutchinson, 6 November 1899.

³⁰ PRO, WO 32/7859, 079/9864, Hely-Hutchinson to Chamberlain, 7 November 1899.

³¹ PAR, GH 1679, Diary of Events, p58, 7 November 1899; NAR, KG 582, p638, Telegram, Staatspresident to Commandant-Generaal, Ladysmith, nd; UNISA Archives, Steevens, 'Notes on the South African War'; President Steyn to Kruger, quoted in Mocke, 'Die Slag van Colenso', p6, and see p54; Delport, 'Die Rol van Generaal Marthinus Prinsloo', pp61-2, 64 and 66-7; Davitt, The Boer Fight for Freedom, p242; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, I, pp356, 362-3 and 366; Powell, Buller: A Scapegoat?, p136; Pakenham, The Boer War, p170.

Burleigh.³² Nonetheless, his opinion is given some weight by recorded encounters in Boer sources between the burghers and 'flinke voluntierkorps [the efficient Volunteer corps]', who included 'een aantal prachtige schutters [a number of excellent shots]', some of whom had been previously encountered on the OFS border, and could have been Natal Volunteers.³³

Here again, it is important to consider the misleading and inflammatory potential of the Natal press. The confused and panicky reaction in the Colony was fuelled by newspaper reports, as had been the case with the Bester's skirmish near Ladysmith a few days earlier. The Natal Mercury, for example, dramatically announced the evacuation only a day after reporting a secure Colenso garrison, and confidently predicting a successful defence against whatever the Boers could throw at it.³⁴

Bottled up in Estcourt

**'The whole burden of a possible defence of
Maritzburg lay on the little force at Estcourt.'**³⁵

The lengthy line of communication and supply in the Natal theatre - the Natal Government Railway (NGR) line - on which both Colenso and Estcourt were situated, restricted the strategy and mobility of the British forces, composed as they were largely of infantry, and accompanied by bulky supply 'tails'. Under these circumstances the services of Natal Volunteer mounted infantry scouts, such as those of the Natal Carbineers, were considered important, at least in

³² Natal Advertiser, 27 November 1899; Burleigh, The Natal Campaign, p129.

³³ De Zuid Afrikaan, 2 November 1899.

³⁴ Natal Mercury, 3 and 4 November 1899. Also see Natal Witness, 23 October, 3 and 6 November 1899. In an editorial on the 4th, the Natal Mercury solemnly intoned that there 'could have been no alternative for the safety of the Volunteer Camp but evacuation, considering that the camp was rapidly being invested by a largely overpowering number of the enemy, with artillery with which our guns were wholly incompetent to contend' (Natal Mercury, 4 November 1899).

³⁵ The Times, 11 December 1899.

theory.³⁶ The need for mounted troops may not yet have filtered through the British military hierarchy, but it was readily apparent to observers, such as The Times correspondent, who wrote from Mooi River on 26 November:

'It is quite impossible in an extensive hilly country like Natal to keep in touch with such a mobile enemy as the Boers without a very large force of mounted men...

It is the absence of such a force to which we owe the fact that in the last week or so, Boers have freely moved at their pleasure through the rich grazing country on every side of Estcourt, looting cattle and collecting abundant supplies for General Joubert's army at the cost of the unhappy Natal farmer, and have succeeded in mystifying, separating, and almost investing, British forces at Estcourt and Mooi River, in each case very much larger than the whole of the Boer commandos south of the Tugela.³⁷

At Estcourt, No.5 Squadron of the Carbineers joined a squadron of the Imperial Light Horse, a detachment of Natal Naval Volunteers and the Natal Royal Rifles. These units had been in residence since 1 October, the Natal Royal Rifles enjoying the distinction of being the first Natal Volunteer unit despatched to the front.³⁸ The Carbineers formed part of the 300-strong mounted component of a small garrison of some 2 300 in Estcourt, supported by the Natal Police. At the time this latter figure represented the bulk of the British Army presence in the Colony.³⁹

After the withdrawal from Colenso, the village of Estcourt found itself in November the unlikely

³⁶ Black and White Budget, II/20, 24 February 1900, pp28-9; CE Callwell, Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice, HMSO, 1906: reprint, London, Lionel Leventhal, 1990, chapter X.

³⁷ The Times, 26 December 1899.

³⁸ JP Mardell, 'Extracts from a Record Made Eleven Years Ago by some Police Services in Weenen County during the War', The Nongqai, II, 19/3, 1911, p724; Natal Witness, 9 October 1899; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p24. For concise summaries of the rather uneventful campaigns of the NRR and the Natal Naval Volunteers, see the Natal Mercury, 23 October 1900; Natal Volunteer Record, pp108-114 and 119-121; and Tylden, The Armed Forces of South Africa, pp127-8.

³⁹ W Park Gray to AG McKenzie, in McKenzie, Delayed Action, p410; Mardall, 'Extracts from a Record', p724; Mocke, 'Die Slag van Colenso', pp15 and 17. Burleigh, The Natal Campaign, p69, quotes a considerably lower mounted infantry roll of only approximately 130 (including the Natal Police) in the town on 13 November.

temporary headquarters of the British troops in Natal after the majority had been trapped in Ladysmith on 2 November.⁴⁰ A Boer attack was anticipated at any time, and early morning stands-to-arms, picquets and patrols were punctuated by several clashes with Boer horsemen.⁴¹ On Saturday 18 November, for example, Boers approached to within sight of Estcourt, and a brisk skirmish ensued on the outskirts of the village.⁴²

Estcourt's 'siege', though brief, was nerve-wracking and uncomfortable. Situated close to the Natal English settler heartland, it came to illustrate that community's response to the war. One farmer to send stock south to avoid the commandos was George Richards, a Volunteer officer attached to the Natal Carbineers. He hailed from the settler gentry and in October 1901 was to be elected to the colonial Legislature.⁴³

In Estcourt itself there was evidence of vacillating unrest bordering on panic, exacerbated by general British reverses, specific Boer probes, and strategic and military confusion about the defensibility of the post, akin to the crisis that had faced Colenso.⁴⁴ Artillery at Ladysmith was

⁴⁰ Mocke, 'Die Slag van Colenso', pp13-14; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p99.

⁴¹ PAR, GH 1679, Diary of Events, p68, 14 November 1899, pp68 and 73; PAR, CO (microfilm), 1/1/1/200 [PRO 179/208], Magistrate, Estcourt, to Colonial Secretary, 23 November 1899; NAM, 8302/15, Phipps diary, p8, 17 November 1899; Natal Advertiser, 15 November 1899; Natal Witness, 15 November 1899; Times of Natal, 15 and 20 November 1899; Natal Volunteer Record, p151; Mardall, 'Extracts from a Record' p725; Ackerman, 'Aardrykskundige Invloede', pp154-6; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, pp101-2; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p157.

⁴² PAR, GH 1679, Diary of Events, p75, 18 November 1899; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p109.

⁴³ PAR, Natal Almanac and Directory 1902, p904; KCAL, KCAL 4158, Irvine diary, 25 November 1899; Natal Carbineers History Centre, GR Richards, 'Boer War Incidents 1899-1902', in 'Whither Bound: Some South African Essays', pp21-2; Natal Witness, 22 November 1899 and 2 October 1901; Burleigh, The Natal Campaign, pp83-4; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p111.

⁴⁴ IWM, 77/18/1, Weldon, p29; Natal Witness, 4, 7 and 15 November 1899; Natal Mercury, 4, 6 and 9 November 1899; Natal Advertiser, 20 November 1899; Mardell, 'Extracts from a Record', pp724-5; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p99; and see Winston Churchill, London to Ladysmith via Pretoria, London, Longmans, Green and Co, 1900: reprint, Durban, TW (continued...)

clearly audible and gun flashes visible from hilltops at night.⁴⁵ The unnerved remaining populace had every intention of leaving too, if British troops did not soon emerge victorious.⁴⁶

The local colonial press now inclined towards the pessimistic, urging, for example, a 'plan of campaign' in Natal. Once again, the entrapment of regiments such as the Carbineers - the 'light cavalry' - in both Ladysmith and Estcourt, was bemoaned.⁴⁷ Fortunately for the British, Boer opinion on Estcourt's strategic position and strength was divided, typifying their general indecision, and once again the temporary advantage they enjoyed was not exploited.⁴⁸

One incident during November that captured the unsettled mood of the village and the spirit of volunteering in the early phase of the war involved a Morning Post correspondent, Winston Churchill, and a Carbineer trooper, William Park Gray. Soon after his arrival in Estcourt on 6 November 1899, Churchill announced a substantial sum to anyone who could smuggle him into Ladysmith.⁴⁹

This was the perfect challenge for the adventurous Park Gray, and it typified the qualities in Gray that seemed to represent the best positive attributes in the Natal Volunteer. As a native of Cathkin in the Loskop-Gourton district in the foothills of the Natal Drakensberg, and as a grandson of the first English settler in the Winterton district, he knew the area intimately. As a further credential,

⁴⁴(...continued)

Griggs, 1982, pp72-3; Creswicke, South Africa and the Transvaal War, II, p119; Burleigh, The Natal Campaign, p70.

⁴⁵ Atkins, The Relief of Ladysmith, p61; Burleigh, The Natal Campaign, p62.

⁴⁶ Natal Witness, 4 November 1899.

⁴⁷ Natal Witness, 23 November 1899.

⁴⁸ Natal Witness, 20 November 1899; Standard and Digger's News, 27 November 1899; Weeber, Op Die Natalse Front, pp93 and 101; Davitt, The Boer Fight for Freedom, p246.

⁴⁹ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Peter Francis Papers, Gray to Francis, 30 June 1947; June M Smith, '£200 to the Man who can get me into Ladysmith', Vista, 25 June 1966, passim; RE Stevenson, 'A Carbineer Remembers', Military History Journal, 2/2, December 1971, passim; HW Kinsey, 'Churchill and Ladysmith', Military History Journal, 7/3, June 1987, passim.

he was also the Estcourt-Weenen Squadron's top scout and marksman. He was not short on stamina either. When the regiment was mobilized in September he had ridden nearly 62 miles (100 kilometres) to join his squadron at Colenso.⁵⁰ Although Gray was refused permission to embark on this venture with Churchill, his affinity for unorthodox military initiative and adventure was enough to infuriate his Carbineer squadron commander, Major Duncan McKenzie, on several occasions, and had this been more widely known, it would surely have confirmed British scepticism regarding Natal Volunteer discipline and reliability.⁵¹

The heading, 'Guide Gray's Escape', reflecting this spirit of positive adventure, introduced the Natal Mercury's account of Park Gray's next adventure on 3 January 1900.⁵² On this occasion he was despatched as a guide to a patrol of Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry tasked with sketching the Little Thukela River in the vicinity of Springfield (later Winterton). The detachment was intercepted by a party of Boers and Gray was separated from his companions. Evading pursuit, he returned to base after an all-night ride, seemingly demonstrating the initiative considered typical of colonial troops in contrast to British Tommies who generally struggled without the firm

⁵⁰ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Peter Francis Papers, Gray typescript, p1, and Gray to Francis, 30 June 1947; Sandys, Churchill: Wanted Dead or Alive, p42.

⁵¹ See Gray to AG McKenzie, November 1963, in McKenzie, Delayed Action, p412. During the siege of Ladysmith two civilians, Sydney Thorrold and George Malcolm, embarked on an obscure mission which carried some of the hallmarks of the adventures that Gray was a part of. Thorrold and Malcolm were tasked with the destruction of the Sunday's River bridge on 28 November 1899, an operation that was a farcical though bloodless failure. This may have been a maverick amateur partisan-style operation, but according to the regimental history of the Natal Mounted Rifles, there was a sequel to the Thorrold and Malcolm foray when two troopers of that regiment, E Agnew and PE Inman, were despatched on a 'small diversion' to destroy an unidentified bridge or culvert in the vicinity of the Sunday's River on 13 January 1900. This venture was also aborted when the target was found to be well guarded. This story is not verified elsewhere, but it does raise questions about the seriousness of the colonial commitment to realistic military operations (Natal Witness, 20 August 1900 and 4 March 1950; and see Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Hamilton Papers, 2/1/1, private manuscript diary, 2 December 1899; Goetzsche, Rough But Ready: An Official History of the Natal Mounted Rifles, pp62-3).

⁵² The Times, 6 January 1900; Natal Witness, 8 January 1900; Natal Mercury, 13 January 1900; Times of Natal, 13 January 1900; Natal Carbineers History Centre, Woods newspaper cuttings scrapbook, passim.

guiding hand of their officers.⁵³

A daily highlight for the Estcourt garrison during November was the armoured train reconnaissance towards Colenso. It was arguably the only aggressive British gesture on the Natal front at this time, but the train itself was vulnerable to Boer horsemen, who were starting to probe south from Colenso.⁵⁴ The Times suggested something of the frustration born of enforced inaction that built up in the Estcourt garrison:

'The force was too small to venture on an effective attack on the Boers, and not mobile enough to harass them or even to keep properly in touch with them. The mere task of furnishing pickets for the numerous roads leading out of Estcourt absorbed a very considerable portion of the men.'⁵⁵

There was military justification for armoured-trains in the flat expanses of the western South African theatre.⁵⁶ However, the mountainous terrain of Natal was not similarly suitable.⁵⁷ As Holt comments, it was 'a poor substitute for the swift-moving cavalry scout as a means of gleaning information'.⁵⁸ Kenneth Griffith believed that one Carbineer on horseback could have performed this task more efficiently and with less risk.⁵⁹ This was indeed work for the mounted infantry arm

⁵³ Stevenson, 'A Carbineer Remembers', p55.

⁵⁴ Natal Mercury, 25 October 1899; Natal Advertiser, 16 November 1899; The Times, 11 December 1899; Haldane, How We Escaped from Pretoria, p2; and see Under the Union Jack: Descriptive and Illustrative of the Campaign in South Africa, London, George Newnes, 1900, 1/4, 2 December 1899, p81; Marshall Everett (ed), Thrilling Experiences in the War in South Africa, The Educational Company, 1900, opposite p21; Sandys, Churchill: Wanted Dead or Alive, p45; Darrell Hall, The Hall Handbook of the Anglo-Boer War, Fransjohan Pretorius and Gilbert Torlage (eds), Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1999, p240.

⁵⁵ The Times, 11 December 1899.

⁵⁶ Hall, The Hall Handbook of the Anglo-Boer War, p241; Perrett, Against All Odds! More Dramatic 'Last Stand' Actions, pp102-3 and 105.

⁵⁷ Muller, 'At Large on the Veldt', p7; Burleigh, The Natal Campaign, p66.

⁵⁸ Holt, The Boer War, p119.

⁵⁹ Kenneth Griffith, Thank God we kept the Flag Flying: The Siege and Relief of

(continued...)

of the Natal Volunteers, but there were insufficient mounted troops for such escorts, which were not provided.

The train was ambushed on the morning of 15 November 1899 near Chievery.⁶⁰ Although this incident, where the Natal Volunteer component (60-strong) was the Durban Light Infantry, who lost 3 men killed and 18 captured, is well-known to Anglo-Boer War history, this study will concentrate on a Carbineer-Imperial Light Horse detachment out of Estcourt that met the survivors north of the town.⁶¹ This was the first action of the war for which the Volunteers were arguably suited.⁶² However, despite inflicting several casualties, the outnumbered force was outflanked and forced to retire. In an account (undoubtedly exaggerated) in an Imperial Light Horse history of the war, it was reported that the little expeditionary force had charged headlong into a Boer force of over 2 000.⁶³ This source fits the pattern of unqualified embellishment that from the outset of the war permeated partisan contemporary material on the military conduct of the Natal Volunteers and allied units.

Even so, the skirmish furnished several positive examples of Volunteer tactical methods, as well as the problems of weaponry and equipment facing the force. Tactical dispositions, for example,

⁵⁹(...continued)

Ladysmith, London, Hutchinson, 1974, p126; and see The Times 11 December 1899. This sentiment was also shared by Lord Roberts, see PRO WO 32/7965, 079/1777, Roberts to Secretary of State for War, 15 February 1900.

⁶⁰ See Stevenson, 'A Carbineer Remembers', pp54-60; Kinsey, 'Churchill and Ladysmith', p122-3; Burleigh, The Natal Campaign, pp80-1; McKenzie, Delayed Action, pp155-6.

⁶¹ Natal Witness, 17 November 1899; Natal Mercury, 17 November 1899; The Times, 18 November 1899; Natal Volunteer Record, pp124-5; Creswicke, South Africa and the Transvaal War, II, pp124-5; Stirling, The Colonials in Africa, p38; Amery (ed), The Times History, II, pp304-7; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, pp267-8; Martin, The Durban Light Infantry, I, pp53-73; Sandys, Churchill: Wanted Dead or Alive, pp44-57.

⁶² 'Natal Carbineer Record-Estcourt Squadron No.5', in McKenzie, Delayed Action, pp155 and 180.

⁶³ George Fleming Gibson, The Story of the Imperial Light Horse in the South African War 1899-1902, Sl, GD and Co, 1937, p142.

emphasised patrols on both flanks to avoid being outflanked.⁶⁴

The skirmish was the first time that the similarity in attire between colonial and Boer, especially in headgear, was to be a cause for concern and tension.⁶⁵ The issue of uniforms, in terms of the identification of the wearer as a recognisable participant in war, was an issue of special relevance to Natal Volunteers and Boer citizen-soldiers alike.⁶⁶ This was further accentuated at Willowgrange on 22 November 1899 with the death of a Natal colonial guide, Frick Chapman, a local farmer. Chapman was allegedly killed during or soon after the battle by a British soldier who mistook him for a Boer.⁶⁷ Despite the likelihood of such accidents, mounted Natal Volunteer regiments resisted efforts to replace their slouch hats with colonial-pattern helmets, despite the obvious risks of mistaken identity.⁶⁸ The issue may appear at first glance to be a cosmetic one, but it did accentuate the acquired South African characteristics shared by both Boer and Natal Colonist, and the fact that they had nevertheless been sharply divided by the war.

The Carbineers were frustrated in this skirmish by the limitations of their single-shot Martini-Enfield and Martini-Metford weapons.⁶⁹ This was an early indication that the Volunteers were expected to make do with inferior equipment. Sir John Ardagh was one officer in the British

⁶⁴ Gibson, The Story of the Imperial Light Horse, p142; McKenzie, Delayed Action, p155.

⁶⁵ Natal Carbineers History Centre, William Park Gray, undated typescript, pp2-3; Gray to AG McKenzie, in McKenzie, Delayed Action, p411.

⁶⁶ See Clark, Waging War, p91.

⁶⁷ Natal Advertiser, 27 November 1899; Natal Mercury, 27 November 1899; Black and White Budget, II/22, 10 March 1900, p8. Another source states that he was killed by the Boers (Harold Brown, War with the Boers: An Account of the Past and Present Troubles with the South African Republics, II, London, H Virtue and Co, nd, p136).

⁶⁸ Natal Witness, 7 October 1899 and 15 February 1900; Natal Advertiser, 7 October 1899; Navy and Army Illustrated, IX, pp178-9; McKenzie, Delayed Action, p159; and see Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p26; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p101; Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p690; Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, IV, pp445-6; AD Jones, 'Notes on Boer Uniforms', Soldiers of the Queen, 99/December 1999, pp11-13.

⁶⁹ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', pp7 and 107; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p268.

military establishment who urged the replacement of obsolete weapons in the colonial forces. Ardagh's suggestion of the magazine-fed Lee-Metford (adopted by the British Army in 1888) was rejected by the War Office in favour of the Martini-Enfield. It was claimed that for the 'poorly-trained' members of colonial military formations, a single-shot weapon was sufficient.⁷⁰

However, unlike regular cavalry, for whom the carbine was a secondary weapon after the sword and lance, the mounted infantry fought largely with the carbine, which therefore needed to be an effective firearm.⁷¹ Yet the Volunteers struggled to achieve effectiveness and parity with British regular forces.⁷² It was also discovered, for example, that carbines were outranged by the Boer Mausers, reinforcing the claims for adoption of the infantry rifle.⁷³ Although there was a selected introduction of the Lee-Metford to colonial units from January 1900 onwards, this issue was still largely undecided in April 1902.⁷⁴ The sizeable batches of the Martini-Metford carbine which were

⁷⁰ PRO 5, WO 30/40/14, Ardagh Memoranda, p310 (copy of Minute in 57/20/1774); and see Miller, Lord Methuen and the British Army, p133, footnote 14; Haythornwaite, The Colonial Wars Source Book, p49.

⁷¹ Knight, Go To Your God Like a Soldier, p163; G Tylden, 'The Use of Firearms by Cavalry', Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research, 19/1940, pp9-11. The dragoons, upon whom the Natal Carbineers modelled themselves, were mounted infantry carrying carbines or musketoons.

⁷² Brigadier-General Rimington, 5 February 1903, in Esher, How Britain Goes to War: A Digest and an Analysis of Evidence taken by the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa, London, 'Review of Reviews' Office, 1903, p115, and see p117. See Ian Skennerton, The British Service Lee: Lee-Metford and Lee-Enfield Rifles and Carbines 1880-1980, Margate, Australia, Ian D Skennerton, 1982, p56; BA Temple and ID Skennerton, A Treatise on the British Military Martini: The .40 and .303 Martinis 1880-c1920, Burbank Australia, BA Temple, 1989, p384; George Markham, Guns of the British Empire: Firearms of the British Soldier, 1837-1987, London, Arms and Armour Press, 1990, pp96-8.

⁷³ PRO, WO 108/272, Reports on rifles, carbines, small arms, nd; Tylden, 'The Use of Firearms by Cavalry', p13.

⁷⁴ PAR, PM 28, minute paper PM 899/02, Re-arming of Volunteers with Lee-Enfield magazine rifle, 3 April 1902; PAR, NCP 8/2/1 Departmental Reports 1901, Commandant Volunteers; Bizley diary, 11 February and 14 August 1901; Nicholson diary, 10, 11 and 16 February 1901.

sent in 1895-1896 to the colonies, including Natal, continued in use.⁷⁵

Alterations to the carbine necessitated by the exigencies of war included the binding of rifle-barrels with bootlaces and strips of leather so that, when hot after extended use, they could be grasped when mounting, and an attachment to secure the carbine-bucket to the bandolier to avoid complications when dismounting.⁷⁶

Another problem was an awkward and uncomfortable canvas bandolier equipment, known officially as the Royston-pattern after its 'inventor', Colonel William Royston, the Commandant of the Natal Volunteers, and (un)popularly as the 'Royston Entanglement'.⁷⁷ The scale of the problems experienced with bandoliers and other items of equipment under active service conditions is evident from exhaustive British Army reports on the subject. Generally, bandoliers were recommended for mounted infantry and pouches for infantry.⁷⁸ Later, under service conditions, Royston's apparatus was re-arranged so that the belt passed over the opposite shoulder to that used for the carbine.⁷⁹

The Boer Occupation of Highlands and the Battle of Willowgrange

**'On the morning of Wednesday, November 22nd, Estcourt
was really at the beginning of a short, a very**

⁷⁵ Skennerton, The British Service Lee, p410; Markham, Guns of the British Empire, p90-2; and see Paterson, 'The Military Organisation of the Colony of Natal', p92.

⁷⁶ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p22; Michael Barthorp, The Anglo-Boer Wars: 1815-1902, Manzini and Durban, Bok Books International, 1988, p55.

⁷⁷ Times of Natal, 23 August 1899; Natal Mercury, 17 November 1900 and 28 February 1950; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p8; Hurst, Short History of the Volunteer Regiments of Natal and East Griqualand, pp100-101.

⁷⁸ PRO WO 108/274: Reports 1899-1901: Valise equipment, bandoliers etc, pp1-37,39-73,75-107,109-141 and 143-174.

⁷⁹ Natal Carbineers History Centre, 'Natal Carbineers Dress Regulations' (1903), passim.

Shortly after the armoured-train incident, between 17 and 24 November, Estcourt's defenders faced the only serious military crisis of their brief investment, this time to the south around Willowgrange.

Patrol activity in that area, scattered skirmishes, and the absence of a concerted attack on the sparsely-defended settlement during the preceding weeks, had suggested that the Boers intended by-passing the garrison in a pincer movement, severing communications with Pietermaritzburg.⁸¹ The Boer force skirting Estcourt to the west was reported to have passed through the village of Weenen on the 17th, or during the night of the 17th-18th, when it was extensively looted, fuelling settler indignation.⁸²

The Boers captured Highlands Station on the NGR line, between Estcourt and Mooi River, on 20 November, and severed the telegraph links the following day.⁸³ In the Natal midlands settler fears of Boer looting were apparently confirmed as occupation forces 'scattered in small bands over the country outside the radius dominated by our [British] troops, and engaged in looting cattle and farmsteads and commandeering provisions and clothing'.⁸⁴ In the farmhouse on 'The

⁸⁰ Brown, War With the Boers, II, p134.

⁸¹ PAR, GH 1679, Diary of Events, p72, 17 November 1899; Free State Archives, 4/1, Oorlogmuseum Versameling, 155/28/3, Carel to mother 19 November 1899; Natal Mercury, 23 November 1899; Erasmus, 'Die Ineenstorting van die Boeremagte', p37; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, I, p372.

⁸² PAR, GH 1679, Diary of Events, p77, 19 November 1899; PAR, Departmental Report 1899, Weenen Division, 'War Report', 31 March 1900, ppB22-4; Times of Natal, 1 December 1899; Natal Advertiser, 1 December 1899; Times of Natal, 1 December 1899; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p108; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, I, p372.

⁸³ PRO, WO 132/9, Intelligence Reports, Daily Intelligence Reports, TK Murray, 21 November 1899; PAR, GH 1679, p79, 21 November 1899; PAR, CO 179/208, Report, Stationmaster, Highlands, to Colonial Secretary via Magistrate, Estcourt, 23 November 1899; NAM, 7607/49, Letters/diary of Lieutenant SG Francis, West Yorkshire Regiment, pp4-7, 20 November 1899; Creswicke, South Africa and the Transvaal War, II, p128.

⁸⁴ PAR, GH 1679, Diary of Events, p78, 20-21 November 1899; Times of Natal, 20 and 21
(continued...)

Hook', both the bedroom and kitchen bore the scars of bullets, and cattle were looted from RW Hall's farm, 'Gleniffer', while Hall was away on Volunteer duty.⁸⁵

The Natal Witness announced Estcourt's 'investment' in characteristically dramatic language: 'Communications cut off...railway rails torn up near Highlands...telegraph wires cut...rumoured heavy fighting'.⁸⁶ In an editorial on the 23rd, the same newspaper asked plaintively:

'The information that came on Tuesday evening of communication having been cut off with Estcourt, that at that place we had another beleaguered garrison of some 11 000 men, and that there was another at Mooi River of some 3 000 men, naturally led to even the man in the street asking how many more temptations were to be offered to the Boers. With Ladysmith, Estcourt, and Mooi River surrounded...what, everyone is asking, is the plan of campaign?'⁸⁷

On 17 November the first of several half-hearted and inconclusive expeditions had left Estcourt for the Willowgrange district to challenge the Boer presence between the town and Mooi River. Inadequate intelligence, organisation and transport at both Estcourt and Mooi River encouraged a cautious defensive policy on the part of the British, despite a combined strength of over 10 000 men.⁸⁸ In the course of several almost farcical expeditions over the next few days, British

⁸⁴(...continued)

November 1899; Natal Witness, 2 December 1899. The Copes and Turners (probably amongst the few families not to abandon such threatened homesteads in the Natal midlands) were reputedly detained by the Boers, but later released after promising not to disclose their movements (Natal Witness, 21 November 1899; The Times, 22 and 23 November 1899; Natal Advertiser, 25 November 1899; Creswicke, South Africa and the Transvaal War, II, p131; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, I, pp372-3).

⁸⁵ Natal Witness, 21 and 27 November 1899.

⁸⁶ Natal Witness, 24 November 1899.

⁸⁷ Natal Witness, 23 November 1899; and see pertinent criticism by Amery in John Barnes and David Nicholson (eds), The Leo Amery Diaries, Volume I: 1896-1929, London, Hutchinson & Co, 1980, p30, Amery to Chirol, 25 November 1899.

⁸⁸ PAR, GH 1679, Diary of Events, p76, 19 November 1899; PAR, CSO 2609, press statement, enclosure in Telegrams, 23 November 1899; Natal Witness, 22 and 24 November 1899; Natal Mercury, 24 November 1899; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I,

(continued...)

deficiencies in tactics and reconnaissance became apparent. The Natal Volunteers were on the whole restricted to the position of frustrated observers.⁸⁹

Reports that flooded into the Governor's office on 21 November abounded with word of Boer movements.⁹⁰ Harry Phipps, of the 1st Border Regiment, left a rather cynical account of the militarily ineffective events in the vicinity of Willowgrange on that day:

'As I expected we were to attack at daybreak this morning. So we marched all through the night and got into position this morning, but something went wrong with the scheme, the artillery forgot to bring their ammo or the Boers would not run away when they saw us, but instead show fight, but anyway, back we came to Willowgrange station without firing a shot.'⁹¹

The British at Estcourt and Mooi River made little effort to interdict the Boers:

'For four days a small force of Boers held a tract of country with a frontage roughly 25 miles either way, and held it at their leisure, raiding cattle, driving about with traps and horses...picking up what they wanted; killing time, buck shooting and guinea-fowl shooting - all this with 13 000 British troops within eight or ten miles of their main camp on either side of them.'⁹²

Despite the apparent ineffectiveness of forays by British and colonial troops, such as the one

⁸⁸(...continued)

p270; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, pp110,112; Amery (ed), The Times History, III, p369; AH Young, 'History of Mooi River and District', 1933, p51; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, I, pp373-4.

⁸⁹ PAR, GH 1679, Diary of Events, p78, 20 November 1899; Times of Natal, 27 November 1899; Natal Witness, 2 December 1899; Black and White Budget, II/15, 20 January 1900, p4; Burleigh, The Natal Campaign, p102; Wilson, With the Flag to Pretoria, I, p79; McKenzie, Delayed Action, pp157-8.

⁹⁰ PAR, GH 1679, Diary of Events, pp79-80, 21 November 1899; The Times 26 December 1899; Natal Witness, 27 November 1899; Natal Mercury, 28 November 1899; Wilson, With the Flag to Pretoria, I, p80.

⁹¹ NAM, 8302/15, Harry Phipps diary, p9, 21 November 1899.

⁹² The Times, 7 December 1899, quoted in Davitt, The Boer Fight for Freedom, p248.

described below, the Natal Volunteers emerged with credit, particularly for their scouting and skirmishing on 19 November.⁹³

On 22 November the Natal Carbineers escorted a British-colonial force (the Imperial Light Horse, the East Surrey Regiment, the West Yorkshire Regiment, the 7th Battery Royal Artillery, the Natal Royal Rifles and the Durban Light Infantry) on the only serious expedition out of Estcourt to dislodge the commandos from the district.⁹⁴ Burleigh, the correspondent of the British newspaper, the Daily Telegraph, described the advance, which took place in well-spaced, aggressive skirmishing lines, a deployment that was close to the ideal of Volunteer co-operation with British forces in this theatre.⁹⁵ That afternoon and evening, the Carbineers helped manhandle one of the naval 12-pounder artillery pieces up the steep, broken shoulder of Beacon Hill, the initial objective of the expedition.⁹⁶ It proved a nightmarish exercise, thanks to a series of furious thunderstorms. The artillery was not effectively used, but this operation at least demonstrated the fortitude of the Volunteers.⁹⁷

⁹³ Times of Natal, 27 November 1899.

⁹⁴ Natal Witness, 27 and 29 November 1899; Standard and Digger's News, 30 November 1899; Natal Volunteer Record, p125; Davitt, The Boer Fight for Freedom, p247; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, I, p379.

⁹⁵ Natal Mercury, 27 November 1899; F Giles, Military History Notes, Woolwich, FJ Cattermole, 1882, 'Advanced Guards', pp1-4; Burleigh, The Natal Campaign, p111; and see McKenzie, Delayed Action, p160.

⁹⁶ NAM, 7607/49, SG Francis letters, 20 November to 1 December 1899; Natal Advertiser, 27 November 1899; Natal Witness, 27 November and 2 December 1899; Natal Mercury, 6 April 1900; Martin, The Durban Light Infantry, I, p75.

⁹⁷ NAM, MS journal, W Sykes, 2nd West Yorkshire Regiment, passim; NAM, 7607/49, SG Francis letters, 20 November-1 December 1899; Times of Natal, 25 November 1899; Natal Advertiser, 27 November 1899; Natal Witness, 27 November and 2 December 1899; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p115; Burleigh, The Natal Campaign, p111; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, I, p376; and see Atkins, The Relief of Ladysmith, p98; Nicholas Riall (ed), Boer War: The Letters, Diaries and Photographs of Malcolm Riall from the War in South Africa 1899-1902, London, Brassey's, 2000, p32. Such fortitude was again demonstrated when lightning struck a VCR camp near Dundee on 24 October 1900 (Bizley diary, 24 October 1900; Nicholson diary, 24 October 1900; Natal Mercury, 31 October 1900; Natal Witness, 1 November 1900).

Although it was Major Duncan McKenzie of the Natal Carbineers who suggested a night attack on the Boer position, the Volunteers played no direct part in the subsequent action that was to end in a confused retirement with heavy casualties.⁹⁸ It was apparent from the marginalisation of the Volunteers in this engagement that it was unlikely that they would be entrusted with regular offensive operations.⁹⁹ The outcome frustrated McKenzie, who found fault with almost every aspect of the bungled operation. He had been fully aware of the risks of a night attack. On the morning of the battle he had personally explained, on site, to the British commander in Estcourt, Major-General HJT Hildyard, and to Colonel Walter Kitchener, overall commander of the attacking force, several critical battlefield features, most notably a stone wall running between Beacon Hill and the Boer positions on nearby Harris Hill. McKenzie intended that this feature should guide the troops to their target, ensuring surprise and probable success. Instead the wall contributed to the major mishap of the attack when columns advancing on either side of it mistook each other for the enemy.¹⁰⁰

The truncated service of Frick Chapman, a member of the Highlands Rifle Association, who acted as a guide during the operation, further suggests that while British military prejudice against irregular assistance remained strong, some need was felt to assuage Natal colonial sensibilities. He had been accidentally shot by a British soldier either on the day of the battle or the following day.¹⁰¹ The British military leadership was in the habit of blaming disasters on colonial and African guides, and Chapman's services had been dispensed with during the operation for no specific

⁹⁸ Natal Mercury, 27 November 1899; McKenzie, Delayed Action, pp158-60; Evans, The Boer War, p33.

⁹⁹ See TR Brereton, 'First Lessons in Modern War: Arthur Wagner, the 1898 Santiago Campaign, and US Army Lesson-Learning', The Journal of Military History, 64/1, January 2000, p86; Stern, The Citizen Army, p121; French, 'The Nation in Arms II: The Nineteenth Century', in Townshend (ed), The Oxford History of Modern War, p81.

¹⁰⁰ Natal Witness, 27 November and 2 December 1899.

¹⁰¹ PAR, CSO 1684, 9377/99, placed with 9387/1901, President, Highlands RA, to Colonial Secretary, 7 December 1899; Natal Mercury, 27 November 1899; Stirling, The Colonials in Africa, p47; Fergusson, British Military Intelligence, pp132-3.

reason.¹⁰² However, he was specifically commended in General Hildyard's report on the action, and buried with full military honours. A marble memorial to him was erected in the Estcourt Anglican churchyard by the West Yorkshire and East Surrey regiments. The Border Regiment also raised a subscription for a stained-glass window in the Estcourt Anglican Church.¹⁰³

By 9am on 23 November a Boer counter-attack forced a general British withdrawal from positions on Harris Hill, seized despite the setbacks of the previous evening. The Volunteers were thereafter relegated to patrol work in the Willowgrange valley,¹⁰⁴ which possibly accounts for a condescending report in the Standard and Digger's News quoting a secretary to Commandant-General Joubert, on an episode late in the battle:

'When the fight had lasted for two hours, the English fled into Estcourt, and we noticed a number of mounted men riding in haste away from the first hill, in search of a safer place. These men had taken no part in the fight.'¹⁰⁵

In a masterpiece of understatement following on the Willowgrange debacle, Buller reported that 'complete tactical success was not secured'.¹⁰⁶

Initially, on 24 November, alarm prevailed in British ranks, and the Estcourt garrison braced itself for the Boer bombardment that was expected to follow.¹⁰⁷ However, thanks to severe doubt on

¹⁰² Holt, The Boer War, p137.

¹⁰³ PRO, WO 32/7888, 079/578, Hildyard to Buller, 24 November 1899; Natal Mercury, 28 November 1899; Natal Witness, 3 February 1900; Brown, War with the Boers, II, p137.

¹⁰⁴ PRO, WO 32/7888, 079/578, Hildyard to Buller, 24 November 1899; Natal Mercury, 6 April 1900; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, p272; Creswicke, South Africa and the Transvaal War, II, p134; Martin, The Durban Light Infantry, I, pp76-7; George Chadwick, The Tugela Line: The Anglo-Boer War, 1982, pp3-4; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, I, p376.

¹⁰⁵ Standard and Digger's News, 11 December 1899.

¹⁰⁶ Natal Witness, 20 February 1900; Mocke, 'Die Slag van Colensoi', p21.

¹⁰⁷ Wilson, With the Flag to Pretoria, I, p82; Black and White Budget, II/14, 13 January
(continued...)

the part of Joubert as to the viability of continuing the Boer incursion, compounded by a fall from his horse which removed him from effective command, the setback turned into an unlikely strategic success when the Boers immediately began a withdrawal to the Thukela from the 24th to the 27th, and the Natal Volunteers were able to bask in the reflected glory of that unexpected development.¹⁰⁸ On the Boer side Joubert's successor, 'Acting General' Louis Botha, downplayed the entire southern Natal excursion as little more than a raid-in-force.¹⁰⁹

Indications of the Boer retirement were detected almost immediately, on the 25th, by a reconnoitring force that included Carbineers scouts, deploying in textbook fashion.¹¹⁰ Several golden opportunities to disrupt this withdrawal were subsequently ignored by the British cavalry commander, one Colonel Martyr, most notably at a road-cutting west of Estcourt.¹¹¹ Martyr explained to McKenzie, within earshot of the astonished troopers, that his instructions were not to engage the enemy, but simply to shepherd them back to Colenso. The Boers and The Times alike were amazed at this lack of initiative.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷(...continued)

1900, p30, and II/15, 20 January 1900, p22; Atkins, The Relief of Ladysmith, pp108-9.

¹⁰⁸ NAR, FK 1817, file 578, Buller to War Office, 2 December 1899; PRO, WO 32/7888, 079/578, also incorporating Hildyard to Buller, 24 November 1899; NAR, FK 1817, file 579, Buller to War Office, 2 December 1899; Natal Witness, 20 February 1900; and see PAR, GH 1679, Natal Police Report, p88; Weeber, Op Die Natalse Front, p103-4; Wessels, 'Die Britse Militêre Strategie', p415; Erasmus, 'Die Ineenstorting van die Boeremagte', p38; Mocke, 'Die Slag van Colenso', p58; JH Breytenbach, Gedenkalbum van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog, Kaapstad, Nasionale Pers, 1949, p91.

¹⁰⁹ Friend of the Free State and Bloemfontein Gazette, 1 December 1899; and see Free State Archives, Oorlogmuseum Versameling, 155/28/3, Carel to mother, 30 December 1899.

¹¹⁰ Burleigh, The Natal Campaign, p132; Amery (ed), The Times History, II, p317; McKenzie, Delayed Action, pp160-1.

¹¹¹ PAR, GH 1679, Diary of Events, p92, 26 November 1899.

¹¹² Volkstem, 2 December 1899; Standard and Digger's News, 11 December 1899; Natal Witness, 16 December 1899; De Express en Oranjevrijstaatsche Advertentiblad, 26 December 1899; The Times, 7 December 1899, quoted in Davitt, The Boer Fight for Freedom, p249; Gibson, The Story of the Imperial Light Horse in the South African War, p144; Weeber, Op Die Natalse Front, p103; Anon., The Mobile Boer, p54; McKenzie, Delayed Action, pp160-2;
(continued...)

The Volunteers joined an immediate advance to Frere, that was intended to prepare for the relief of besieged Ladysmith. They provided mounted screens ahead and on the flanks of the British column.¹¹³ The deployment of the Estcourt-Weenen Squadron of the Natal Carbineers was proved to be an astute one as their familiarity with the terrain contributed significantly to the squadron's successes and minimal casualties.¹¹⁴

It was during this phase of the campaign that the Durban Light Infantry, an infantry regiment, with a battery of the Natal Field Artillery, was tasked with unappealing escort and guard duties on the line of communication.¹¹⁵ Frustrated, they applied in vain for conversion to mounted infantry - the Natal Volunteer arm of service most in demand, especially when the British moved to the offensive.¹¹⁶ The regiment was offended that British militia units were being sent to the front in its place, and this probably reflected the frustration of the Natal Volunteer infantry, who were already being allotted an even smaller slice of active service than their mounted infantry colleagues

‘We have been treated as coolie labourers, and not as soldiers. When there have been trucks to be loaded, trenches to dig, guards and pickets to find, the DLI have always been very much before the eyes of those in authority, but when the enemy was to be met, and our homes to be defended, a place in the rear has always been assigned to us.’¹¹⁷

Communications between Estcourt and Pietermaritzburg were restored on 26 November, and Estcourt and district soon returned to normal, with farmers re-occupying homesteads and

¹¹²(...continued)

Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, I, pp383-4; II, pp237-238; Martin, The Durban Light Infantry, I, pp78-80.

¹¹³ Martin, The Durban Light Infantry, I, p80; McKenzie, Delayed Action, p162.

¹¹⁴ Natal Witness, 2, 3 and 11 October 1899; and see Natal Carbineers History Centre, Rodwell scrap album, *passim*.

¹¹⁵ Burleigh, The Natal Campaign, p145.

¹¹⁶ Natal Advertiser, 10 January 1900; Natal Mercury, 2 April 1900; Natal Volunteer Record, pp122 and 125-6.

¹¹⁷ Natal Mercury, 2 April 1900.

provisions streaming in.¹¹⁸ The Natal Witness made the faintly sarcastic comment on Estcourt in early December that returning refugees mostly regretted their hasty departures earlier that month, since those who remained had been quite safe. The almost embarrassed return of these refugees was an indication that colonists often reacted in an alarmist fashion to battlefield developments.¹¹⁹ When the battlefield moved north the town continued to play a part in the British-colonial war effort, as a base and transit camp, and medical centre.¹²⁰

Conclusion

In the first week of November 1899 the small Natal Volunteer component of the British garrison at Colenso, deployed since October on the strategic NGR line of communication, found itself enmeshed in another contentious retirement, this time to Estcourt, in the face of advancing Boer forces. The minor investment of Estcourt which followed brought the Boer threat close to the heart of Natal settler country, and witnessed the vandalism of homesteads in the Highlands district south of the town, accompanied by evidence of alarm fanned by the colonial press. Natal settlers did not consider the Boer retirement to the Thukela line after the battle of Willowgrange as evidence that the Boer threat was receding, and commitment to the war effort remained positive.

Militarily, the scouting potential of colonial mounted infantry was apparent, but was not realised because of limited numbers available. The Durban Light Infantry, part of the Volunteer infantry component, lost heavily in the Armoured Train ambush, but on the same day Volunteer mounted infantry demonstrated its skirmishing potential at Ennersdale, north of Estcourt, despite

¹¹⁸ PAR, GH 1679, Diary of Events, p88, 26 November 1899; PAR, CO (microfilm), 1/1/1/1/200 [PRO 179/207], Hely-Hutchinson to Chamberlain, 26 November 1899; Natal Witness, 27 November and 4 December 1899; Creswicke, South Africa and the Transvaal War, II, p143; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p118.

¹¹⁹ Natal Witness, 9 December 1899; and see PAR, MJPW 72, L&W, 9105/1899, Magistrate Estcourt, to PM, and General Manager NGR, to Minister of Lands and Works, 28 November 1899; PAR, GH 1679, Diary of Events, p89, 28 November 1899.

¹²⁰ NAM, MS 8303/29, JA Weir, 'With Buller to Ladysmith' lecture, 5 March 1901, p5; Natal Mercury, 27 October 1900; Natal Advertiser, 22 January 1900; Anon., Twenty-five Years' Soldiering in South Africa: By a Colonial Officer, London, Andrew Melrose, 1909, p397.

limitations in weaponry and equipment. There was further frustration on 22 November when the Volunteers once again languished on the periphery while British infantry attempted to dislodge Boer forces at the battle of Willowgrange, an engagement in which the local knowledge of the Volunteers present would have been particularly useful. Despite the potential evident in the individual skills and initiative of William Park Gray of the Natal Carbineers, the unorthodox nature and often unfulfilled outcomes of informal Volunteer missions were not calculated to enhance relations with the British forces. The British failed effectively to utilise local knowledge available in the planning and execution of the Willowgrange engagement, and this was encapsulated in the brief service of the colonial guide, Chapman.

CHAPTER IV

BULLER'S RELIEF COLUMN AND INCIPIENT CIVIL WAR

**'It is the same old dreary game, and our people
are committing the same blunders and
adopting the same haw-haw eye-glass tactics
which led us into such horrors as Isandlwana and
Majuba, and many other defeats.'**¹

Following the 'relief of Estcourt' and General Buller's arrival at the Natal front in November, the Natal Volunteers joined the push to relieve Ladysmith, a major focus of British strategy in South Africa. Emphasis here will be on the Estcourt-Weenen Squadron of the Natal Carbineers in a 450-strong Composite Regiment, a component of a mounted brigade in the Southern Natal Field Force.²

Another Layer of Colonial Defence: November 1899

Meanwhile, during October and November 1899, the Boers posed an immediate threat to the Natal midlands and Pietermaritzburg, and the commandos ranged virtually unchallenged through settler farms. The Natal government was therefore compelled to consider the application of further reserve levels in the Natal military structure, in addition to the Volunteers who had already been mobilized and were serving with the British forces. Settler concern was epitomised by the request on 9 November from one Alfred Green, a farmer from Rosetta near Mooi River, to the Prime Minister, Hime, for carbines and ammunition since 'now that they [the Boers] appear to be

¹ Watkins-Pitchford, Besieged in Ladysmith, p3.

² 'Natal Carbineer Record - Estcourt Squadron No.5', in McKenzie, Delayed Action, p186. See Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, file 2, GD 233/124/1, Copies of Official Documents connected with Lord Dundonald's Brigade, Section 1, Names of Officers of Cavalry and Mounted Corps, 6 December 1899, and Organisation of Troops, Natal Field Force, 8 January 1900, and file 3, GD 233/124/2, Mounted Brigade Typescript Record, p6, for the detailed composition of this brigade, re-designated the 2nd Mounted Brigade during the final phase of the relief campaign.

between Estcourt and Colenso, it is time to think of defence'.³

Several rifle associations, the Colony's reserve force, were mobilized. These included the Howick, Lidgetton, Karkloof, Nottingham Road, Weston, and Highlands Rifle Associations, called out on 20 November.⁴ The rifle associations served under the same conditions as the Volunteers, but with restricted deployment.⁵ Those in the northern districts of the Natal midlands were issued with weapons during the period of crisis in the Colony.⁶ The Boers were sufficiently alarmed to vow vengeance on farmers belonging to these rifle associations.⁷

However, the general response of the rifle associations was poor, with their operations informal at best, and regulations tabled in October 1899 allowed for the disbandment of those with less than 15 members. It was soon apparent that the effect of such a force was probably more psychological than as a genuine military deterrent. For example, when Boers penetrated south of Estcourt in mid-November 1899, the local rifle association, the Highlands Rifle Association, was ineffective, with most of its members obliged to seek the comparative safety of Estcourt.⁸ In early January 1900 calls were made for the cancellation of previous mobilization orders.⁹

³ PAR, MJPW 72, minute paper L&W4887/1899, Alfred Green to Hime, 9 October 1899 and reply, 10 November 1899.

⁴ In Pietermaritzburg, for example, the rifle associations comprised the Pietermaritzburg Rifle Association (22 October 1899), and the Maritzburg Home Guard Rifle Association (23 October) (PAR, MJPW 72, minute paper L&W 5087/1899, Government Notice, 560/1899 and 635/1899; and see PAR, MJPW 71, minute paper L&W 4341/1899, Beningfield to Hime, 4 October 1899).

⁵ PAR, CSO 1684, minute paper 7388/1901, Minutes from Prime Minister, Principal Under-Secretary and Colonial Secretary, to Presidents of Rifle Associations, 20 November 1899. See PAR, NCP, 6/1/1/52, Natal Government Gazette, LI, No3042, 12 September 1899, pp1591-3, for the rules of the Nottingham Road Rifle Association.

⁶ PAR, MJPW 90, enclosure in V551/1901, Hime to WC Stockill, 6 August 1901.

⁷ Natal Advertiser, 27 November 1899.

⁸ Natal Witness, 2 December 1899.

⁹ PAR, NCP 6/1/1/53, Natal Government Gazette, LII, No.3078, 16 January 1900, p37, Government Notice No.25/1900; PAR, MJPW 71, minute paper L&W 455/1899, List of Rifle
(continued...)

In addition to the rifle associations, another variety of 'emergency corps' was Murray's Horse, raised in November 1899 for a brief tour of operations that lasted until the 16th of that month. Significantly, considering the way in which the direction of Natal interests was firmly in the hands of the settler elite, this corps was raised and commanded by the Hon Thomas Keir Murray CMG, one-time Colonial Secretary of Natal, and a relation by marriage to Sir Albert Hime, the Prime Minister.¹⁰ Murray's small temporary collection of well-mounted men responded with commendable alacrity to the crisis posed by the Boer threat.¹¹

However, although Murray's Horse 'performed valuable service in patrolling a wide area, thereby leading the enemy to believe that lower Natal was better protected than it really was',¹² the service of this unit, described by Hurst as more in the nature of a commando, did not make a meaningful contribution to the colonial war effort, and instead epitomised the lack of purpose and direction in the Natal response to the war.

⁹(...continued)

Associations which have not adopted the New regulations, 12 October 1899; Natal Witness, 23 and 29 March 1901. Only Newcastle could muster more than 100 members (PAR, MJPW 72, minute paper 5087/1899, Government Notice 560/1899, 23 October 1899 and 635/1899, 20 November 1899, and see Natal Witness, 23 and 29 March 1901 and 4 April 1901). The Ladysmith and Pietermaritzburg contingents were two that seemed to attract a more enthusiastic response (Siege Museum, Ladysmith, Ladysmith Town Guard Papers, September 1899; PAR, NDR 2/2, Muster Roll, Volunteers and cadets; PAR, NCP 7/4/7, Departmental reports 1900, Commandant of Volunteers; PAR, CSO 1637, minute paper 37/1900, Governor to Minister of Lands and Works, 9 January 1900; PAR, CSO 1637, minute paper 37/1900, Draft Letter to Ras, 12 January 1900). See JA Dunn, 'Natal Rifle Associations Reviewed', *Military Medal Society of South Africa*, journal No.30, May 1988, pp19-24, for some war detail on the Wilgefontein Rifle Association during this period.

¹⁰ PAR, GH 1679, Diary of Events, p26, 18 October 1899; Natal Witness, 28 October and 4 November 1899; Morrell, 'The Family Man and Empire', p33; Stirling, The Colonials in Africa, pp45-6; Hurst, The Volunteer Regiments of Natal and East Griqualand, p116. See Natal Volunteer Record, pp80-1, for a nominal roll of Murray's Horse.

¹¹ Natal Witness, 23 November 1899; Stirling, The Colonials in Africa, pp45-6. Natal Volunteer Record, p171, asserts that Murray raised his unit after a personal appeal to Hely-Hutchinson and Hime for the mobilization of the rifle associations had been refused.

¹² PAR, CSO 2609, Order, 16 November 1899, in Confidential Minute Papers, Transcript Telegrams, 17 November 1899; Natal Mercury, 21 and 23 November 1899; Stirling, The Colonials in Africa, p46.

The reason for such a lack was that in official circles it was felt that the country district settlers were already doing enough towards the war effort, and that further compulsion would be counterproductive. The Prime Minister, Hime, informed Hely-Hutchinson very emphatically of this concern:

'Almost every family in the Colony has supplied one or more of its male members to one or other of the Volunteer Forces now serving at the front; and I think it is too much to ask that the other male members of these families should now be called out, thus leaving their families and their farms without any protection whatsoever.'¹³

As early as mid-November the Natal government was therefore considering the release from service of Murray's temporary corps, and was reluctant to mobilize the rifle associations for fear that such a move would 'create a panic throughout the Colony'.¹⁴ In its announcement of the demise of Murray's Horse, following the arrival of reinforcements from the Cape in late November 1899, the Natal Advertiser confirmed smugly:

'We are informed that no sooner had Murray's Special Volunteer Corps been relieved at Mooi River by reinforcements and disbanded, than the military authorities awoke to the fact that a most valuable body of men, volunteers in the very truest sense of the word, fully acquainted with the country and Boer tactics, had been lost to them.'¹⁵

The disbandment of Murray's Horse after such a brief existence was greeted with dismay in the Natal press, and sentiment tantamount to vigilantism can be detected:

'The disbanding of Murray's Horse was a great mistake. The reason of disbanding was because the corps was not properly organised and officered, and there was evident misunderstanding with the military authorities...

It may be taken as certain that, in carrying out their plan, the military do not provide for the protection of the Natal farmer, and farmers ought to have been made aware of this.

¹³ PAR, CSO 1631, minute paper 8944/1899, 16 November 1899.

¹⁴ PAR, CSO 1631, minute paper 8944/1899, 16 November 1899; and see DN Carter-Campbell, 'Glasgow to the Relief of Ladysmith, 23 October 1899-2 March 1900', Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research, 55/1977, p139.

¹⁵ Natal Advertiser, 20 November 1899.

Farmers in Natal have been waiting for a decisive blow by the British forces, while the Boers have been on a plundering crusade.¹⁶

When the members of this unit, who had served without rank, pay or allowances, returned to their farms, there was talk of dissatisfaction among the troopers, mostly older men with sons in the Volunteer regiments.¹⁷ Referring to Murray's Horse, Bennett Burleigh criticised the neglected opportunity fully to mobilize such a resource, particularly in the light of the suitability of its members as scouts, guides and interpreters.¹⁸

Yet to what extent was the willing manpower potential of the Colony actually being neglected? Hime, as we have seen above, believed that almost every family in the Colony was contributing one or more of its men to the war effort. In London in late May 1900 Sir Walter Peace, the Agent-General for Natal, informed the London Press Club that:

'In order to raise a force of soldiers in this country as great in proportion to the population of the United Kingdom as the proportion of the Volunteers in Natal who had gone to the front to the population of the Colony, it would be necessary to raise 2 500 000 men.'¹⁹

The Times History certainly did not agree with Hime or Peace, and with reference to Murray's Horse, made the following telling comment on the unit's complement of under 150 men as:

'an indication of the futility of relying upon the individual patriotism of even the most sincerely patriotic population, where personal service is not recognised as a national duty'.²⁰

Which of these contradictory impressions is valid? The bald statistics should be the arbiter. An

¹⁶ Times of Natal, 23 November 1899; and see Natal Mercury, 27 November 1899.

¹⁷ Times of Natal, 17 November 1899.

¹⁸ Burleigh, The Natal Campaign, p68; Hurst, The Volunteer Regiments of Natal and East Griqualand, pp116-7.

¹⁹ Natal Witness, 23 May 1900.

²⁰ Amery (ed), The Times History, III, p99.

averaged strength return for the mobilized standing Natal Volunteer force for the period October 1899 to February 1900, 2 080 men, represents 11.68 per cent of the approximately 17 808 white male colonists of military age (17 to 50 years old). This represents a negligible 2.97 per cent increase over the 1 551 men listed in the last peacetime strength return in December 1898 (8.71 per cent). The mobilization percentage is boosted to 16.07 per cent if temporary and informally constituted units such as Murray's Horse are included. The ephemeral rifle associations and town guards have not been considered. If the entire white male population is taken, the Volunteers on active service in the final quarter of 1899 drop to 6.83 per cent of the total.²¹ Therefore, as far as mobilization is concerned, most English settlers in Natal do not appear to have absorbed the spirit of late Victorian popular imperialism, imbued as it was with strains of nationalism and militarism. It was apparent that Volunteer enlistment was more often for reasons of social status and leisure rather than patriotism and martial ardour.²² The response was also surprising in the context of high levels of unemployment in the Colony.²³

²¹ Figures for the total White male population, males of military age, and the Volunteer strength return for December 1898, was drawn from PAR, NCP 7/3/5, Statistical Yearbook for the Colony of Natal for the Year 1898, ppJ1,J3 and L2. Detailed statistics were not obtainable for 1899 on account of the war. As far as the figures for mobilisation are concerned, the averaged 2 080 was calculated from the 2 047 listed in the return of the Volunteer force for December 1899 (PAR, NCP 7/3/6, Statistical Yearbook, 1899, pL2), the 2084 from the totalled lists of individual Volunteer regiments in Natal Volunteer Record, pp37 passim, and that of 2 110 from the report of the Commandant of Volunteers for 1899 (PAR, NCP 7/4/6, Departmental Reports, pF1). The strength returns of Murray's Horse and the Colonial Scouts is from Natal Volunteer Record, pp80-8, and the military age-span for the Volunteers is listed in Volunteer Act, 1895, p25. See Andrew Duminy and Bill Guest, 'The Anglo-Boer War and its economic aftermath, 1899-1910', in Duminy and Guest (eds), Natal and Zululand from Earliest Times to 1910, p350; Stern, The Citizen Army, pp155-174; Steve Camp, Historic Pietermaritzburg, Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter, 2001, p19; Gordon, Honour Without Riches, p257; Pearse, Joseph Baynes: Pioneer, p156.

²² Woodfine, "'Unjustifiable and Illiberal': Military Patriotism and Civilian Values in the 1790s", in Taithe and Thornton (eds), War, pp85-6.

²³ See National Army Museum, TS, Dr MD Blanch, 'The War and British Society', pp3-4 and 6; Natal Witness, 18 March 1901; Guest, 'It was the Best of Times, it was the Worst of Times', p41; Morrell et al, 'Colonialism and the Establishment of White Domination', in Morrell (ed), Political Economy and Identities in KwaZulu-Natal, p39; John Keegan, 'Regimental Ideology', in Geoffrey Best and Andrew Wheatcroft (eds), War, Economy and the Military Mind, London, Croom Helm, 1976, pp8-9; and see Best, War and Society in Revolutionary Europe, p240; Peter Randall, Little England on the Veld, Johannesburg, Ravan (continued...)

To confuse matters, in late November a new unit, styled the Colonial Scouts, was raised in Pietermaritzburg and Durban.²⁴ It was commanded by Colonel Friend Addison MLA, formerly the Commanding Officer of the Stanger Mounted Rifles, and founding CO of the Natal Mounted Rifles. The Scouts were initially intended to oppose the main Boer invasion of Natal, but instead saw service on the Zululand border with the Transvaal, securing the British flank against Boer raiding.²⁵ A clear distinction was made between this force, as an 'Irregular Corps', and the Volunteer regiments.²⁶ Although not raised under the provisions of the Volunteer Act, it was, nevertheless, subject to its regulations, as Murray's Horse had been. The Scouts were also paid

²³(...continued)

Press, 1982, pp72,77,85 and 88. In evolving European nation-states one of the hallmarks of the ruling class was the familiarity with, and in many cases, the exclusive right, to bear arms (Best, War and Society in Revolutionary Europe, p21; Keegan, Regimental Ideology', in Best and Wheatcroft (eds), War, Economy and the Military Mind, p11 and 15; Smith, 'A century of controversy over origins', in Lowry (ed), The South African War Reappraised, p24; Was Natal settler society a local aristocracy?, see Best, War and Society in Revolutionary Europe, pp22 and 25).

²⁴ PAR, CSO 1633, minute paper 1387/1899, Report, Colonial Secretary and Minister of Agriculture to Hime, 8 December 1899; PAR, CSO 1632, minute paper 9068/1899, 21-23 November 1899; Natal Mercury, 23 October 1900; and see Natal Advertiser, 25 November 1899; Natal Witness, 5 December 1899.

²⁵ PAR, ZA, Volume 33, minute papers 695/1900 (CR 48/1900), 742/1900 (CR 53/1900), nn (CR 85/1900) and nn (CR 91/1900), Colonial Scouts Patrol Reports, January 1900; Stirling, The Colonials in Africa, p46; Hurst, The Volunteer Regiments of Natal and East Griqualand, pp112-114; Stirling, The Colonials in South Africa, p46; Tylden, The Armed Forces of South Africa, pp68-9; Twenty-five Years' Soldiering in South Africa, p391; John Laband, 'Zulus and the War', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, pp115-6. The Scouts made sufficient impact to attract the attention of The Times in London (The Times, 6 December 1899). See Natal Volunteer Record, pp82-8 and 173-180, for a complete nominal roll and service record. Addison came from a leading coastal landowning family. He was the eldest son of Dr William Addison, who was also the first medical doctor in the Colony (Shelagh Spencer, British Settlers in Natal 1824-1857: A Biographical Register, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, I (1981), V (1989) and VI (1992), I, pp14-15). He had prior experience in levying men for regional defence, having reportedly raised 900 for the defence of the Stanger district during the Anglo-Zulu War (Dictionary of South African Biography, III, p2).

²⁶ PAR, CSO 1633, minute paper 1387/1899, Report, Charles Smythe, Colonial Secretary, to GOC, Lines of Communication, 25 January 1900.

in accordance with Volunteer rates of pay for mounted corps.²⁷

The unit was, however, poorly equipped and trained. Hurst commented:

'The Colonial Scouts were a conspicuous example of splendid material in men and horses proving of negligible value as a regiment in the war - really wasted - owing to lack of proper organisation, hurried and insufficient training and, in some cases, insufficient and unsuitable officers.'²⁸

The deployment of the Colonial Scouts along the Zululand-Transvaal border also had a destabilising effect in that region, encouraging a Boer invasion of the Nquthu and Nkandla districts in January 1900, and sparking a crisis in British relations with the Natal government, who complained that the result had been to compromise Zulu confidence in the measures taken for their protection.²⁹

Strategically, the debacle surrounding the deployment of the Scouts to Zululand compromised the capacity of the force effectively to fill the role of a reserve security force in Natal. On 1 March 1900 the Natal Mercury suggested that Boer looting in the Natal midlands in late 1899 could have been curtailed had the Colonial Scouts instead been permitted to range from a base such as Estcourt.³⁰ Another problem, this time affecting its popular support, was the fact that the recruiting base for the regiment appeared to coincide with the membership of the rifle associations, such as the Maritzburg Rifle Association, who were only obliged to render very localised defence. The conditions of service of town guards were also variable, with some signing

²⁷ PAR, CSO 1633, Report, Colonial Secretary and Minister of Agriculture to Hime, 8 December 1899, 'Conditions for Raising Corps of Colonial Scouts'; PAR, CSO 1633, minute paper 737/1900, With reference to the Corps of Colonial Scouts, Smythe to GOC Lines of Communication, 25 January 1900.

²⁸ Hurst, The Volunteer Regiments of Natal and East Griqualand, p114.

²⁹ PAR, ZA 33, minute paper nn (CR 47/1900), Chief Magistrate and Civil Commissioner to Hime, 13 January 1900, enclosure in Hime to Wolfe Murray, 13 January 1900; Guest, 'It was the Best of Times, it was the Worst of Times', p32; Peter Warwick, Black People and the South African War 1899-1902, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1983, pp83-4.

³⁰ Natal Mercury, 1 March 1900.

on for as long as their services were required, while others took oaths of allegiance. None were attested.³¹

The service of Murray's Horse, the Colonial Scouts, and the midlands rifle associations reflected the stop-start nature of the second-line Natal colonial defence system, and the apparent vacillation of the government.³² The Natal Witness specifically criticised the apparently haphazard and disruptive government efforts to mobilize additional measures for the defence of the Colony. The newspaper urged an 'all-or-nothing' approach, and argued that piecemeal volunteering was impractical and prejudicial to morale, largely on account of the familiar concerns about the abandonment of farms, and the welfare of men with families and businesses to support. It suggested, instead, that unit mobilizations at this juncture would receive a good response.³³

At the end of January 1900 the Natal Witness called for the formation of a Natal colonial brigade, as had been raised in the Cape Colony. The newspaper was confident that there were more than enough willing recruits, many of whom had applied unsuccessfully to join the Cape brigade.³⁴ Further, 50 ex-members of the Colonial Scouts volunteered for duty with the British column at Mooi River, as scouts and guides.³⁵

The Application of Colonial Forces to the War Effort

**'As with poetry and rhetoric, it was not enough
to know the rules if one did not possess
the talent.'³⁶**

³¹ PRO, WO 108/359, Conditions of Service, South African and Overseas Contingents, South African War, HMSO 1904, p119.

³² See Tylden, The Armed Forces of South Africa, p118.

³³ Natal Witness, 27 November 1899.

³⁴ Natal Witness, 31 January 1900.

³⁵ Natal Advertiser, 20 November 1899.

³⁶ Howard, Studies in War and Peace, p23.

Much of the Composite Regiment's success in the field with the British forces from November 1899 to March 1900, especially as a scouting force, is generally attributed to a successful partnership forged between Natal officers such as Major Duncan McKenzie of the Natal Carbineers, and a recently arrived British regular officer, Major Hubert Gough, of the 16th Lancers, who proved an adept and willing student of local conditions.³⁷ As such, Gough was one of the few British regular officers willing to implement the mounted infantry tactics learnt painfully from the Boers, and most importantly, to attempt to give expression to the military skills of the Natal Volunteers within the framework of a British military structure that remained unsympathetic.

Gough's tactical classroom comprised patrols in late November 1899 in the Natal midlands with the Nottingham Road Rifle Association, commanded by a local farmer, PD Simmons.³⁸ It was to these men that contemporary historian Clement Stott referred as 'being composed of local farmers...[who] rendered most valuable assistance on account of their knowledge of the surrounding country'.³⁹ The Nottingham Road contingent included several men from the settler families that influenced agricultural, commercial, political and Volunteer interests in the Colony.⁴⁰

The scouting of the Natal irregulars impressed Gough. He reported in his memoirs that typically

³⁷ General Sir Hubert Gough, Soldiering On, London, Arthur Barker, 1954, p66; Anthony Farrar-Hockley, Goughie: The Life of General Sir Hubert Gough CGB GCMG KCVO, London, Hart-Davis and MacGibbon, 1975, chapter 4; Tylden, 'Mounted Infantry', p177.

³⁸ PAR, CSO 1633, minute paper, J King, President, Nottingham Road Rifle Association to Principal Under Secretary, Natal, 11 December 1899; PAR, CSO 1633, minute paper 9550/1899, Report, Commandant Nottingham Road Camp, 15 December 1899; PAR, CSO 9377, minute paper 9377/1899, President, Highlands Rifle Association, to Colonial Secretary, 7 December 1899; PAR, CSO 1631, minute paper 8944/1899, 16 November 1899; Natal Witness, 27 November 1899; CJ Juta, 'Diary of a Colonial Scout 1899-1900', Theoria, 22/1964, passim; Twentieth Century Impressions of Natal, pp522-3; Creswicke, South Africa and the Transvaal War, II, pp139-40; King, Along the Road to Fort Nottingham, p61.

³⁹ Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p111.

⁴⁰ Natal Advertiser, 27 November 1899. The names included: DC McKenzie, EW Shaw, HM Stainbank, Peter McKenzie, Archibald Thompson, H Shaw, E Parkinson, M Sutton, U McKenzie, CA Roberts and C McLean.

they were 'ready to fight when required, but not at all inclined to gallop thoughtlessly into danger'.⁴¹ Tactically, 'they moved in bounds, like wild animals carefully approaching their prey, and this has now become the classic method of advance for scouts'.⁴²

William Dickson, commenting on reconnaissance by the Volunteers with the Composite Regiment in the Colenso district on 23 December 1899, echoed Gough's opinion:

'They ride up sharply, dismount, lead the horses back, and the men advance to the edge of the kopje to hide among the rocks. This was the first kopje. Not finding the enemy, they mount again and gallop to the next, and so on until they do find the enemy, whom they quickly drive off'.⁴³

What did this signify for the integration of Natal colonial mounted infantry into British operations? Aspects of mounted infantry and mounted rifles operations, laid out in an 1890 manual, were prefaced by the distinction between mounted infantry, where the horse was simply another form of locomotion, and the mounted rifleman, who was a horseman trained to fight on foot.⁴⁴ The manual stated that 'it is expected of them [the mounted infantryman] that they should perform all the outpost, reconnaissance, and patrolling of an army in a manner similar to cavalry'.⁴⁵ Weeber, on the other hand, almost mockingly suggests that colonial mounted infantry were seeking to emulate Boer tactics in making the attack on foot, with their horses ensconced safely in the rear.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Gough, Soldiering On, p66.

⁴² Gough, Soldiering On, p67, and see p42.

⁴³ Dickson, The Biograph in Battle, p91; and see Natal Advertiser, 21 February 1900. For a critique of what Christopher Dwyer terms 'haphazard employment' of mounted troops in the American Civil War, see Dwyer, 'Confederate Cavalry Raiding Strategy', p264. Sir Charles Warren observed that British troops had only considered such tactics after suffering severe losses (Royal Commission, I, Report, p48, and see p47).

⁴⁴ NAM, Lieutenant-Colonel ETH Hutton, 'Mounted Infantry and its Action in Modern Warfare', 1890, p1; and see Royal Commission, I, Report, pp50-2.

⁴⁵ NAM, Hutton, 'Mounted Infantry and its Action in Modern Warfare', p2.

⁴⁶ Weeber, Op die Natalse Front, pp116-7.

According to Burleigh, it was general British Army policy to deploy infantry on rough terrain, and cavalry in more open country.⁴⁷ Instead, observers marvelled at the inept use of British cavalry.⁴⁸ It was not, for example, widely appreciated that modern weaponry made it no longer feasible for cavalry to approach to close quarters for purposes of intelligence gathering (or for that matter, attack or flanking actions).⁴⁹ However, there was a distinct reluctance to deploy proud British cavalry regiments in the mounted infantry roles of scouting and reconnaissance that this campaign demanded.⁵⁰ A German observer concluded: 'In my opinion, the Natal Carbineers was the only regiment which merited the designation of cavalry.'⁵¹

The promotion of mounted infantry tactics was reinforced by CE Callwell, author of a renowned 'manual' on irregular warfare, Small Wars, originally published in 1899, and revised in the light of Anglo-Boer War operations.⁵² Callwell correctly concluded that guerrilla warfare was

⁴⁷ Burleigh, The Natal Campaign, p312.

⁴⁸ Sibbald, The War Correspondents: The Boer War, pp25-6; Davitt, The Boer Fight for Freedom, p331; Kandyba-Foxcroft, Russia and the Anglo-Boer War, p156; and see Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Lyttelton Papers, Letter 13, Lyttelton to Regg, 22 April 1900; Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, IV, p431; Porch, 'Imperial Wars', in Townshend (ed), The Oxford History of Modern War, p105.

⁴⁹ PRO, 30/40/16, Ardagh Papers, Frontier Defence, p8; Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Lyttelton Papers, Letter 13, Lyttelton to Regg, 22 April 1900; and see Steele, 'Salisbury and the Soldiers', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, pp13-14.

⁵⁰ Knight, Go to Your God Like a Soldier, p188; Charles Townshend, 'Introduction: The Shape of Modern War', in Townshend (ed), The Oxford History of Modern War, p3; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, I, p10; Jilly Cooper, Animals in War, London, William Heinemann, 1983, p18; Barthorp, 'The Mounted Infantry'; Haythornwaite, The Colonial Wars Source Book, pp56-7. The American military attaché with the Boers, Captain SLH Slocum, who had a background in the United States 8th Cavalry, was surprised at the British (and general European) neglect of this arm of service (Captain SLH Slocum and Captain Carl Reichman, Boer Operations in South Africa, Melville, Scripta Africana, 1987, p80; and see Kochanski, 'Wolseley and the South African War', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, pp68-9).

⁵¹ Blockhouse Private Museum, Ladysmith, Anglo-Boer War scrapbook, anonymous newspaper article. In April 1900 the Transvaal government opened applications for the formation of their own corps of 'mounted cavalry' (Volkstem, 12 April 1900).

⁵² Callwell, Small Wars, chapters XVI and XXII, especially pp207-8, 412-312 and 421; and
(continued...)

unfavourable to regular troops, especially in circumstances such as ambushes and petty skirmishes, which characterised much of the war in Natal.⁵³

Callwell and the Natal colonial press, however, also shared a romanticised and optimistic perspective of mounted infantry operations that was seldom realised:

'The first purposes of irregular horse are to harass the enemy as much as possible, to cut off his communications and destroy his supplies; to constantly get between him and his base; to be always ready to surprise him...to perform flank movements as regular cavalry, to follow the enemy when he retreats'.⁵⁴

European doctrine, on the other hand, was harshly dismissive, arguing that: 'whatever the tactical flexibility - that dismounted cavalry could never match true infantry and mounted infantry would be but bastard cavalry'.⁵⁵ Trooper Dacre Shaw was probably closest to identifying the niche occupied by the Volunteers in this campaign: 'It is not ceremonial drill and barrack-yard discipline that are wanted in modern war, but self-resource and a personal keenness to fight'.⁵⁶

The application of Volunteer manpower, even on a limited scale, was repeatedly frustrated by British higher authority. Lieutenant-Colonel (later Lieutenant-General) Lord Dundonald, who, as commander of the Cavalry Brigade in Buller's Natal Field Force, was in overall command of the Volunteers, was one British officer who lacked confidence in the Volunteers. Although he was widely regarded by contemporary observers in Britain and Natal as a charismatic leader, he has

⁵²(...continued)

see Coghlan, 'The Natal Volunteer Movement 1846-1873', pp40-44; Fergusson, British Military Intelligence, p95.

⁵³ Callwell, Small Wars, chapters II and VIII, especially pp85-7; and see HA Gwynne, The Army on Itself, London, Frederick Warne & Co, 1904, p99; John M MacKenzie, 'Popular Imperialism and the Military', in John M MacKenzie (ed), Popular Imperialism and the Military, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1992, pp7-8.

⁵⁴ Natal Witness, 22 February 1900; and see Howard, Studies in War and Peace, p33.

⁵⁵ Strachan, European Armies and the Conduct of War, p85; and see Black, War and the World, p193.

⁵⁶ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineer', p25.

been criticised by historians for his military limitations.⁵⁷ Gough suggested that many of Dundonald's successes were attributable to the initiative of the colonial officers with whom he worked.⁵⁸ Both Gough and McKenzie were considered to possess an abundance of the so-called 'dash' necessary to match the Boers.⁵⁹ Dundonald's own praise for the colonial irregulars at this point was muted and condescending.

However, by February 1900 Lord Roberts was able to make the following revealing recommendations for the use of cavalry and mounted troops:

'On the line of march scouting must be carried out by mounted troops in the most searching manner, in front and on both flanks. All high ground should be visited, and, whenever practicable, horsemen should ride along the ridges of hills.'⁶⁰

Colonial-Afrikaner Animosity in Natal

**'The Natal burghers in the Conquered Territory
have allied themselves with the Republican
forces, and are in laager, with Commandant
de Jager, at Waschbank.'**⁶¹

⁵⁷ Natal Witness, 13 February 1900; Daily Graphic, 2 March 1900; Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p294; Wilson, With the Flag to Pretoria, I, p256; Charles N Robinson (ed), The Transvaal War Album: The British Forces in South Africa, London, Hudson & Kearns, 1900, p155; Farrar-Hockley, Goughie, p46; Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, IV, pp74-5; Knight, Colenso 1899: The Boer War in Natal, p38.

⁵⁸ Natal Witness, 13 February 1900; Courtenay Wyley, Lord Dundonald: Soldiers of the Queen Library: Life-stories of our Heroes at the Front, No.13, London, The London Publishing Company, nd, pp13-4; Gough, Soldiering On, p70.

⁵⁹ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p79; Burleigh, The Natal Campaign, pp107 and 229.

⁶⁰ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Aston Papers 1/1, Kitchener-Roberts, 'Notes for guidance in South African warfare', 5 February 1900.

⁶¹ Report from Standard and Digger's News, 21 November 1899, quoted in Natal Witness, 29 November 1899.



1. 'Some survivors (siege of Ladysmith) of the Natal Carbineers'.
From: Willson, *With the Flag to Pretoria*, II, p496.



2. The funeral of Colonel William Royston, Pietermaritzburg, April 1900.
From: Robinson (ed), *Navy and Army Illustrated*, X, p221.

Although the Volunteer contingent played little part in the early engagements of Buller's campaign in Natal, the mounted troops' busy programme of scouting and reconnaissance elicited praise from several observers.⁶² However, the Volunteers soon became involved in the thorny matter of the alleged vandalism of abandoned settler homesteads by Boer commandos or disaffected 'Natal Dutchmen'. The Natal Mercury lamented:

'Whatever may be the plans of the military commanders for the prosecution of the war, and its speedy termination, the patience of Natal farmers is being sorely taxed. Day follows day, and week follows week, and there is no abatement of the destruction, looting, and raiding done by the Boer commandos in Natal.'⁶³

The Natal Volunteers were to discover that a military campaign that also involved civil conflict against a supposed domestic enemy asks different questions of armies.⁶⁴ This challenge was to prove a disputatious one for the Natal government and its military forces.

According to The Times, the entry of the Boer commandos into Natal had been preceded as late as the first week of October 1899 by the flood of refugees from the Transvaal, armed with alarmist reports.⁶⁵ Allegations of a much trumpeted and often exaggerated alliance of the Natal Afrikaner community with the Boers were particularly hostile.⁶⁶ One farmer in the Ladysmith district, for example, was suspected of harbouring an alleged spy discovered observing Natal Volunteer camps in the week prior to the outbreak of war. There is no evidence of any sequel to this allegation, and it should perhaps be treated with caution considering its source - the Natal

⁶² For example, see Creswicke, South Africa and the Transvaal War, II, pp144-5.

⁶³ Natal Mercury, 24 November 1899; and see Natal Advertiser, 22 November 1899; Young, 'History of Mooi River and District', p51.

⁶⁴ Black, 'Military Organisations and Military Change in Historical Perspective', p888.

⁶⁵ The Times, 7 October 1899.

⁶⁶ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Woods newspaper cuttings scrapbook; Natal Advertiser, 20 September 1899; Natal Witness, 18 November 1899 and 30 January 1900; Times of Natal, 16 December 1899; Mocke, 'Die Slag van Colenso', pp50-1; Merriwether, 'The Uncertain Path', p77.

Advertiser.⁶⁷ Several inflammatory contemporary histories of the war, such as that by Clement Stott, also criticised the Boer invaders and the Natal Afrikaner in this regard.⁶⁸ One writer on the political origins of the war specifically refers to 'a conflict of race' between English and Afrikaner in South Africa.⁶⁹

Dundee had been extensively looted in the wake of the battle of Talana, and the case of the farm, 'Longwood', was the subject of an acrimonious exchange of telegrams in February 1900 between Lord Roberts, the British Commander-in-Chief in South Africa, and Presidents Kruger and Steyn, with mutual accusations of wanton destruction of property.⁷⁰ The farms of Volunteers on active service were obviously at risk from the invading commandos.⁷¹ Officially, the Boer leadership denounced looting.⁷²

This aspect of the war in Natal was to have far-reaching consequences long after the end of the war, especially as Dutch-speaking colonists as a group were often assumed by the English-speaking settlers to be Boer collaborators.⁷³ Such allegations were made despite the moderate response of the Natal Afrikaner community to the prospect of war (see pp33-5), and the local official confidence in the Afrikaner population, expressed, for example, by the Magistrate of the

⁶⁷ Natal Advertiser, 7 October 1899, and see 16 November 1899.

⁶⁸ Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, pp107-9 and 121; and see Natal Advertiser, 17 January 1900; Frederick Treves, The Tale of a Field Hospital, London, Cassell and Company, 1900, p12; Watkins-Pitchford, Besieged in Ladysmith, p27.

⁶⁹ Cook, Rights and Wrongs of the Transvaal War, pp1-7.

⁷⁰ NAR, Leyds 1044, CD 582, Correspondence, p4, Roberts to Presidents ZAR and OFS, 12 February 1900; War Museum of the Boer Republics, Bloemfontein, CD 582, p7, 'Correspondence Regarding Destruction of Property', De Wet to Roberts, 10 January 1900; War in the Biggarsberg', p14; Guest, 'It was the Best of Times, it was the Worst of Times', p30, and see pp28-9; Mangold, Vir Vaderland, Vryheid en Eer, pp41-2.

⁷¹ Times of Natal, 13 October and 5 December 1899; Natal Mercury, 5 December 1899; Gray to AG McKenzie, November 1963, in McKenzie, Delayed Action, pp411-2.

⁷² NAR, Leyds (i), Telegrams, 58, p57; Natal Carbineers History Centre, Natal Field Force Orders, 9 November 1899.

⁷³ PAR, NCP 7/4/6, Departmental Reports 1899, Report, Commissioner of Police, pF9.

Estcourt Division, RH Addison.⁷⁴ There is evidence that Natal Afrikaner colonists did become involved in incidents of looting, and this will be touched on briefly here. On one unspecified Sunday in November, for example, Park Gray of the Natal Carbineers allegedly recognised two local Afrikaner acquaintances among a group of Boers whom he surprised at a homestead near Estcourt.⁷⁵ On 7 December The Times carried a report dated 3 December that mentioned that looting 'is still being carried on principally by the low colonial Dutch'.⁷⁶ On 17 December 1899 the Natal government also published a list of Afrikaner colonists, held in the Estcourt Gaol, suspected of involvement in such incidents.⁷⁷ The issue of Natal Afrikaner complicity with the Boer commandos in the Colony, especially in the context of alleged coercion by the commandos, will come under discussion again on pages 308-15.

Despite the adverse effect on military efficiency for both sides, incidents of looting and the simmering mistrust of Afrikaner colonists that these incidents evoked meant that the need to maintain internal authority in the Colony inevitably resulted in expeditions that were not conducted for tactical purposes.⁷⁸ On one occasion, on 7 December 1899, a detachment of Natal Carbineers joined a Natal Police patrol to the Gourton-Springfield district of the Upper Tugela magistracy, where 150 head of cattle had been reported captured by suspected 'disloyal Dutch',

⁷⁴ PAR, NCP 7/4/7, Departmental Reports 1900, ppB30-31, Report, Magistrate, Estcourt Division; and see PAR, CSO 1640, minute paper 1090/1900, EM Cronje to Colonial Secretary, 23 January 1900; PAR, CSO 1640, minute paper 1090/1900, Colonial Secretary to Mrs Cronje, 13 February 1900; Musgrave, In South Africa with Buller, pp91-2. See chapter I of this thesis.

⁷⁵ Gray to AG McKenzie, November 1963, in McKenzie, Delayed Action, pp411-2.

⁷⁶ The Times, 7 December 1899.

⁷⁷ PAR, MJPW 72, NP 8497/1899, 187/1899, 17 December 1899, List of Suspects in Estcourt Gaol.

⁷⁸ Clark, Waging War: A Philosophical Introduction, p26; and see Geoffrey Best, 'Restraints on War by Land before 1945', in Michael Howard (ed) Restraints on War: Studies in the Limitation of Armed Conflict, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1979, pp25-6; Fransjohan Pretorius, Life on Commando During the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902, Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1999, pp217-231; Scholtz, 'Die Betrekkinge tussen die Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek en die Oranje Vrystaat', pp22-3, and see pp39-40; von Warmelo, On Commando, p15.

and two suspects were apprehended.⁷⁹ The cattle and loot in the form of furniture were recovered and a brief skirmish ensued, reported with characteristic verve and imagination in the Natal press.⁸⁰

The expedition appears to have had a sequel in the form of a court-martial in December, and it was not the only such trial.⁸¹ A leading Afrikaner colonist and MLC, CJ Labuschagne, was also detained in November on a charge of high treason.⁸² Labuschagne was convicted on 13 February 1901, but the modest sentence imposed, seven months imprisonment, and the ease with which he was accepted back into Natal colonial society, is further evidence that despite the tensions between English and Afrikaner colonists on account of the war, class and racial solidarity would quickly restore the generally cordial relations that had existed prior to hostilities.⁸³ In October 1901 a Frere farmer, Hendrik Hattingh, also stood trial for allegedly passing information about the Estcourt-based armoured-train to the Boers, and two Weenen County farmers were accused of abetting the Boer occupation of Highlands.⁸⁴ The names of alleged offenders appeared in a

⁷⁹ Natal Witness, 9 and 12 December 1899; and see Himeville Fort Museum, Harding diary, 7 December 1899; Natal Advertiser, 8 December 1899; Natal Mercury, 9 and 11 December 1899; Creswicke, South Africa and the Transvaal War, II, p152; Best, War and Society, p16.

⁸⁰ Natal Witness, 12 December 1899; Standard and Digger's News, 19 December 1899; Creswicke, South Africa and the Transvaal War, II, p152; Burleigh, The Natal Campaign, pp126-7, 146 and 157; Mardell, 'Extracts from a Record', p726; and see Chichester to Mardall, 12 October 1900, in Nongqai, II, September 1911, p728. The Times of Natal specifically referred to a 'punitive expedition' (Times of Natal, 13 December 1899).

⁸¹ Times of Natal, 11 December 1899; Natal Witness, 12 and 15 December 1899.

⁸² Times of Natal, 1 December 1899; The Times, 7 December 1899. Labuschagne was convicted on 13 February 1901 and sentenced to a modest seven months imprisonment (PAR, NDR 7/2, Rebel Register/Return of Persons Convicted of High Treason, No. 116).

⁸³ See PAR, CO (microfilm), 1/1/1/201 [PRO 179/209], Mardell to Dartnell, 2 January 1900; Verne S Harris, 'The Reluctant Rebels: The Impact of the 2nd Anglo-Boer War upon the Klip River Dutch Community with Specific reference to the Klip River Dutch Community in Dundee', BA Honours thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1982, pp46 and 53. In 1906 Labuschagne earned an entry in The Natal Who's Who, p113.

⁸⁴ Natal Mercury, 13 June 1900; Natal Advertiser, 22 October 1901; and see Guest, 'It was (continued...)

blacklist, 'Names of British subjects in Natal who are suspected of disloyalty', compiled by the Natal Police CID.⁸⁵ On a specifically military point, the Natal Witness argued with some validity that had the bulk of the mounted Volunteers not been cooped up in Ladysmith, one of the benefits of their presence would have been an effective check on Boer looting.⁸⁶

As early as 29 November 1899, the Natal government was fielding claims for invasion losses from farmers south of the Thukela.⁸⁷ Even before the outbreak of hostilities, GR Richards, a prominent Mooi River farmer and Volunteer officer, sought assurances for security and reparations from the British government. Richards was informed by the Governor that 'if Natal should be attacked it will be defended if necessary by the whole force of the Empire, and that redress will be exacted for any injury to her or to HM loyal subjects in the Colony due to such attack'.⁸⁸ This was the same assurance that Milner had given the Colony in May 1899. In January 1900 the Natal Advertiser insisted that the Imperial Government had been responsible for the war in the region and was therefore fully responsible for any compensation due to the Colony.⁸⁹

However, relations between colonists and metropole were not enhanced by several associated disputes, such as whether colonists 'received any warning from the military authorities or otherwise of the advance of the Boer forces, or any intimation of the necessity for the removal

⁸⁴(...continued)

the Best of Times, it was the Worst of Times', p37.

⁸⁵ KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Museum Service, Regina vs Lindley Bosman, October 1900, enclosure in Registrar of the Supreme Court of South Africa, Pietermaritzburg.

⁸⁶ Natal Witness, 23 November 1899; and see Alfred Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary of Alfred Wingfield', 31 January 1900.

⁸⁷ PAR, PM 17, minute paper 9115/1899, Losses sustained by farmers, 29 November 1899. A Mr Clouston, of the farm, 'Clouston', near Colenso, was one of those affected (Evans, The Boer War, p31).

⁸⁸ PAR, CSO 1636, minute paper 7628/1899, Richards to Colonial Secretary, 2 October 1899; PAR, CSO 1636, minute paper 7628/1899, Colonial Secretary to Richards, undated. Also see PRO, WO 132/2, Hime to Buller, 23 July 1900.

⁸⁹ Natal Advertiser, 2 January 1900.

of their stock.⁹⁰ Colonists also resented 'the suggestion that owners have not stirred hand or foot to help themselves because they relied on compensation from the British Government'.⁹¹ Towards the end of December 1899 an Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission was appointed to ascertain the extent of these losses.⁹²

The Natal government viewed the issue as another war-related problem that it could have done without, and while it deprecated the Boer actions, it was displeased with the precipitate abandonment of farms in the war districts.⁹³ On 24 May 1900 an impatient Buller wrote from Newcastle:

'The proper way to end a war is to defeat the enemy in the field. This you will never do if you scatter your forces and turn them into herds to guard cattle or sheep.

I am moving up towards Pretoria; I have left about the Drakensberg troops sufficient, in my opinion, to guard Natal from any serious raid; but I cannot pretend that I can protect any particular farmer's cattle.'⁹⁴

⁹⁰ PAR, PM 17, minute paper 9115/1899, Losses sustained by farmers, Hime to Hely-Hutchinson, 1 December 1899.

⁹¹ PAR, PM 17, minute paper 9115/1899, Losses sustained by farmers, Hime to Hely-Hutchinson, 1 December 1899, and Lieutenant-General Clery to GOC, Line of Communication, 27 November 1899. A proclamation to this effect was issued on 20 November 1899 (PAR, NCP, 6/1/1/52, Natal Government Gazette, LI, No.3066, 20 November 1899).

⁹² Times of Natal, 22 December 1899; and see Churchill, London to Ladysmith, pp67-9. It would probably have been little consolation to these farmers to know that at the war's end the colony received the Transvaal districts of Vryheid, Utrecht, Wakkerstroom and Piet Retief in partial compensation for the invasion (Headlam, The Milner Papers: South Africa 1899-1905, pp403-4).

⁹³ PAR, CSO 1633, minute paper 9445/1899, Government Notice, C Bird, Principal Under-Secretary, 22 November 1899; Natal Witness, 23 November 1899; Natal Mercury, 23 November 1899. There were several example of farmers who did remain on farms (See Natal Witness, 5 March 1900; Young, 'History of Mooi River and District', p52).

⁹⁴ PAR, PM 17, minute paper 3036/1900, Protection of the country in the vicinity of Gourton and Upper Tugela, Buller to GOC, Line of Communication, 24 May 1900.

Settlers did not react positively to such dismissiveness.⁹⁵

Ironically, Natal colonial and British irregular troops also earned a reputation for opportunistic looting.⁹⁶ In May 1900 a Carbineer trooper enthused about the spoils acquired after the re-occupation of Dundee:

'I have looted lots of grub. I looted lots of horse feed last night for 'Scout'. It's rather a quick business looting, as Thorneycroft's, BMI, SALH, and BMR are awful beggars at it, and you always know that there are thousands of men after just what you are wanting.'⁹⁷

The incident described above did not involve the looting of suspected Natal Afrikaner collaborators, but rather appeared to have involved the despoiling of the same colonist homes in Dundee that the Boers were accused of vandalising when they occupied the town in October 1899.⁹⁸ It certainly compromised the moral high ground that Natal settlers appropriated on this issue, especially in the light of the Volunteer participation in the plundering of Natal Afrikaner farms in northern Natal from mid-1900 onwards, as will be discussed on pages 341-3.

The conflict between English colonists on the one side, and the Boers and Natal Afrikaner settlers on the other, was to be fanned by the specific tensions generated by the battle of Colenso on 15 December 1899. According to a Carbineer trooper, for example, 'we had been told that the Boers

⁹⁵ Times of Natal, 5 December 1899.

⁹⁶ PAR, A 72/4, Schoon Papers, Maggie Bester, 'My Experiences', 22 October 1899; Paul Raw, letter, James Raw Smith to sister, Kate, nd; Nicholson diary, 26 February 1900; Natal Witness, 27 October 1899; Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p346; Atkins, The Relief of Ladysmith, p131; Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, IV, p81; Pakenham, The Boer War, p210; Kandyba-Foxcroft, Russia and the Anglo-Boer War, p139; and see NAM, 7607/49, SG Francis Letters, 17 December 1900, p10; The Siege Diary of William Watson, 26 February 1900; GW Willis to brother, William, in A Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith, No.4, p18, for the depredations of British troops, and even English colonists, in Ladysmith.

⁹⁷ Natal Witness, 23 May 1900; and see Himeville Museum, Gordon letters, Jim Gordon to Mary, 22 August 1900, for an incident of alleged looting by two officers of the BMR in August 1900.

⁹⁸ Nasson, The South African War 1899-1902, p251.

were so incensed against colonials for fighting against them that they would shoot us on sight'.⁹⁹

The Boers and Carbineers had exchanged taunts, and accusations of duplicity, as early as October during the 'phony war' phase in the foothills of the Drakensberg passes.¹⁰⁰ Despite the favourable treatment of Lieutenant Gallwey while a prisoner of the Boers (see pp82-3), one focus of this animosity was the alleged mistreatment of prisoners.¹⁰¹ In response, several Boer allegations during November, emanating from the 'hoofdlaager' at Ladysmith and published in the Natal press, implicate the Natal Volunteers, especially those with the Relief Column, in alleged improper conduct, specifically that on occasion the Volunteers spoke Dutch in order to secure tactical advantage.¹⁰²

These allegations, whether based on rumour or not, confirmed a civil war aspect to the Natal colonist-Boer confrontation on the Natal front that was not a factor for the more emotionally detached British troops. Colonist and Boer alike, and to a certain extent, Afrikaner settlers, became groups to be specifically hated individually, rather than representative of an enemy

⁹⁹ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Gray typescript, p3; and see Edwin Harcourt Burrage, Carbineer and Scout: A Story of the Great Boer War etc, London, Blackie and Son, 1901, pp20-71; Harry Golding, Between Two Fires: A Story of the Boer War etc, London, Ward Lock and Co, 1900, for the English settler-Boer divide set in the world of popular fiction.

¹⁰⁰ Himeville Museum, Harding diary, nd.

¹⁰¹ PAR, CO (microfilm), 1/1/1/202 [PRO 179/209], enclosure in Confidential Despatch No4, 19 January 1900; Standard and Digger's News, 21 November and 28 December 1899; Natal Witness, 9 January, 15 February and 13 August 1900; Muller, 'At Large on the Veldt', p10. Also see PAR, CO (microfilm), 1/1/1/205 [PRO 179/211], enclosures in Confidential Despatches, 27 April and 5 May 1900; PAR, PM 17, 2658/1900, Campbell to Hime, c11 April 1900; PAR, CO (microfilm), 1/1/1/205 [PRO 179/211], Buller, enclosure 3 in Confidential Despatch, 27 April 1900; PAR, CSO 1638, minute paper 598/1900, Nourse to Hime, c17 January 1900; Clark, Waging War, p26. For the favourable comment of a repatriated DLI prisoner see the Times of Natal, 11, 14 and 25 August 1900.

¹⁰² Natal Carbineers History Centre, Gray typescript, pp2-3; Times of Natal, 20 November 1899; Natal Advertiser, 20 November 1899; Natal Witness, 21 November 1899; Pearse, Four Months Besieged, p146.

state.¹⁰³ Churchill commented that 'the colonists...especially the men from Natal, were filled with a bitterness against the enemy which regular soldiers in those days considered unprofessional'.¹⁰⁴ In March 1900 Churchill directed an appeal to the Natal public, through the local press, for magnanimity towards the Boers, at the very time that settler calls for retribution and revenge accompanied the first serious setbacks for the commandos. His appeal was not well received,¹⁰⁵ though he was accurate in his prediction of the immediate alternative, namely extended guerrilla warfare. It was believed in some quarters that the Boers harboured a similar hatred towards Natal colonists dating from the exodus of the Voortrekkers and the conversion of the Colony from a largely Boer to British domain.¹⁰⁶ The evident ill-feeling that evolved between colonial and Boer forces was such that in 1900 it was suggested that South African colonial troops not be deployed in the Republics at all.¹⁰⁷

The Battle of Colenso

**'A hot engagement between our troops and the Boers
is now proceeding at Colenso. Details later.'**¹⁰⁸

15 December 1899 saw the Relief Column's initial effort to breach the Tugela Line with an attack

¹⁰³ Ian Clark, Waging War, p17; and see Niall Ferguson, The Pity of War, London, Allen Lane, 1998, p363; Joanna Bourke, An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare, New York, Basic Books, 1999, pp85,89 and 140-155.

¹⁰⁴ Winston Churchill, My Early Life, London, Oldhams Press, 1947, p303; and see Surridge, 'All you soldiers are what we call pro-Boers: The Military Critique of the South African War, 1899-1902', History, 82/268, October 1997, p597.

¹⁰⁵ Natal Witness, 29 March 1900; Sandys, Churchill: Wanted Dead or Alive, pp184-5; and see Winston Churchill, Frontiers and Wars, London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1962, p525.

¹⁰⁶ Brown, War with the Boers, p66.

¹⁰⁷ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Ian Hamilton Papers, 2/2/2, Hamilton to Wilkinson, 26 March 1900.

¹⁰⁸ Natal Advertiser, 15 December 1899.

at Colenso.¹⁰⁹ Buller had initially resolved to attack at Colenso but, deterred by the strength of the Boer positions and a lack of cover, shifted his focus to Potgieter's Drift to the west.¹¹⁰ However, British defeats on the western and central fronts in the Cape Colony, at Stormberg (10 December), and Magersfontein (11 December), plus his own reservations about his suitability for such a command, caused him to revise his plans once again, and return to Colenso.¹¹¹ Most troops remained under the impression that any action at Colenso would be in the nature of a feint, and that a major attack would still take place further upstream.¹¹² The ensuing battle was to be the first major military test for the Volunteers.

Preparations for the attack at Colenso appeared thorough. The Composite Regiment, together with the South African Light Horse (SALH), Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry and the 13th Hussars, were tasked with an assault on Hlangwane Hill on the British right flank.¹¹³ The intention

¹⁰⁹ See Pakenham, The Boer War, pp208-15; Gilbert Torlage, 'Colenso, 15 December 1899', in George Chadwick, et al (eds), Battlefields of South Africa, Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1991, pp98-107; SB Bourquin and Gilbert Torlage, The Battle of Colenso: 15 December 1899, Randburg, Ravan Press, 1999, passim; Knight, Colenso 1899: The Boer War in Natal, passim. Buller's Natal Army was the largest military force ever assembled in Natal, in fact, the biggest army in the Empire, outside of Britain, since the Crimean War, and included four brigades of infantry (Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, II, p233; Sibbald, The War Correspondents, p74; Bourquin and Torlage, The Battle of Colenso, p2).

¹¹⁰ PRO, WO 32/7889, 079/703, Buller to War Office, 12 December 1899; PAR, FK 1817, file 703, Buller to War Office, 12 December 1899; The Times, 1 January 1900; Mocke, 'Die Slag van Colenso', pp91-2; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, pp338-9; Chisholm, Ladysmith, pp135-6; W Baring Pemberton, Battles of the Boer War, London, BT Batsford, 1964, p123.

¹¹¹ Bourquin and Torlage, The Battle of Colenso, p10; Pemberton, Battles of the Boer War, pp126-7; Haythornwaite, The Colonial Wars Source Book, pp197-8; Mocke, 'Die Slag van Colenso', pp93-5; Holt, The Boer War, pp79-81; and see PRO, WO 32/7890, 079/704, Buller to War Office, 13 December 1899; Natal Witness, 1 August 1899; Dixon, On the Psychology of Military Incompetence, pp55-7; Surridge, Managing the South African War, pp176-7; Peter Trew, The Boer War Generals, Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1999, p21.

¹¹² Jeans (ed), Naval Brigades, pp241-2; Bourquin and Torlage, The Battle of Colenso, p10.

¹¹³ Erasmus, 'Die Ineenstorting van die Boeremagte', chapter 7; Taitz, The War Memories
(continued...)

was to prevent the Boers working round the British right flank and, if possible, to dislodge the Boers in occupation there, and from this new vantage point to subject the Colenso Kopjes to enfilade fire.¹¹⁴

Their opponents on Hlangwane were a composite force of the Wakkerstroom and Standerton Commandos.¹¹⁵ The Composite Regiment itself was under the command of a Major RL Walter of the 7th Hussars.¹¹⁶ In the rear areas of the British camp at Frere the mood was expectant and upbeat.¹¹⁷ According to Danes, author of Cassell's History of the Boer War, the Boers were destined to be 'crushed between the upper and nether millstones of Buller's force'.¹¹⁸

At dawn on 15 December the Composite Regiment assembled for an assault on the eastern slopes of Hlangwane.¹¹⁹ Their attack was an immediate disaster. The dismounted men were exposed on

¹¹³(...continued)

of Commandant Ludwig Krause, p34; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, p343.

¹¹⁴ Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 2, GD 233/124/1, Copies of Official Documents connected with Lord Dundonald's Brigade, Section 1, Orders by Lieutenant-General Sir Francis Clery, 14 December 1899; Creswicke, South Africa and the Transvaal War, II, pp189-90; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, p367; Brown, War with the Boers, p161; Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, IV, pp76-7.

¹¹⁵ Mocke, 'Die Slag van Colenso', pp133-4; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, II, pp250,295 and 487; Davitt, The Boer Fight for Freedom, p357; Pakenham, The Boer War, pp220-1; Weeber, Op die Natalse Front, p117.

¹¹⁶ Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD 233/124/2, Mounted Brigade Record, p6; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, pp352 and 367.

¹¹⁷ NAM, NAM 8302, Phipps Diary, 15 December 1899, p12; UNISA Archives, Alexander notebook-diary, 14 December 1899; Natal Witness, 14 December 1899; Mocke, 'Die Slag van Colenso', p41; Treves, Tale of a Field Hospital, pp9-10; Chisholm, Ladysmith, pp138-9; Pemberton, Battles of the Boer War, p119.

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Mocke, 'Die Slag van Colenso', p22, and see p25.

¹¹⁹ Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD 233/124/2, Mounted Brigade Record, p6; Natal Witness, 1 January 1900; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, pp351-2 and 367-8; Smurthwaite, The Boer War 1899-1902, pp54-5.

open ground, with the Boers in almost impregnable positions on the steep, rocky slopes.¹²⁰ Fierce volleys from short range left four Carbineers dead and six wounded out of the 40 men engaged - their severest casualties of the relief campaign. At 7.45pm that evening Major McKenzie of the Carbineers despatched a suitably inspiring telegram to the Natal Witness, listing that regiment's casualties.¹²¹ The Prime Minister, Hime, replied as follows:

'I deeply regret to hear of the casualties amongst the Carbineers in today's engagement. I have no doubt whatever that both officers and men worthily maintained the reputation of our Natal Volunteers.'¹²²

The remainder of the Volunteers scrambled to cover in a donga.¹²³ The most thoroughly documented Carbineer fatality was David Gray, who died in the arms of his cousin and half-section, William Park Gray, whose individual military skills had already by this juncture set him apart from most of his peers.¹²⁴

Once more, melodramatic accounts sought to present the affair in the best possible light:

'But the gallant colonials were out on their first action, and their fiery courage pushed the attack home. Leaving their horses, they advanced a mile and a half on foot before they came within easy range of the hidden riflemen, and learned the lesson which had been

¹²⁰ NAM, NAM 8303/29, Weir Lecture, p14; Glover, preface to Swinton, Duffer's Drift, p8.

¹²¹ PAR, CSO 2609, Telegrams, McKenzie to Hime, 15 December 1899; Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 2, GDD 233/124/1, Mounted Brigade Casualties, Colenso, 15 December 1899; Blockhouse Private Museum, anonymous Anglo-Boer War scrapbook; Natal Witness, 16 December 1899; William Park Gray, quoted in Kinsey, 'Churchill and Ladysmith', p123.

¹²² PAR, CSO 2609, Telegrams, Hime to McKenzie, 15 December 1899.

¹²³ Natal Advertiser, 16, 19 and 20 December 1899; Natal Witness, 1 January 1900; Mocke, 'Die Slag van Colenso', p135; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, p368; Taitz, The War Memories of Commandant Ludwig Krause, p35; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, II, p294. For an account by a trooper of the ILH see the Friend, 24 January 1900.

¹²⁴ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Gray typescript, p4; Natal Advertiser, 19 December 1899; Times of Natal, 22 December 1899.

taught to their comrades all along the line, that given approximately equal numbers the attack in the open has no possible chance against the concealed defence, and that the more bravely it is pushed the more heavy is the repulse. The irregulars carried themselves like old soldiers, they did all that mortal man could do'.¹²⁵

More sobering, but probably less pleasing to the colonial ear, was the following extract from the Volkstem, which brutally exposes the intensity and lethality of 'modern' warfare:

'Any man who has been in a modern battle, where men are being knocked over all round, and says he likes it, is a liar...When a bullet strikes you hear nothing; it goes right through a man and probably travels another 2 000 yards [1 800 metres]. You hear a grunt or a gurgle, and the man collapses and doubles up. Sometimes if hit in the arm or leg he spins around and falls, and probably gets up again, as it is only the shock which knocks him down, and he hardly feels it. The worst thing is a bullet wound in the stomach below the navel, which is mortal. The pain is excruciating, and they howl like a shot hare; it sounds like a child screaming, and is horrible.'¹²⁶

(Incredibly, this account appeared in the newspaper immediately above a list of church services for the following day!)

Major McKenzie of the Natal Carbineers persuaded Dundonald to order the 7th Hussars to provide cover for a hurried retirement from the foot of Hlangwane. This order was not carried out, and although a specific reason was not given,¹²⁷ Barton's refusal to lend support to Dundonald could have been associated with the general British prejudice concerning Volunteer capability. Prejudice could also partially account for the detachment of such a large proportion of Dundonald's brigade for baggage guard and other unspecified sundry duties that the remaining force of only 1 000 was inadequate for the appointed task at Hlangwane, even if reinforced.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Conan Doyle, The Boer War, pp190-1. The situation was exacerbated by extreme heat (Friend, 24 January 1900; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, II, p263; Jeans (ed), Naval Brigades, p245; Bourquin and Torlage, The Battle of Colenso, p30).

¹²⁶ Volkstem, 5 May 1900.

¹²⁷ McKenzie, Delayed Action, p164; Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD 233/124/2, Mounted Brigade Record, pp6-8; Chisholm, Ladysmith, p144.

¹²⁸ Amery (ed), The Times History, II, p447; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, II, pp291-2.

Dundonald thought that the generally poor British situation on the battlefield at this time could still be rescued if Hlangwane were taken, or a wedge driven between it and the Thukela. To give effect to this plan, infantry support was requested from Major-General Geoffrey Barton, commanding the 6th Division on the right flank of the main central prong of the attack. This request was also refused, and after a hasty battlefield conference between Buller and Barton, a general withdrawal was ordered.¹²⁹

Contemporary observers and historians have suggested that Buller might have been more successful with a stronger effort at the comparatively lightly held, but strategic Hlangwane, whose occupation would have rendered the general Boer positions untenable, rather than battering at the main Boer defences.¹³⁰ Several European military missions, such as that from Germany, endorsed the Hlangwane option.¹³¹ However, on the day of the battle, Buller felt that the occupation of Hlangwane would not assist the crossing, and that it would have to be evacuated if the attack

¹²⁹ Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD 233/124/2, Mounted Brigade Record, p8; Natal Carbineers History Centre, Natal Witness, article undated, enclosure in Rodwell album; Swart, 'General Sir Redvers Buller', p45; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, p369; Amery (ed), The Times History, II, p448; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, II, pp295-7. It is difficult to reconcile this turn of events with the conclusion in the Dundonald Papers that 'the work assigned to Lord Dundonald's Brigade to protect the right flank and enfilade the kopjes north of the Tugela was carried out' (Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD 233/124/2, Mounted Brigade Record, p8).

¹³⁰ KCAL, KCM 4158, Irvine diary, 27 December 1899; AK Murray, quoted in Natal Witness, 1 January 1900; Mocke, 'Die Slag van Colenso', pp37 and 105-7; Pakenham, The Boer War, pp217-221; Davitt, The Boer Fight for Freedom, p256; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, II, pp261,292 and 331; Knight, Colenso 1899: The Boer War in Natal, p48; and see Cilliers, 'Die Slag van Spioenkop', pp3-4; Steele, 'Salisbury and the Soldiers' in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, pp12-13. In a letter to White on 13 March 1896 on the topic of a hypothetical attack scenario, Buller had advocated such a circumspect approach (British Library, MSS Eur F108/33, Buller to White, 13 March 1896).

¹³¹ NAR, Leyds 763, Lieutenant Thomson, Rapporte en telegramme, p19; Anon, The War in South Africa: Prepared in the Historical Section of the Great General Staff, Berlin, London, John Murray, 1904, p50; and see The Mobile Boer, p66. Also see Cape Argus Weekly Edition, 17 January 1900; Sternberg, My Experience of the Boer War, xxvi; Lieutenant-Colonel ES May, A Retrospect on the South African War, London, Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1901, p60.

failed.¹³²

As far as the Volunteers were concerned, the most serious criticism was the lapse in battlefield reconnaissance of Hlangwane, a role for which they were suited.¹³³ There had not been a single reconnaissance across the Thukela in the week prior to the battle,¹³⁴ and a cursory reconnaissance to the south bank of the Thukela, between 3 and 8 December, was conducted at an ineffective distance.¹³⁵

The absence of a significant reconnaissance role for the Volunteers existed despite Buller's selection of a Natal colonial civilian, TK Murray, a former Natal cabinet member and founder of Murray's Horse, as his head of intelligence.¹³⁶ In fact, apart from praise from Buller himself in October 1900, when on his way back to England, there is no evidence that Murray made a measurable difference in that post. His appointment could have been made simply on the strength

¹³² Pemberton, Battles of the Boer War, pp127-8 and 130.

¹³³ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Lyttelton Papers, letter 1, Edmond Wortley to Reggie, Chieveley, 26 December 1899; The Times, 20 December 1899; Mocke, 'Die Slag van Colenso', p150; Regan, Someone had Blundered, pp20-1.

¹³⁴ Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, II, p239. The familiar accusation also emerged that the military failed to act on the information that was provided (Callwell, Small Wars, chapter IV; Sibbald, The War Correspondents, p20).

¹³⁵ Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, II, pp236-7; and see Black and White Budget, II/20, 24 February 1900, p4; Black, War and the World, p191; Ropp, quoted in Fergusson, British Military Intelligence, foreword, xii; Surridge, Managing the South African War, pp20-1; Hew Strachan, preface, in Nasson, The South African War 1899-1902, vii. The significance of Hlangwane as a strategic feature was emphasised by the dispute in the Boer ranks over its occupation. The feature was abandoned for a full 24 hours on the eve of the battle (Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD 233/124/2, Mounted Brigade Record, pp4-5; Volkstem, 19 January 1900; Mocke, 'Die Slag van Colenso', pp37-8, 67-8 and 81-5; Erasmus, 'Die Ineenstorting van die Boeremagte', pp43-4; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, pp343-4; Amery (ed), The Times History, II, p447; Taitz, The War Memories of Commandant Ludwig Krause, pp32-4; Sir J Percy Fitzpatrick, South African Memories, London, Cassell and Company, 1932, pp151-2; Roy McNab, The French Colonel: Villebois-Mareuil and the Boers 1899-1900, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1975, pp98-9; Davitt, The Boer Fight for Freedom, p256; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, II, p250; Chisholm, Ladysmith, p138; Bourquin and Torlage, The Battle of Colenso, pp8 and 11-12).

¹³⁶ Fergusson, British Military Intelligence, p152; and see Natal Volunteer Record, p27.

of his raising of the short-lived Murray's Horse,¹³⁷ or have been a gesture to Natal colonial sensibilities, though it was probably prompted by the fact that Major AE Altham, the designated incumbent of the post, was besieged in Ladysmith.¹³⁸

Buller was labelled as incompetent for the defeat at Colenso, and superseded by Field Marshal Lord Roberts as Commander-in-Chief in South Africa.¹³⁹ It is perhaps surprising that in the turbulent wake of the disastrous battle, his report, written on 17 December 1899, included specific praise for the Natal Volunteers, despite their peripheral involvement.¹⁴⁰

Disputed Victoria Cross Decorations

Amidst the negative psychological impact of the military setback, colonial Natal sought a silver lining in the courage of one of its Volunteer soldiers, Trooper Frederick Farmer of the Natal Carbineers. Among the severely wounded in the Hlangwane attack had been Lieutenant David MacKay, and Farmer scrambled through heavy crossfire to his rescue. He was immediately recommended by General Buller for the Victoria Cross. Although the local press was optimistic, the application was unsuccessful. The precise reason was not given beyond the formulaic official

¹³⁷ See pp12-30 of this thesis.

¹³⁸ Natal Volunteer Record, p27; Beckett, 'Buller and the Politics of Command', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, p51.

¹³⁹ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Ian Hamilton Papers, 2/2/2, Hamilton to Wilkinson, 8 March 1900; Liddell Hart, Hamilton 2/1/1, private manuscript diary, 17 December 1899, and see 2/2/5, Hamilton to wife, 21 March 1900; Liddell Hart, Lyttelton Papers, letter 13, Lyttelton to Regg 22 April 1900; Liddell Hart, Lyttelton Papers, NGL/fam/389, Lyttelton to Charles 2 February 1900; Liddell, Hamilton Papers 2/2/2, Hamilton to Spencer Wilkinson 8 March 1900; The Times, 24 January 1900; Swart, 'General Sir Redvers Buller', p3, quoting Amery, The Times History, III, p549; Geoffrey Regan, Someone Had Blundered: A Historical Survey of Military Incompetence, London, BT Batsford, 1987, pp22-5,25-8,53-8,58-61 and 61-6; Headlam, The Milner Papers: South Africa 1899-1905, p32.

¹⁴⁰ PRO, WO32/7889, 079/863, Buller's report on the battle of Colenso, 17 December 1899.

response that the action was not considered of sufficient merit.¹⁴¹

The issue became a cause for concern for a Natal settler lobby which suggested that the reason for the refusal of the decoration was that Farmer was a Natal colonial. There was indeed circumstantial evidence to support his claim, and the Volunteers were to have reason to feel aggrieved. A British Imperial Yeomanry officer, an English Volunteer, Lieutenant Alexis Doxat, was awarded the VC for an incident similar to Farmer's, near Zeerust in the western Transvaal on 20 October 1900.¹⁴² The Dominion colonial regiments appear to have had mixed results in terms of VC awards. There was the VC exploit of Farrier-Sergeant WJ Hardham, of the New Zealand colonial forces which, on merit, seemed to differ little from that of Farmer's:

'Hardham won his decoration on 28 January 1901 near Naauwpoort, Transvaal. He was with a section "which was extended and hotly engaged with a party of ± 20 Boers. Just before the force commenced to retire Trooper McCrae was wounded and his horse killed; Farrier-Sergeant Hardham at once went, under a heavy fire, to his assistance, dismounted, and placed him on his own horse, and ran alongside until he had guided him to a place of safety".'¹⁴³

Another Natal Volunteer to be confidently recommended for the Victoria Cross was Trooper AW Evans, of the Natal Mounted Rifles, son of that regiment's Commanding Officer, Colonel Robert Evans (who later commanded the Volunteer Composite Regiment). This application, for the rescue of a companion after a patrol was ambushed by the Boers on the outskirts of Ladysmith on 23 October 1899, had been so confident that a cigarette manufacturer printed a card, in

¹⁴¹ Natal Witness, 19 December 1899; Black and White Budget, III/31, 12 May 1900, p165 and III/35, 9 June 1900, p315. The Natal Witness commented: 'Could anything be more plucky and risky than the conduct of the trooper' (Natal Witness, 7 September 1900). Twenty years earlier another Carbineer, Trooper William W Barker, had also been recommended, unsuccessfully, for the VC during the Anglo-Zulu War. The first South African VC recipient was Trooper Herman Albrecht, at Wagon Hill on 6 January 1900 (Donwald Pressly, 'Town Played a Significant Role in Military History of South Africa', Paratus, March 1989, p37).

¹⁴² Bennett, Absent-Minded Beggars, pp83 and 126.

¹⁴³ Hall, The New Zealanders in South Africa, pp45-6; and see David Humphry, 'A Victoria Cross Anomaly', Medal News, October 2000, pp26-7; Ian Uys, Victoria Crosses of the Anglo-Boer War, Knysna, Knysna Fortress Financial Group, 2000, p82.

advance, for sale with its packs, depicting Evans as a VC hero.¹⁴⁴ Evans had to be content with the Distinguished Service Order. His case prompted the suggestion that VC recommendations not be made public 'unless there is some reasonably certain prospect of the War Office confirming the recommendation of the General in the field'.¹⁴⁵

The Imperial Light Horse, one of the South African irregular units with the British Army in South Africa, alone earned nine recommendations for the VC, none of which was successful. It was suggested that similar recommendations for regular units were usually successful.¹⁴⁶

The indignation that greeted the news that Farmer's exploit was not to be rewarded with the VC also had a curious, but cryptic, sequel in the Natal Witness. A correspondent who identified himself only as a 'veteran of Colenso' implied that Farmer's case had been the subject of special and unmerited attention, perhaps for the benefit of colonial opinion and morale, concluding that 'if it is awarded in this case, I no longer, for one, covet it'.¹⁴⁷ Such evident prejudice could relate to the sentiment, expressed by George Clark Musgrave, that the Volunteer component at Colenso were 'practically raw colonials'.¹⁴⁸ Creswicke added another element to the debate, suggesting that there was preferential treatment for part-time soldiers, both British and colonial, as far as awards were concerned, and that regulars and irregulars alike seemed locked in a demeaning competition for such awards. The sentiment that the Victoria Cross could be devalued if its award was perceived in this light, was apparently confirmed by the appearance of Farmer's Colenso exploit,

¹⁴⁴ Natal Mercury, 25 November 1900; Goetzsche, Rough But Ready: An Official History of the Natal Mounted Rifles, pp57-9. Evans's 'gallant act' had even been recounted by one Alfred T Story, in an article entitled 'Deeds of daring and devotion in the war', in the prestigious English publication, Strand Magazine, XX, July-December 1900, p154. Natal Volunteer Record, pp137-8, dates this patrol as taking place on 4 November 1899.

¹⁴⁵ Natal Witness, 13 September 1900. For another fruitless VC application, involving a New Zealander, see Hall, The New Zealanders in South Africa, p60.

¹⁴⁶ PRO 30/57/22, Kitchener Papers, enclosure in Y/115(b), 22 December 1902.

¹⁴⁷ Natal Witness, 14 September 1900.

¹⁴⁸ Musgrave, In South Africa with Buller, p245.

considerably embellished, in an unnamed 'London penny illustrated'.¹⁴⁹ If there was indeed a competition, the 'score' reflected that five VCs were awarded to Imperial soldiers at Colenso and none to the colonials.¹⁵⁰

Farmer did receive the consolation of the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) for his action, the only such award awarded to a Natalian for an action which took place during the Victorian period.¹⁵¹ Despite the disappointment concerning the VC recommendation, there was rejoicing in the Colony when notification of this award was received in April 1901.¹⁵²

Volunteer Medical Care and Compensation for Dependents of Volunteers

For Natal, Lieutenant MacKay's recovery from his apparently fatal wound at the battle of Colenso compensated to some degree for the Farmer VC disappointment. His fortitude amidst the post-battle carnage, and in the face of the intense heat prevailing on that day, and the uncomfortable ambulance-wagons then in use, received widespread coverage.¹⁵³ News of his wound even filtered

¹⁴⁹ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p80; Creswicke, South Africa and the Transvaal War, II, p197; MacKenzie, 'Popular Imperialism and the Military', in MacKenzie (ed), Popular Imperialism and the Military, p11.

¹⁵⁰ Black and White Budget, III/31, 12 May 1900, p163; and see Uys, Victoria Crosses of the Anglo-Boer War, pp19-20,22 and 24-5.

¹⁵¹ London Gazette, 8 February 1901; DR Forsyth, Medals for Gallantry and Distinguished Conduct, awarded to Natal, Cape Colony and Union Defence Force Units, Johannesburg, privately published, 1981, p21; PE Abbot, Recipients of the Distinguished Conduct Medal 1855-1909, Polstead, Suffolk, JB Hayward and Son, 1987, p70; and see PRO WO 32/8076,079/2700, Recommendations for distinguished conduct, Natal, to 30 March 1900; Natal Carbineers History Centre, Volunteer Act, 1895, p111.

¹⁵² NAR, FK 1841, file 2700, List of WOs, NCOs and Men receiving the DCM, 15 April 1900; Natal Witness, 23 April 1901; and see Simon Fowler and William Spencer, Army Records for Family Historians, Kew, Public Record Office, 1998, chapter 9. The award of Farmer's DCM and Major Duncan McKenzie's CMG was announced in the same communiqué from London (Natal Witness, 22 April 1901).

¹⁵³ NAM, NAM 8307/121, Diary of W Greening, 90th Regiment, 15 December 1899; Natal Carbineers History Centre, Gray typescript, p4; Natal Advertiser, 19 December 1899;
(continued...)

through to the Ladysmith garrison.¹⁵⁴ MacKay rejoined his squadron on 21 February 1900, in time to relieve Ladysmith.¹⁵⁵

The medical care afforded to MacKay was of a high quality compared to previous conflicts such as the Crimean War, and included such innovations as the field-dressing.¹⁵⁶ The significance here is the context of military nursing care for regular soldiers, compared to that expected by the Colony for its civilian-soldiers. In the temporary Legislative Assembly Hospital in Pietermaritzburg, for example, patients from the Volunteer corps lacked for nothing 'in the way of attention and creature comforts'.¹⁵⁷ The hospital appears to have escaped the deficiencies, such as the lengthy delays in the treatment of wounds, that affected facilities for British patients.¹⁵⁸ The Volunteers therefore appear to have received excellent care, which was not always the case for regular soldiers. Indeed, it is reasonable to speculate that in this war Natalians did expect a special consideration from the British towards the Colony's military forces and, in a broader sense, its special interests, all in return for what was to prove a modest contribution of its own.

¹⁵³(...continued)

Natal Advertiser, 21 December 1899; Natal Witness, 9 November 1900; Mary Bisset Lucas, 'The Lancet and the South African War: the first period October 1899-June 1900', Adler Museum Bulletin, 17/3, December 1991, p27; Treves, Tales of a Field Hospital, pp15 and 22-3; George Henry Makins, Surgical Experiences in South Africa 1899-1900, London, Smith, Elder & Co, 1901, p18.

¹⁵⁴ Pennington, 'Anglo-Afrikaner War 1899-1900', p60.

¹⁵⁵ 'Natal Carbineer Record - Estcourt Squadron No.5', in McKenzie, Delayed Action, p184; Dundonald, My Army Life, p112.

¹⁵⁶ Natal Advertiser, 18 December 1899; Natal Witness, 10 February 1900; Stone, 'The Victorian Army: Health, Hospitals and Social Conditions', pp67-8; Lucas, 'The Lancet and the South African War', p28; Makins, Surgical Experiences, p23; Knight, Go to Your God Like a Soldier, pp238-244; and see Emanuel Lee, To the Bitter End: A Photographic History of the Boer War 1899-1902, New York, Viking-Penguin, 1985, chapter 3; Grierson, Scarlet into Khaki, pp73-6.

¹⁵⁷ Natal Witness, 8 November 1899; and see Times of Natal, 30 October and 14 November 1899; Natal Witness, 1 February 1900.

¹⁵⁸ Times of Natal, 5 and 9 February 1900; and see Natal Advertiser, 9 February 1900; Natal Mercury, 20 October 1900.

When pressure on the Legislative Assembly Hospital increased, the Maritzburg Association for Aid to Sick and Wounded and the Volunteer Relief Fund appealed to colonial families to accept convalescents.¹⁵⁹ The benchmark of civilian medical care was reflected by the use of lady civilian nurses at the front, unheard-of in the British Army, partly because of the separate facilities that this necessitated.¹⁶⁰ At the same time, any implied breakdown in military medical care, as suggested by the criticism of the facilities in Pietermaritzburg, was an embarrassment because the medical care of an army in the field was seen as a major distinguishing factor between 'civilised' and 'savage' warfare.¹⁶¹

The human cost of war is always a delicate issue for the government of a Volunteer force to handle, and by June 1900 the Natal casualty list totalled 84 men. In the aftermath of the battle of Colenso, the measures adopted by the Natal government at the outset of the war for the support and compensation of the dependents of casualties were invoked. These took the form of pensions and gratuities.¹⁶² However, officers and men of colonial forces in existence at the outbreak of war were to be paid out by the colonial government, while only specially raised regiments and overseas Dominion forces fell under British Army pay warrants.¹⁶³

The committee awarded a minimum adult dependent's annual pension of £52, and an allowance of £12 for children, in terms of a succession of Volunteer laws: Law 15 (1872), Law 27 (1885), Law 19 (1888) and Act 23 (1895). These rates compared favourably with those for British regular officers, but elicited protest in the Colony as an ungenerous and insulting policy towards dependants of the dead, partially on account of the higher cost of living in Natal compared to

¹⁵⁹ Natal Witness, 22 March 1900.

¹⁶⁰ Stone, 'The Victorian Army: Health, Hospitals and Social Conditions', p13.

¹⁶¹ Stone, 'The Victorian Army: Health, Hospitals and Social Conditions', p19.

¹⁶² PAR, MJPW 75, minute paper 4293/1900, Report of Select Committee regarding provision to be made for widows and dependents, June 1900; MJPW 79, V2803/1900, minute paper, Minister of Lands and Works to Commandant of Volunteers, 28 November 1900; MJPW 79, 9692/1900, Kenmuir to Hon Treasurer, 30 November 1900; PAR Sessional papers, Legislative Assembly, No.8, 1900, Report No.9; Times of Natal, 6 June 1900.

¹⁶³ Natal Witness, 21 August 1900.

Britain.¹⁶⁴ Families of Natal Volunteers who died of disease contracted on active service (such as during the siege of Ladysmith), also benefited from a provision of the English Volunteer Act of 1863 which allowed for a pension increment of up to 50 per cent.¹⁶⁵

Conclusion

During October and November 1899, while the Volunteers were engaged at Ladysmith, Colenso, and Estcourt, another tier of the Natal defence structure was mobilized to meet the threat of the Boer incursion into the Natal midlands, which included the looting of farms. Despite the small percentage of male colonists who had enrolled in the Volunteer regiments, the response to this call for a local defence was equally muted, and the Natal government was reluctant to make further military demands on the settler community. The secondary force, comprising the rifle associations, and two specially raised regiments, Murray's Horse and the Colonial Scouts, was therefore never effectively deployed in its intended role.

The brief service of Major Hubert Gough (who was to command the Volunteers during the Relief Campaign) with the Nottingham Road Rifle Association did, however, demonstrate the potential of the Natal irregular soldier for scouting and reconnaissance, and emphasised the deficiencies of British cavalry in the Natal theatre.

The Boer incursion into the heart of Natal highlighted the tensions that had existed between English and Afrikaner colonists ever since the war began in October 1899. These tensions were fanned by a significant though disputed degree of complicity with the Boers on the part of the Natal Afrikaner, and by the first military climax of the campaign, the battle of Colenso.

The battle of Colenso on 15 December 1899 was the first major battle in which the Volunteers

¹⁶⁴ PAR, Sessional Papers, 1900, pp58 and 60, Report 9; PAR, Sessional Papers, 1900, p58, Report 9; Volunteer Act, 1895, p12; Times of Natal, 23 April 1900.

¹⁶⁵ PAR, Sessional Papers, 1900, p59, Select Committee, No9, and see Brian Kearney and Johan Wassermann, 'Comrades in Quietus: Deaths of Volunteers and Boer Prisoners of War', in Wassermann and Kearney (eds), A Warrior's Gateway, pp142-3.

were involved. However, from a purely tactical military perspective, they only played a peripheral part in the abortive attack on Hlangwane, although the circumstances surrounding their deployment and withdrawal provided further evidence that the British did not consider them as the equal of regular troops. For the Volunteers, the critical point of debate in the general criticism of Sir Redvers Buller's conduct of the battle was his failure to utilise their skills in conducting adequate reconnaissance beforehand.

Despite the British repulse, the commendable performance of the Volunteers did reflect well on the force, and was highlighted by the individual courage of Frederick Farmer, which earned him the recommendation for a Victoria Cross. The indignant response of the Colony to his failure to secure the VC, the insistence that medical treatment for Volunteer wounded be superior to that provided for British casualties, as well as concern about financial compensation for dependants of those killed, revealed a continuing expectation in Natal circles that the special interests of the Colony and its Volunteers should be prioritised, despite their moderate contribution to the war effort.

CHAPTER V

AFTER COLENZO: WITH THE RELIEF COLUMN ON THE SPIOENKOP CAMPAIGN

The Hussar Hill Incident and Christmas 1899

Until 10 January 1900 Buller's army remained at Chieveley and Frere to recover from the repulse at Colenso. For the Natal Volunteers, by then a component of Lieutenant-General Sir Charles Warren's 5th Division, it was a period of routine reconnaissance.¹ The Boers were still in occupation of the north bank of the Thukela River, and responded to British-colonial scouting with periodic forays of their own.

It was one of these ventures that gave rise to the next notable excursion for the Volunteers. On 20 December a Carbineer patrol surprised a Boer party on Hussar Hill, a strategic ridge south-east of Colenso, killing two Boers caught robbing the body of a Hussar killed there the previous day.²

This Carbineer action appears to have been a deliberate ambush, with men posted a few hundred yards from the Hussar body and the balance occupying a ridge further back.³ The firing alerted Boers in a nearby laager and a sharp skirmish ensued, during which the Volunteers were skilfully extricated.⁴ The issue of the comparative effectiveness of the Volunteers and the British regulars

¹ Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD 233/124/2, Mounted Brigade Record, pp5 and 8a; and see Natal Witness, 3 January 1900; Cape Argus, Weekly Edition, 3 January 1900; Times of Natal, 6 and 8 January 1900; Natal Advertiser, 6 and 9 January 1900; Churchill, London to Ladysmith, pp236-241.

² Natal Advertiser, 21 and 23 December 1899; Natal Witness, 22 December 1899; Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p419; Natal Volunteer Record, p152; Creswicke, South Africa and the Transvaal War, III, p10.

³ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p80; Natal Witness, 22 and 23 December 1899; Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p418; Dundonald, My Army Life, pp112-3.

⁴ Natal Mercury, 23 December 1899; Natal Witness, 23 December 1899; Natal Advertiser, 23 December 1899; Gibson, The Story of the Imperial Light Horse, p141; Dickson, The
(continued...)

was again raised, this time by The Times:

'Our mounted men did well, especially the irregulars, who, from their knowledge of the country and the habits of the enemy, and also because their colonial ponies are far better suited to this kind of work than English horses, could more nearly meet the Boers on their own terms than was possible in the case of English cavalry.'⁵

Support and anxiety on the home front for the well-being of the Volunteers on active service were evident in the arrangements for the festivities of Christmas 1899, which included the fruits of a Volunteer Christmas fund, launched by the employees of the Pietermaritzburg building and contracting firm of Harry Collins. The fund was administered by the Times of Natal. An initial £25, donated by Collins himself, was intended for a Christmas dinner.⁶ In fact, the men on active service arguably enjoyed a more festive Christmas than families back home, concerned about their menfolk on active service.⁷

The Spioenkop Campaign

**'Mile after mile, stretching halfway back to
Frere and Chieveley, the roads were black
with waggons and men.'⁸**

The Spioenkop campaign is best known to history for the second failed British push to relieve Ladysmith, but when the Natal Volunteers and the Composite Regiment departed Chieveley on

⁴(...continued)

Biograph in Battle, pp87-8; McKenzie, Delayed Action, p168.

⁵ The Times, 29 January 1900.

⁶ Times of Natal, 4 and 26 December 1899; Natal Mercury, 6 December 1899; Natal Advertiser, 21 December 1899.

⁷ Cape Argus, Weekly Edition, 10 January 1900. The same seemed to be true of the Volunteer Christmas on active service in December 1878, shortly after mobilization for the Anglo-Zulu War (Laband and Knight, The War Correspondents: The Anglo-Zulu War, pp24-5).

⁸ Dickson, The Biograph in Battle, p113.

10 January 1900 in the first phase of this operation, it was as escort to General Sir CF Clery's brigade baggage-train.⁹ This wagon-train bore all the hallmarks of the supply and transport arrangements of continental European armies, blended with the exigencies of campaigning in Africa.¹⁰ However, it was an opportunity for the Volunteers finally to exercise their tactical preference for detached scouting operations by their deployment in the reconnaissance of familiar, and now strategic, terrain for the British advance. This landscape included the hamlet of Springfield and its bridge over the Little Thukela River, from which roads diverged to three drifts over the Thukela itself and the western Drakensberg passes.¹¹ The following comment by an officer of the Royal Artillery suggests that the Volunteers did enjoy a more positive role than had previously been the case:

'During this period the sentinels of the British force were the Colonial Mounted Corps, the men who had engaged the enemy single-handed at Hlangwane, and had been in constant touch with him ever since. By day their helios flashed back all that was worth knowing from Spearman's Hill, and at night their fires twinkled reassuringly in the darkness. The eyes of the army, the fate of the nation, were with the Colonial Corps, and never had they been in better or more trustworthy hands.'¹²

The Natal Volunteers were engaged in continuous incident-packed reconnaissances along the Tugela front. A secondary purpose of such operations was to make arrangements for the protection of farms during their owners' absence. This intention may have been connected to concerns in the Colony that too little had been done to prevent the Boer looting of midlands farms

⁹ Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD 233/124/2, Mounted Brigade Record, p8; NAM, NAM 8307/121, Greening diary, 10 January 1900; Natal Witness, 19 January 1900; Churchill, London to Ladysmith, p253; Creswicke, South Africa and the Transvaal War, III, p94; Dickson, The Biograph in Battle, pp111-5.

¹⁰ Natal Advertiser, 22 January 1900; Callwell, Small Wars, pp58-61.

¹¹ Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD 233/124/2, pp8-11; Dundonald Papers, GD 233, Box 128, 'The Spion Kop campaign, Section No.6'; The Times, 13 February and 14 November 1900; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, II, p622, appendix 8d; Burleigh, The Natal Campaign, p283; Creswicke, South Africa and the Transvaal War, III, p94.

¹² Wilson, The Relief of Ladysmith: The Artillery in Natal, p54.

in November 1899.¹³ The situation regarding the security of settler farms was more delicate in the Upper Tugela region because of the greater number of Afrikaner farmers living there, and the fact that they lived in close proximity to their English brethren.

Buller initially altered plans to force a crossing at Potgieter's Drift on the Thukela River, and headed for Trichardt's Drift, five miles upstream, opposite Spioenkop.¹⁴ The Trichardt's Drift operation was intended to establish a bridgehead across the Thukela in a complex plan to breach Boer defences in that sector. The change in plan was kept secret, with even the cavalry-mounted infantry camp at Springfield left standing to simulate normal camp routine. The idea was to mislead the Boers who, however, enjoyed a clear view of proceedings.¹⁵

The overall strategic significance of this operation for the Natal Volunteers, who now fell under the overall command of Lieutenant-General Sir Charles Warren,¹⁶ would only become apparent in the context of the skirmish near Acton Homes on 18 January. However, for the Volunteers the immediate significance of the crossing lay in another deed of heroism, and another illustration of the divide between the local irregular forces and British regulars, especially in terms of familiarity with local conditions.

The river was full after heavy rains, and British forces were frustrated by the fluctuating

¹³ NAR, FK 1769 (WO32/852), Mounted Brigade Staff Diary, pp21-2; Natal Witness, 20 January 1900.

¹⁴ Natal Witness, 19 January 1900; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, II, pp341-2; 'Natal Carbineers Record - Estcourt Squadron No.5', in McKenzie, Delayed Action, p182.

¹⁵ Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, file 5, GD 233, box 128, 'War in South Africa: Sir Charles Warren's Flank March, Section No.6; The Times, 19 January 1900; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, II, p630, appendix 9a; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, III, pp77-8 and 101.

¹⁶ Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, II, p626, appendix 8(I), 'Force under the Command of Sir Charles Warren on Leaving Springfield for Trickhardt's Drift, 16 January 1900'.

environmental conditions typical of a local summer.¹⁷ The site chosen for the crossing on 17 January was also dangerous underfoot, and these hazards were overlooked, probably due to inadequate reconnaissance.¹⁸ According to McKenzie, the Natal Carbineers negotiated the river with little difficulty employing a practised drill, some swimming alongside their horses with kit tied to the top of the saddle.¹⁹

Winston Churchill, who had rejoined the Natal army after his escape from Boer custody, recorded his version of the crossing:

'The Royal Dragoons mounted on their great horses...passed without much difficulty, but the ponies of the Light Horse and mounted infantry were often swept off their feet, and the ridiculous spectacle of officers and men floundering in the torrent or rising indignantly from the shallows provided a large crowd of spectators, who had crossed by the bridge, with a comedy.'²⁰

Churchill's description differs markedly from other eyewitness accounts, and was thought in Natal colonial circles to reflect his hardening attitude towards Natal colonial troops. The reason is uncertain, but in Volunteer circles was believed to have something to do with the abortive Park Gray venture discussed on pages 109-110 of this work.²¹ Sandys, however, suggests that, if anything, Churchill's opinion of the Natal colonist had been further enhanced by the commendable performance of the NGR employees with the ambushed armoured-train.²² It is difficult, therefore,

¹⁷ Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD 233/124/2, Mounted Brigade Record, p9; NAM, NAM 8307/121, Greening diary, 20 January 1900; Natal Witness, 14 February 1900; Natal Advertiser, 12 June 1900; The Times, 14 November 1900.

¹⁸ Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, GD 233, box 128, Sir Charles Warren's Flank March, Section No.6'; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, II, pp355-6; Dundonald, My Army Life, p101; McKenzie, Delayed Action, p167.

¹⁹ McKenzie, Delayed Action, p167.

²⁰ Churchill, London to Ladysmith, p281.

²¹ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Peter Francis Papers, Gray to Francis, 30 June 1947; Natal Advertiser, 22 May 1900; Churchill, London to Ladysmith, p63.

²² Sandys, Churchill: Wanted Dead or Alive, p88. Churchill was also reported to have
(continued...)

to determine if Churchill was exaggerating, or whether the Volunteer account, recorded in the biography of one of the force's leading officers, was embellished. The comment in this thesis on the periodic creativity and exaggeration of contemporary newspaper and first-hand recollections, such as in the case of the Bester's skirmish in October 1899, would at least make the latter a possibility.

Dundonald's own clumsy crossing was typical of the British cavalymen involved.²³ The crossing turned into a nightmare for several members of the 13th Hussars and 1st Royal Dragoons. Their heavy chargers, unaccustomed to water, lost their footing and were swept downstream.²⁴ Dacre Shaw, who was to win the DCM during the course of the war, supports the assertion that it was the British chargers, rather than the colonial ponies, that were unsuited to South African conditions.²⁵ One cavalryman was drowned and two were rescued by Carbineer troopers David Sclanders and Fred F Woods.²⁶ Sclanders was decorated with the Royal Humane Society's Silver Medal for this action.²⁷

The Skirmish at Acton Homes

²²(...continued)

expressed specific praise for Natal Volunteer field-craft at about the time of the Spioenkop campaign, see the Natal Advertiser, 21 February 1900.

²³ Stevenson, 'A Carbineer Remembers', pp55-6; Dundonald, My Army Life, pp120-2.

²⁴ McKenzie, Delayed Action, p167.

²⁵ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p22.

²⁶ PAR, CSO 2609, transcript telegrams, Warren to CSO, 21 January 1900; Natal Mercury, 19 June 1900.

²⁷ Nicholson diary, 28 August 1900; Times of Natal, 31 August 1900; Medal News, September 1999, 'News and Views', p6; Dictionary of South African Biography, II (1972), p421. The Sclanders family is another Volunteer name that boasts a long settler heritage in Natal dating back to 1861 (See Reg Pearse, 'The Sclanders of Cathkin', in Sunday Tribune, 30 September 1984). For the interesting story of a Royal Humane Society medal for a sea rescue at Kalk Bay in the Cape Colony, also during the Anglo-Boer War, see Anthony Allen, 'A Royal Humane Society Medal - South Africa 1901', Military Medal Society of South Africa, journal No.26, pp17-24.

On the morning of 18 January 1900, the Natal Carbineer and Imperial Light Horse squadrons, plus the mounted infantry company of the King's Royal Rifles, comprising the bulk of the Composite Regiment, advanced on the left flank of Dundonald's brigade in the direction of Acton Homes, west of Spioenkop. The column was unencumbered by transport, with each man carrying his own rations and ammunition. At last they seemed correctly deployed to play an effective part in a critical phase of the campaign in Natal.²⁸ The context of this operation was Buller's decision to despatch Warren, with roughly two thirds of his army, including Dundonald's mounted troops, and the Natal Volunteers, to Trichardt's Drift with the intention that they outflank the Boer right at Ntabamnyama (west of Spioenkop) and infiltrate behind the burghers opposite the lower drift at Potgieter's. Then, it was assumed, the Boers would vacate the latter positions and Buller could cross at Potgieter's to effect a junction with Warren's force before proceeding to Ladysmith.²⁹ Acton Homes was situated immediately west of Ntabamnyama, and the idea of a concerted effort in that vicinity was not altogether far-fetched, with Buller himself hinting in a letter to the War Office as early as 12 December 1899 at an approach to Ladysmith via Acton Homes.³⁰

At about midday, Carbineer scouts reported a Boer column advancing in response to Dundonald's reconnaissance along a track between two kopjes in the direction of Acton Homes.³¹ The Imperial Light Horse and Natal Carbineers squadrons, under Major Duncan McKenzie's command, were despatched to intercept.³²

Manoeuvring into position for the subsequent ambush, the Volunteers exhibited several preferred

²⁸ The Times, 17 February 1900; Creswicke, South Africa and the Transvaal War, III, p99; Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p469; Maurice, History of the South African War, II, p360; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, III, pp113-6.

²⁹ Pakenham, The Boer War, pp281-4; Gilbert Torlage, 'Spioenkop 24 January 1900', in Chadwick et al, Battlefields of South Africa, p120.

³⁰ NAR, FK 1817, file 703, Buller to War Office, 12 December 1899; and see Pemberton, Battles of the Boer War, pp163-6.

³¹ Natal Witness, 16 February 1900; The Times, 14 November 1900; Creswicke, South Africa and the Transvaal War, III, p99; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, III, p97 and p114; Dundonald, My Army Life, p124; McKenzie, Delayed Action, p168.

³² Wilson, With the Flag to Pretoria, I, p267; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, III, p114.

characteristics of colonial mounted infantry, such as a detour to avoid being spotted by the target commando or Boer lookouts on Spioenkop, and the use of terrain and cover to best advantage.³³ British observers considered it almost unheard of that Boer forces could be surprised in this manner.³⁴ The unsuspecting Boers, proceeding in uncharacteristically close order, were allowed to approach to close quarters before a premature shot from among the ranks of the ambushers triggered the engagement.³⁵ The initial volleys emptied several Boer saddles, but most of the stunned burghers managed to reach cover and stage a spirited resistance that lasted several hours before most were taken prisoner.³⁶ After the skirmish six Volunteers were detailed to escort 40 prisoners captured in the skirmish to Pietermaritzburg, including one Petrus Erasmus who left a detailed and humorous account of his capture by the Natal Carbineers.³⁷

A notable feature of the engagement at Acton Homes was a disputed white flag raised in the Boer ranks and then lowered again.³⁸ The British-colonial troops responded by immediately opening

³³ Natal Witness, 22 January 1900; Natal Mercury, 21 February 1900; Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p469; Gibson, The Story of the Imperial Light Horse, p148; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, III, p114; and see Gray typescript, p5. For first-hand accounts of this engagement see Stevenson, 'A Carbineer Remembers'; McKenzie, Delayed Action, pp168-9; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, III, pp113-6.

³⁴ Harold Coventry journal, p17; Churchill, London to Ladysmith, p108; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, III, p114; and see Standard and Digger's News, quoted in Natal Witness, 16 February 1900; Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, pp469-70; Wilson, With the Flag to Pretoria, I, p267; The Mobile Boer, p115.

³⁵ Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD 233/124/2, Mounted Brigade Record, p21; The Times, 14 November 1900; Burleigh, The Natal Campaign, p304; and see Natal Carbineers History Centre, Gray typescript, p5; Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p470; Wilson, With the Flag to Pretoria, I, pp267-8; E Blake Knox, Buller's Campaign: With the Natal Field Force, London, R Brimley Johnson, 1902, pp22-3.

³⁶ McKenzie, Delayed Action, p169; and see Natal Advertiser, 20 January 1900; Wilson, With the Flag to Pretoria, I, p267; Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, pp470-1; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, III, pp115-6.

³⁷ Personal communication, 'Capture of PJE Erasmus', Hein Gildenhuys, Ladysmith, to writer, 22 July 1994; Malan, Die Boere Offisiere, p30; Preller, Talana, p241.

³⁸ Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p160; McKenzie, Delayed Action, p169.

fire again.³⁹ The incident prompted an outcry in the British and the Natal colonial press and was enthusiastically employed in the popular press to denigrate and satirize the Boer cause.⁴⁰ In the Times of Natal it was reported that officers were urged to make it

'a sacred duty to warn the fresh officers and men...as to what is to be expected from Boer 'slimness' and...instructing them to regard the white flag when displayed by Boers as a certain indication of intended treachery.'⁴¹

Further evidence of the emotive nature of the white flag debate is evident in the contemporary British official and semi-official histories of the war.⁴² Concern over alleged abuses of the white flag was also reflected at all levels of the British Army.⁴³ The issue was complicated by etiquette

³⁹ Wilson, With the Flag to Pretoria, I, p268; Churchill, London to Ladysmith, p292; Sandys, Churchill: Wanted Dead or Alive, p153; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, III, p115.

⁴⁰ For example, see Natal Witness, 24 January 1900; Robinson (ed), Navy and Army Illustrated, X, 31 March 1900, p31, XI, 24 November 1900, p256; Kimberley Africana Library, Ten Little Boer Boys: A New Version of an Old Tale, by Norman, London, Dean and Son, nd; Nasson, The South African War 1899-1902, p247; Haythornwaite, The Colonial Wars Source Book, p343; Peter Harrington, 'Pictorial Journalism and the Boer War: The London Illustrated Weeklies', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, p241.

⁴¹ Times of Natal, 7 November 1899.

⁴² For example, see Creswicke, South Africa and the Transvaal War, II, p111. The Boers laying siege to Ladysmith were also accused of abusing the white flag. It was alleged, for example, that Boers on the surrounding hills used the white flag to replace gun crews killed and wounded by British fire. The Boers there were also accused of abusing the neutrality and protection of the Red Cross (McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, pp5 and 47-8; and see British Library, Sir George White Papers, MSS Eur F108/57, White to Joubert, 12 November 1899, and Joubert to White, 12 November 1899; PRO, WO 32/7880, 079/2610, Natal Intelligence Reports to 28 April 1900; Mocke, 'Die Slag van Colenso', pp121,136 and 148; Sibbald, The War Correspondents, p89; Best, 'Restraints on War by Land before 1945', in Howard (ed), Restraints on War: Studies in the Limitation of Armed Conflict, pp21-3).

⁴³ Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, II, p624, Appendix 8f, Buller Special Order, 12 January 1900; and see PRO WO 32/7873, 079/1725, 179/9948 and 079/9967 (White Flag, 1899-1900); PRO WO 32/7873 and 079/589, memorandum, Wolseley, 14 February 1900; NAM, NAM 8107/18, Diary of Private Gutland, 2nd Middlesex Regiment, p16; Natal Witness, 1 October 1901.

governing the particular occasions in 'civilised' warfare where truces could be arranged.⁴⁴ Overall, in the context of Natal's interest in the war, and the recorded opinion of two Volunteer participants in the Acton Homes skirmish that the white flag incident was not deliberate, the official, public and media interest generated by the incident may suggest an effort to invigorate support in the Colony for the war, almost presaging the waning of support in the coming year.⁴⁵

The composition of the combatant sides in the skirmish also served to remind colonists, and the Volunteers, of the divisive impact of the war on the settler community in Natal. This was illustrated by the meeting at Acton Homes between Major Duncan McKenzie of the Natal Carbineers and an English burgher named Moodie. They were on first name terms and on the battlefield greeted each other like long-lost friends.⁴⁶ Moodie was related to the Moors, the prominent Estcourt family of Sir Frederick Moor, Minister of Native Affairs in the first responsible government ministry (1893-1897) and Prime Minister of the last Natal administration before Union in 1910. He had married an Afrikaner girl and had become a Transvaal burgher, and was therefore a willing recruit to the Boer cause.

However, the spirit of co-existence exhibited by McKenzie and Moodie did not always prevail. Civil conflict was particularly acute and traumatic in Natal border districts such as Acton Homes, Gourton and Springfield, and encompassed the commandeering of Natal colonists by the Republics and the detention of 'foreigners' by both sides.⁴⁷ One leading Natal family thus affected was the Zunkels, who had two of their number serving in the Natal Carbineers. Other members of the same family had the dubious distinction of being arrested by both sides during the war. In

⁴⁴ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Natal Field Force Orders, 8 January 1900; NAR, FK 1771, file 1725, Roberts to Steyn(?), 11 March 1900; Natal Witness, 27 January 1900.

⁴⁵ See Stevenson, 'A Carbineer Remembers', p56; McKenzie, Delayed Action, pp167-9.

⁴⁶ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Gray typescript, p6; McKenzie, Delayed Action, p169; and see Pearse, Joseph Baynes: Pioneer, p206, for a brief biography of Sir Frederick Moor.

⁴⁷ PAR, PM 17, confidential minute paper 68/1900, Bale to Hime, 31 January 1900; Natal Witness, 31 October 1899; Natal Mercury, 1 February 1900; A Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith, No.4, p2, Fanny Tatham to sister, Polly, 10 October 1899; and see Transvaal Leader, 12 September 1899; Natal Witness, 3 February 1900; Smurthwaite, The Boer War 1899-1902, p31.

the case of the British it was feared that the Zunckels, 'having remained in the district during the Boer occupation, might possibly have been in collusion with the enemy'.⁴⁸ The British adopted this position despite official encouragement of farmers not to leave farms during the Boer incursion. The Zunckel case, in the context of the aspersions cast on the loyalty of residents in the above-mentioned districts, was considered in a serious enough light to attract the attention of both the Governor of Natal and the Prime Minister.⁴⁹

As suggested in the following passage by a British diarist, referring to the Boer prisoners being transported from Acton Homes to Pietermaritzburg, it was also feared that the response of the African population in the Upper Tugela region could inflame the tensions between English and Afrikaner settlers which were fanned by the war:

'All the natives here turned out in full war paint and lined each side of the road, and as the Boers passed by they commenced singing a song about the downfall of the Boers, and shouted insulting jeers at them, much to the anger of the prisoners, who looked like going for the natives. It was a lesson to the Boers because they always ill-treat the natives and flog them.'⁵⁰

Although there was further reconnaissance in the vicinity of the skirmish, the Acton Homes position was evacuated the same day, in accordance with instructions from Warren for a retirement.⁵¹ In several contemporary British histories and illustrated magazines this 'cheerful little engagement' was elevated to the status of a major encounter, with some emphasis given to the calling in of reinforcements, thus inadvertently giving unwarranted credit to the small band of

⁴⁸ Natal Mercury, 1 February 1900.

⁴⁹ PAR, CSO 1640, minute paper 1236/1900, 14 February 1900, Alleged arrest of Mr Zunckel.

⁵⁰ NAM, NAM 8307/121, Greening diary, 20 January 1900.

⁵¹ Natal Witness, 14 February 1900; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, II, pp368-9; Churchill, From London to Ladysmith, pp297 and 315-27; Dundonald, My Army Life, p126; Coetzer, The Road to Infamy, pp170-1; Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, IV, pp118-9.

Boers engaged.⁵² However, the much-maligned and marginalised colonial irregulars had managed to ensnare the Boers 'in a fine old trap', and the engagement had reflected positively on the Natal Volunteers.⁵³ In contrast, an Afrikaner commentator had to admit that this was not a glorious moment in the Boer war effort.⁵⁴ With the Flag to Pretoria was probably correct when it concluded that the affair

'had no serious results [except, presumably for those killed and wounded!] and no strategic importance, though it showed that our colonials were fully a match for the Boers in wiliness. To the Natal Carbineers the credit belongs.'⁵⁵

However, in passing judgement on the limited importance of the Acton Homes skirmish, cognisance should be taken of the limited numbers involved. The same qualification applies to the assertion in the campaign diary of the mounted troops of the Natal Field Force/Second Cavalry Brigade that 'with this force Lord Dundonald...was able to achieve a success which, had it been supported and followed up, might have changed the whole Natal campaign'.⁵⁶

Although the outcome of the skirmish was in itself of little importance, in strategic terms there

⁵² Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD 233/124/2, Mounted Brigade Record, p20; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, II, p359; Creswicke, South Africa and the Transvaal War, III, p99; Wilson, With the Flag to Pretoria, I, p268; Gibson, The Story of the Imperial Light Horse, p149; Conan Doyle, The Great Boer War, pp252-3; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, III, p115; Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p470.

⁵³ Standard and Digger's News, quoted in Natal Witness, 16 February 1900; Natal Mercury, 21 February 1900; Natal Carbineers History Centre, Woods News Cuttings, 'Visit to Free State Wounded', nd; Wilson, With the Flag to Pretoria, I, p268; Burleigh, The Natal Campaign, p305; Winston Churchill, Ian Hamilton's March, in Frontiers and Wars, p534.

⁵⁴ Gedenkboek van den Oorlog in Zuid-Afrika, p238.

⁵⁵ Wilson, With the Flag to Pretoria, I, p268. For another description in the same vein see Creswicke, South Africa and the Transvaal War, III, p99.

⁵⁶ Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD 233/124/2, Diary, Mounted Troops, Natal Field Force/Second Cavalry Brigade, p20; and see Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, IV, pp117-8.

had emerged a possibility of opening a gap in the right flank of the Boer line on the Thukela.⁵⁷ The immediate opportunity for exploiting the success was lost when Warren reined Dundonald in on the 19th. The Natal Volunteers were deprived of the opportunity of having one of the few effective tactical successes in which they played a significant part translated into a meaningful strategic success.

The opportunity for the Volunteers to follow up the minor success at Acton Homes fell victim to strong disagreement between Warren and Dundonald over the merits of an advance via Acton Homes. Warren stressed to Dundonald that the immediate objective was not a dash on Ladysmith, but rather to effect a junction with a column under Buller. Warren, who was also convinced that his forces had been lured to Acton Homes as an intended trap, accused Dundonald of hampering his movements, and putting his force at risk, by detaching his mounted troops. Dundonald responded that in his present position he was, in fact, protecting the left flank and assisting Warren's plans.⁵⁸ Warren also objected to the length of the Acton Homes route, and suggested further that while Acton Homes was a viable target for an overwhelming attacking force, it was to be avoided by a small one.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD 233/124/2, Mounted Brigade Record, p21; Delport, 'Die Rol van Generaal Marthinus Prinsloo', pp85-7; Cilliers, 'Die Slag van Spioenkop', pp7-9; Anon., Sir Charles Warren and Spionkop: A Vindication by 'Defender', London, Smith, Elder & Co, 1902, p89.

⁵⁸ Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD 233/124/2, Mounted Brigade Record, p23; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, II, pp362-3 and 632, Appendix 9c, 'Messages: Warren and Dundonald, 18 January 1900, Warren to Dundonald 7.30pm'; South Africa: The Spion Kop Despatches, HMSO, 1902; reprint, London, Boer War Books, nd, appendix M; Pakenham, The Boer War, pp283-4 and 129; Knight, Colenso 1899: The Boer War in Natal, p61; and see Dixon, On the Psychology of Military Incompetence, p63; Coetzer, The Road to Infamy, p162. The disagreement between Dundonald and Warren was subsumed by a more public row between the latter and Buller over the conduct of the Spioenkop campaign.

⁵⁹ Norris, The South African War 1899-1902: A Military Retrospect, p188; Coetzer, The Road to Infamy, p165.

Warren consequently issued a subdued report on the skirmish.⁶⁰ Breytenbach suggests that Dundonald contributed to this caution by himself exaggerating the Acton Homes action. After Warren despatched reinforcements to Dundonald on the evening of the 18th in response to the latter's appeal, he was annoyed to discover the next morning that the action, though successful, had been a relatively trivial one.⁶¹

On 1 February 1900 Dundonald was relieved of his command of British regular cavalry, apparently for exceeding orders in the wake of the Acton Homes incident. His new command, the 2nd Mounted Brigade, consisted exclusively of irregular mounted infantry.

This demotion of Dundonald meant that the trend of not combining the regular cavalry and mounted infantry into an effective cavalry division continued, and was further evidence of the British Army's inadequate use of the mounted infantry arm. The re-organisation had the immediate effect of relegating the Volunteers to limited intelligence gathering on Boer strengths at various drifts along the Thukela.⁶² It is therefore not surprising that, with the exception of the Natal Volunteer Ambulance Corps, the Volunteers played no direct part in the abortive British attacks at Spioenkop and Vaalkrantz (23-24 January and 5-7 February 1900).⁶³

The Volunteers remained at Acton Homes until 25 January, and spent most of the period 17 January to 5 February based at Spearman's Camp on the slopes of Mount Alice.⁶⁴ During the battle of Vaalkrantz they were situated in the rear, close to the British artillery, and apart from

⁶⁰ PAR, CSO 2609, transcript telegrams, Warren to General C-in-C, Natal, 18 January 1900, in General C-in-C to GC, Pietermaritzburg, 19 January 1900.

⁶¹ The Spion Kop Despatches, appendix M; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, III, pp116-7.

⁶² Stevenson, 'A Carbineer Remembers', p56; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, II, pp406 and 523; Powell, Buller: A Scapegoat?, p148.

⁶³ Natal Advertiser, 28 March 1900.

⁶⁴ Natal Volunteer Record, p153; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p138.

attracting their share of Boer shellfire, remained idle.⁶⁵ The Composite Regiment, of which they were a part, was ordered to protect the right flank and rear of the British positions.⁶⁶

According to frustrated ILH historian, George Fleming Gibson, the forced inactivity during this period of the mounted irregulars, who were 'condemned to picnic in the orchards on the banks of the Tugela', was part of Warren's further punishment of Dundonald for his part at Acton Homes.⁶⁷ The South African Light Horse complained that

'they were kept for four days in the shadow of Zwartkop, without off-saddling or removing a bandolier. Not allowed to move five inches from where they were, they had simply to be ready to start for anywhere at ten seconds notice. They never got the notice, and found their patience sadly taxed. But they were doing their duty.'⁶⁸

This enforced inactivity appeared to confirm a War Office memorandum supporting Buller's deprecation of colonial contingents, especially mounted.⁶⁹ The War Office position would appear to be confirmed by the assertion of the Natal Witness that the intended task of the Volunteers in the event of a breakthrough may have been a modest one, including the monitoring of the telegraph line to Ladysmith.⁷⁰

However, according to one biographer, Buller had every intention of raising, and presumably effectively utilising, mounted infantry, but was thwarted by shortages in weapons, equipment and

⁶⁵ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Lyttelton Papers, letter 5, anonymous, 4 February 1900; Creswicke, South Africa and the Transvaal War, III, p120; Amery (ed), The Times History, III, p315; Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, IV, p116.

⁶⁶ Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 2, GD 233/124/1, Copies of Official Documents connected with Lord Dundonald's Brigade, Section 2, p48, Vaalkrans Orders, 3 February 1900; Churchill, London to Ladysmith, p353.

⁶⁷ Gibson, Story of the Imperial Light Horse, pp149-150; and see Wessels, "'The Soldiers of the Queen'", p9.

⁶⁸ Natal Witness, 9 November 1900.

⁶⁹ PRO, WO 32/7902, 079/1208, Lansdowne to Buller, 18 December 1899.

⁷⁰ Natal Witness, 31 January 1900.

special service regular officers.⁷¹ Powell asserts that in the course of the Spioenkop operation, it was

'Buller's original intention...to use his few colonial horsemen to threaten the Boers besieging Ladysmith from the east, while his infantry forced the Tugela, but due to rinderpest he found it impossible to obtain the ox-wagons needed for such a wide encirclement.'⁷²

Indeed, such practical considerations should be borne in mind if the Volunteer deployment at Spioenkop and Vaalkrans is to be judged in terms of the theoretical assertion that it was generally the conviction of professional army hierarchies that offensive operations were less suitable for citizen armies than defensive operations.⁷³

However, this convention was contradicted by a chief-of-staff circular memorandum from Lord Kitchener, dated 26 January 1900, which included cautionary 'notes for guidance in South African warfare' that seemed to be at variance with the general inactivity to which the Volunteers were condemned at Spioenkop and environs. For example:

'We have to deal with an enemy possessing remarkable mobility, intimately acquainted with the country, thoroughly understanding how to take advantage of ground, adept in improvising cover, and most skilful in the use of their weapons.

Against such an enemy any attempt to take a position by direct attack will assuredly fail. The only hope of success lies in being able to turn one or both flanks, or what would, in many instances, be equally effective, to threaten to cut the enemy's line of communication.

Before any plan of attack can be decided upon, the position must be carefully examined by reconnoitering parties, and every endeavor must be made to obtain all possible information about it from the people of the country'.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Powell, Buller: A Scapegoat?, p139.

⁷² Powell, Buller: A Scapegoat?, p143.

⁷³ Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD 233/124/2, Second Cavalry Brigade Orders, 4 February 1900; Stern, The Citizen Army, pp18,225 and 227.

⁷⁴ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Aston Papers 1/1, Kitchener of Khartoum, 'Notes for guidance in South African warfare', 26 January 1900.

Quite possibly, the truth of the matter was that the British, though recognising the importance of irregular horse, did not trust colonial troops when under the command of their own officers. Consequently, in a scenario very similar to that of the Imperial Light Horse at Elandsplaagte, at Spioenkop the Volunteers stood idly by while another irregular regiment, Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry, played a distinguished part in the battle. Again, that unit's founder and commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel AW Thorneycroft, was a British officer, this time of the Royal Scots Fusiliers. Another unit with a similar pedigree was Bethune's Mounted Infantry, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel EC Bethune, 16th Lancers.⁷⁵

Conclusion

The Spioenkop campaign of January-February 1900 promised much in the way of operational effectiveness for the Natal Volunteers, but in the end delivered little. In the advance from Chieveley to the region of Spioenkop the Volunteers were able to demonstrate their affinity for reconnaissance, and the low-key incident at Hussar Hill on 20 December 1899 had further demonstrated the suitability of the force for the tactics of skirmishing and ambush.

The fact that the Natal Volunteers were to end this campaign on the sidelines at both of the major battles of Spioenkop and Vaalkrans, had its genesis in the ambush of the Boer column, and subsequent skirmish, at Acton Homes on 18 January 1900. In terms of tactics and execution, the incident proved to be arguably the most successful Volunteer operation of the war. However, instead of reaping a reward, the Volunteers became victims of the strategic conflict between Buller and Warren on how the Boer line in the vicinity of Spioenkop was to be breached.

Two campaign incidents during this period also shed important light on the relationship between Volunteers and the British regular troops, and between English and Afrikaner settlers. Firstly, the Trichardt's Drift crossing, another outwardly successful Volunteer operation, accentuated the gulf in understanding between British regulars and the Volunteers. Then, the White Flag incident during the Acton Homes skirmish, together with the disputed treatment by the British of both English and Afrikaner colonists, accentuated the disruptive and divisive effect of the war in Natal

⁷⁵ Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, p206.

on these two groups.

CHAPTER VI

SIEGE LIFE IN LADYSMITH

The Volunteers Adapt to Siege Routine

'Weary, stale, flat, unprofitable, the whole thing.'¹

The merits of White's decision to defend Ladysmith, a weak military position, rather than retire to Colenso and the Tugela line, has been hotly debated by historians. (See pages 40-5 and 66-8.) Considering the strength of his force he was probably correct in deciding against retiring to the extended Tugela line.² In terms of stark statistics, 13 745 troops and 7 600 civilians, plus 51 pieces of artillery, were trapped.³ The siege was a blow to the morale of soldiers in the immediate military context, and the colonists of Natal in general.⁴

Although there was appreciation of the strategic and sentimental importance of the town, Natal's military interests deplored the failure of White to despatch the Volunteer forces south to where, in the overall context of the British war effort, they could have been more effectively deployed in Buller's relief force.⁵ White also faced criticism for his choice of perimeter. It was considered too close to the town, allowing the Boers to take up positions commanding every strategic point.⁶ Alfred Wingfield commented that 'everyone is fearfully dissatisfied with Sir George White, and

¹ GW Steevens, From Capetown to Ladysmith, p125.

² Delport, 'Die Rol van Generaal Marthinus Prinsloo', p57.

³ Watt, The Siege of Ladysmith, p4.

⁴ Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, pp96-7; and see KCAL, KCM 1791, Campbell, 'Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith', 3 November 1899, for the comment of a trapped soldier.

⁵ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Hamilton Papers, 2/1/1, private manuscript diary, 26 November and 18 December 1899, and see 2/2/5, Hamilton to wife, 21 March 1900; Amery (ed), The Times History, II, p263; Powell, Buller: A Scapegoat?, p136; Alan Chalmers, Bombardment of Ladysmith Anticipated: The Diary of a Siege, Weltevreden Park, Covos Day Books, 2000, pp43-4.

⁶ GW Willis to brother, William, 29 March 1900, in A Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith, No.4, p14-15; and see Sibbald, The War Correspondents, p86.

we, who know the enemy and the country, think that a great more might have been done with the force here'.⁷

In a letter to the Ladysmith Town Council on 6 March 1901, White, by then Governor of Gibraltar, stated his own views on the matter:

'From the day I landed in your loyal and progressive Colony I determined to do my best to hold Ladysmith. I did not think it in keeping with the honour of British arms to adopt the secondary position of a besieged force until we had done our best in the open field against the superior forces of the United South African Republics. My first care in all operations outside Ladysmith was to provide for its safety. I regarded it not only as a standpoint in itself, but also as a shield to protect all Natal behind it'.⁸

It would appear that White was not out of step with overall military opinion at the time. On 27 October 1899, for example, The Times carried a 'summary of the military situation' in Natal, that included the following passage:

'Strong positions on the railway should be occupied, made secure by fortification, and abundantly supplied with food and ammunition. Secured from attack and amply provisioned, while strategically acting on the defensive, [troops] would be able to strike out from their fortified positions if opportunities arose'.⁹

White also emphasised that the Boers appeared to place undue importance on the occupation of the town, and linked its capture with a general rising by the Natal Afrikaners.¹⁰

Militarily, the advent of the siege was a shock that few, British and colonial, could conceive of before it became a reality, given the assumed superiority of British arms over the informally-

⁷ Wingfield, Ladysmith Siege Diary, 7 November 1899.

⁸ NAR, Leyds 1043, CD 458, White to Chief-of-Staff, 23 March 1900; Natal Witness, 9 May 1901; and see Natal Witness, 4 April 1900.

⁹ The Times, 27 October 1899.

¹⁰ NAR, Leyds 1043, CD 458, White to Chief-of-Staff, 23 March 1900, pp14-15.

constituted Boer forces.¹¹ Lieutenant-Colonel CW Park of the Devonshire Regiment, who was to lead the legendary 'charge of the Devons' at Wagon Hill on 6 January 1900, admitted in comment on the battle of Nicholson's Nek on 30 October, that 'it is a terrible blow in every way, both to the garrison and to the prestige of the British Army'.¹² For the besieged, seemingly trifling details such as camp relocations, adaptations to an unfamiliar and imposed siege routine, and the frustration of inaction and immobility, acquired an exaggerated importance. Accommodation became one immediate difficulty.¹³

On 4 November the Volunteer Brigade was informed of its sector of responsibility in the town's defensive cordon: Section 'D', approximately two miles in length, comprising the thorn-bush plain between Manchester Post, on the south-eastern corner of Caesar's Camp, and Helpmekaar Ridge.¹⁴ This perimeter defence included mutually supporting entrenched posts and a mobile reserve.¹⁵ Here they were to furnish mounted patrols during the day and picquets at night.¹⁶

The provision of outposts was an important element of military practice, and within the restrictions on movement imposed by the siege, the Natal Volunteers therefore played an important part in the security of the town. The duty of such outposts was 'to keep safe the other troops, to arrest any advance of the enemy till the troops have assumed the necessary formation,

¹¹ McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, pp1 and 4; The Siege Diary of William Watson, 2 November and 6 December 1899; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, pp96 and 172; Pearse, Four Months Besieged, p22; and see UNISA Archives, Gill diary, 31 October 1899, p55.

¹² Lieutenant-Colonel CW Park, Letters from Ladysmith, Ladysmith, Ladysmith Historical Society, 1972, p1, 1 November 1899.

¹³ Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 1 November and 19 December 1899; 'The caterer' in Natal Witness, February/March 1925; Gordon, Honour Without Riches, p263; Samuelson, Long, Long Ago, p156.

¹⁴ NAR, 1043, CD 458, White to Chief-of-Staff, 23 March 1900, p17; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p44; Major GF Tatham, Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith, Ladysmith, Ladysmith Historical Society, 1985, p2, 11 November 1899; Stirling, The Colonials in Africa, p33; Amery (ed), The Times History, III, pp150-1; and see Ackermann, 'Aardrykskundige Invloede', pp147-150.

¹⁵ Amery (ed), The Times History, III, pp145-8.

¹⁶ PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Corps, Orderbooks, 29 October 1899; Natal Carbineers History Centre, Natal Field Force Orders, 29 October 1899; BW Martin, in A Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith, No.4, p32; Gordon, Honour Without Riches, p268.

to reconnoitre the enemy, and to prevent being reconnoitred by him'.¹⁷ At first light every morning 'cossack posts' were pushed forward to positions to be occupied during the day. Two men from each post were despatched to examine the ground to its immediate front. If all was clear, the support troops retired to camp, before it was sufficiently light for the Boers to observe their movements.¹⁸

Although the brigade was not to face any concerted Boer attack on this section of the perimeter, it was still not considered a secure one. The plain at the foot of Caesar's Camp was so heavily wooded that in places visibility was reduced to 30 yards (27 metres).¹⁹ Over the course of several nights towards the end of December Volunteers built defensive schanzes (rough stone walls) to improve the inadequate protection provided by vegetation and by defensive posts. These schanzes were the handiwork of farmers in the regiments, who took considerable professional pride in their handiwork.²⁰

There is thinly disguised frustration in Carbineer John Nicholson's diary entries for early November 1899, of days spent skulking helplessly with horses in a donga to escape the Boer shellfire.²¹ The situation described by Nicholson soon gave way to dull and debilitating routine, regulations and fatigues.²² Complaints soon arose about duties such as pre-dawn mounted

¹⁷ Natal Carbineers History Centre, 'Notes on Outpost Duty: Natal Carbineers; Grierson, Scarlet into Khaki, pp160-2.

¹⁸ PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Corps, Orderbooks, 19 November 1899; Natal Carbineers History Centre, Notes, Outpost Duty; Callwell, Small Wars, p449; Pearse, Four Months Besieged, p141.

¹⁹ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p58.

²⁰ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', pp58-9. After the Boer attack of 6 January 1900, coils of barbed-wire were added (Shaw, p63).

²¹ Nicholson diary, 6, 7 and 8 November 1899; and see Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p47.

²² Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p47; Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 16 November 1899; Extracts from Notes taken on the Boer Campaign, p7, 7 and 8 November 1899; The Siege Diary of William Watson, 12 November 1899.

parades.²³ Certainly, horse guard and military fatigues dominated Carbineer routine for much of the siege. Volunteer camp orders were very strict on the matter of the much-resented precautionary pre-dawn parades to guard against Boer attack:

'All corps shall be ready drawn up on parade mounted, with one days ration, horse-feed, and 100 rounds of ammunition per man. Service Order at 4.30am sharp every day until further orders. The CSO will inspect at that hour promptly, and every man must be in his place and everything ready to start at that time.

Pack horses carrying reserve ammunition equal to not less than 100 rounds per man must be paraded at the same time.²⁴

According to Trooper Dacre Shaw, the dawn parades were entirely superfluous because the garrison was able to turn out in minutes in response to alarms.²⁵ Another fact of siege life was the nightly outpost duty, divided into three shifts, the rotation and allocation of which was drawn for by lots.²⁶ With the lengthening sick-lists from enteric and dysentery, units struggled to make up their duty rosters for routine drudgery such as guarding mealie fields and grazing animals, sometimes made dangerous by Boer sniping.²⁷

During the course of one Volunteer intervention on 27 November to thwart an attempted Boer rustling of horses grazing on the Bulwana plain, the colonial troopers and Boers enjoyed a rare opportunity to display the farm-bred skills that many on both sides boasted. The

²³ Extracts from Notes taken on the Boer Campaign, p7, 13 November 1899.

²⁴ PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Corps, Orderbooks, 30 October 1899; and see Natal Carbineers History Centre, Natal Field Force Orders, 29 October 1899; Tatham, Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith, p4, 25 November 1899; Extracts from Notes taken on the Boer Campaign, 26 December 1899; Catchpole diary, p66.

²⁵ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p54; Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 1 November 1899; Bella Crow, The Siege of Ladysmith, Ladysmith, Ladysmith Historical Society, 1991, p23, 2 December 1899.

²⁶ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p71; 'Arte', 'Reminiscences of an ex-Carbineer', 1949, p9.

²⁷ PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Camps, Orderbooks, 25 February 1900; Natal Witness, 28 February and 1 March 1900; Pearse, Four Months Besieged, pp73-4; Arthur Davey, The Defence of Ladysmith and Mafeking, Houghton, The Brentthurst Press, 1983, p55.

'Carbineers sweep round like Indian scouts to herd the startled horses back. The Volunteers do their work neatly, coolly, quickly, to the chagrin of Boers who wait in kloofs beyond [the] Klip River for a chance of carrying off some valuable horses.'²⁸

In many of these routine duties the garrison, and the Volunteers, were supported by the Ladysmith Town Guard, comprised of local residents. In a light-hearted article in June 1900, the Natal Witness praised its active and enthusiastic existence, but mockingly suggested that its members regretted not being able to depart the town timeously as their counterparts in Dundee and Newcastle had succeeded in doing, and that the

'Boers would never have fled from Wagon Hill before the Devon bayonets had they not been haunted by the fear that all these obstacles overcome they had then to meet the terrible, unrelenting, unforgiving LTG.'²⁹

In all seriousness, the Ladysmith Town Guard had stood guard over the town's railway bridge during the course of the siege and, together with the Klip River Rifle Association and the Railway Rifle Association, taken charge of the defence works overlooking the river banks.³⁰ Probably the most prominent member of the Ladysmith Town Guard was Joseph Farquhar, the incumbent Mayor of the town and also President of the Ladysmith Town Guard Rifle Association.³¹

One officer closer than most to the pulse of the garrison's military routine and operations was Major George Frederick Tatham, of the Ladysmith Troop of the Natal Carbineers, a prominent member of the Legislative Assembly of Natal (1897-1903), and a partner in the legal firm of Walton and Tatham.³²

²⁸ Pearse, Four Months Besieged, pp93-4.

²⁹ Natal Witness, 1 June 1900.

³⁰ Natal Witness, 17 July 1900.

³¹ Military Medal Society of South Africa, journal 38, April 1998, p9. See PAR, NCP, 6/1/1/52, Natal Government Gazette, LI, No.3060, 31 October 1899, pp1799-1801, for the rules of the Ladysmith Town Guard.

³² During the siege he served on Sir George White's staff, and one of his tasks appears to have been the setting up of essential heliograph communication with Estcourt (Tatham, Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith, 10 and 17 November 1899, 2 December 1899 and 12 January 1900).

A dependable tonic for morale has always been humour. The following joke which emerged in the wake of the siege, was typical:

'What is the difference between a Long Tom and Dr Leyds [the Ambassador Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of the Transvaal in Europe and former State Secretary of the Republic]? The one is a hollow cylinder and the other is a silly Hollander.'³³

This resilient humour from the siege was recorded in Ladysmith by two informal broadsheets, the Bombshell and the Ladysmith Lyre.³⁴ The following extract from the Bombshell concerned the Natal Volunteers:

'It was a wet drenching day, the Carbineers had been in the saddle some four or five hours, an order was issued from headquarters that on returning from duty the men were to change their shirts. So the captain sent for the sergeant and gave the order. "But, Sir", said the sergeant, "the men have only one apiece left." "No matter", replied Captain Molyneux, 'they must change with each other.'³⁵

For Lieutenant D Howard Gill, 21st Battery, Royal Field Artillery, who harboured a distinctly jaundiced opinion of the Natal troops in Ladysmith, the Carbineers themselves were a feature of the humorous oddities of siege life: 'Town is as usual full of wildest rumours. We call them 'Carbineers', as most originate from these gentlemen!'³⁶

Decimation by Disease

**'These men had but little of the excitement of battle
to stir their nerves and inspire them for fresh
efforts. They had to fight the sterner fight,**

³³ Natal Advertiser, 14 April 1900.

³⁴ Natal Carbineer History Centre, Ladysmith Bombshell, passim; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, pp186-7; and see Natal Witness, 4 January 1900.

³⁵ Ladysmith Bombshell, 8 January 1900.

³⁶ UNISA Archives, Gill diary, p69, 6 November 1899.

A glance at the casualty figures for the Natal Volunteers trapped in Ladysmith reveals that the overwhelming majority of deaths were the result of disease, once the rash of battle wounds from the engagements preceding the siege had been treated.³⁸ It was not surprising that White lamented that in the period following the last major military action of the siege, the Boer attack of 6 January 1900, 'our struggle became one against disease and starvation even more than against the enemy'.³⁹ One Carbineer death, that took place under somewhat bizarre circumstances, was that of Trooper Eustace Shaw, of a respected Karkloof settler family. Delirious from enteric, he stumbled into the Klip River on 20 February 1900 and was drowned.⁴⁰

The ratio of deaths from disease to fatal battle casualties was in line with overall statistics for military campaigns until World War I.⁴¹ One estimated casualty ratio for the siege was 600 fatalities from disease to 211 battle dead.⁴² At the outbreak of the war, the anticipated ratio was very different, as suggested by Volunteer camp orders on 12 October, which detailed each regiment to furnish one only man daily to the regimental surgeon, and four from each squadron to act as regimental stretcher-bearers.⁴³

By 28 February 1900, it was estimated that 10 668 men of all ranks, or 70 per cent of the

³⁷ Reverend WE Sellers, From Aldershot to Pretoria, London, The Religious Tract Society, 1900, pp193-4.

³⁸ David Humphry, 'Intombi Camp Hospital', Medal News, February 1997, p19.

³⁹ NAR, Leyds 1043, CD 458, White to Chief-of-Staff, 23 March 1900, p25.

⁴⁰ Extracts from Notes taken on the Boer Campaign, 25 February 1900; Charles Scott Shaw, Tales from the Karkloof Hills, Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter, 1990, p68.

⁴¹ Stone, 'The Victorian Army: Health, Hospitals and Social Conditions', p7; and see Roger N Buckley, 'The Destruction of the British Army in the West Indies 1793-1815: A Medical History', Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research, 56/1978, passim; Black, War and the World, p165.

⁴² Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p744.

⁴³ PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Camps, Orderbooks, 12 October 1899.

garrison, had passed through the hospitals.⁴⁴ The chief killers were enteric (typhoid fever) and dysentery.⁴⁵ Enteric in particular appeared as soon as large military forces became stationary within a relatively confined area for any length of time, as was the case during a siege.⁴⁶ This had been the case in Ladysmith even before the siege. (See pages 63-4.)

The Colony was also concerned about the negative impact on health of British military concentrations in centres other than Ladysmith. In March 1901, for example, a health crisis erupted in Durban regarding a possible outbreak of bubonic plague in the remount depot at the Lord's Ground British military base.⁴⁷ Pietermaritzburg's medical officer had also reported alarming statistics of infectious diseases for the year ending 31 July 1899. Enteric was the most prevalent disease listed for the city during this period.⁴⁸

A chief cause of disease in Ladysmith was contaminated water, with the town's waterworks

⁴⁴ NAR, Leyds 1043, CD 458, White to Chief-of-Staff, 23 March 1900, p22; Natal Witness, 20 March 1900; Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, pp743-4; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, II, p655, Appendix 15. According to Military Medal Society of South Africa, newsletter 2/17, November 1980, p1, garrison losses from disease between 2 November 1899 and 28 February 1900 amounted to 12 officers and 529 other ranks.

⁴⁵ Stone, 'The Victorian Army: Health, Hospitals and Social Conditions', pp12-3; Ian Copley, 'The Influence of the South African War on Medicine and Surgery in the 20th Century', unpublished conference paper, UNISA, August 1998, p15.

⁴⁶ Copley, 'The Influence of the South African War on Medicine and Surgery in the 20th Century', p5; Craw, The Siege of Ladysmith, p31, 16 December 1899 and p48, 17 February 1900. See Karl von den Steinen and Lynda von den Steinen, 'One Man's War: the Anglo-Boer War Reminiscences of William Frederick Avery, RAMC', unpublished conference paper, UOFS, October 1999, pp7-8, for information on an epidemic in Bloemfontein after its capture by British forces in March 1900. See Elsabé Brink, The Long March Home: A Little-known Incident in the Anglo-Boer War, Cape Town, Kwela Books, 1999, p35, for comment on dysentery and typhoid among black mineworkers on the Rand in the 1890s. Also see Joy Brain, 'Infectious diseases in Pietermaritzburg', in Laband and Haswell (eds), Pietermaritzburg 1838-1988, pp193-4, for discussion of these diseases in an urban civilian context in Pietermaritzburg.

⁴⁷ PAR, CSO 1670, minute paper 2033/1901, Precautionary measures, Bubonic Plague, various correspondence, 9 March to 21 May 1901; PAR, CSO 1670, minute paper 2033/1901, Inspector of Nuisances, Durban, to Town Clerk, 9 March 1901; PAR, CSO 1670, minute paper 2033/1901, General Commanding Natal District, Newcastle, to Hime, 5 July 1901. and see PAR, NCP, 6/1/1/55, Natal Government Gazette, LIII, No.3223, 31 December 1901, Proclamation No.131, Proclamation with regard to Regulations for Dealing with Plague and Smallpox.

⁴⁸ Natal Mercury, 15 November 1899.

occupied and destroyed by the Boers on 3 November, and the Klip River unsuitable for drinking or cooking.⁴⁹ By 11 January 1900 the Volunteers were drawing their water from improvised purification condensers at the railway station. These replaced inadequate domestic Berkefeld filters.⁵⁰ Other contributory factors to disease were poor diet and consequent malnutrition, polluted soil, and hordes of flies.⁵¹

As early as 14 November no less than half the Natal Carbineer other ranks were laid up with diarrhoea and dysentery, and all the officers were on the sick list!⁵² By the end of December 1899, Alfred Wingfield was already predicting that the garrison would be unfit to do any fighting once they were relieved.⁵³ By 23 January 1900 the Natal Carbineers could muster scarcely 100 fit men out of a complement of 430.⁵⁴ In mid-January 1900 the Commanding Officer of the Natal Carbineers, Colonel Edward Greene, was laid low with enteric, and Squadron Sergeant-Major JWV Montgomery suffered a relapse of the same affliction.⁵⁵ The two other Volunteer regiments represented in considerable number in Ladysmith, the Natal Mounted Rifles and the Border Mounted Rifles, lost an estimated 24 men from disease with many more cases who recovered. On 24 January 1900 the Border Mounted Rifles could only muster between 80 and 90 men for duty

⁴⁹ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p49; Pennington, 'Anglo-Afrikaner War 1899-1900', p61; The Siege Diary of William Watson, 3 and 9 November 1899.

⁵⁰ NAR, Leyds 1043, CD 458, White to Chief-of-Staff, 23 March 1900, pp26-7; Natal Carbineers History Centre, Natal Field Force Orders, 11 January 1900; Jeans (ed), Naval Brigades, pp209-10; Times of Natal, 26 August 1899; Natal Witness, 20 December 1901.

⁵¹ The ground on which military camps were located became polluted when waste products and effluent was buried in, or otherwise permeated into, the soil. See NAM, NAM 8302, Phipps diary, p12, 5 December 1899; Natal Mercury, 15 November 1899; Natal Witness, 28 February-1 March 1900; Copley, 'The Influence of the South Africa War on Medicine and Surgery', p15; Park, Letters from Ladysmith, p12, 27 November 1899; The Siege Diary of William Watson, 5 December 1899; Extracts from Notes taken on the Boer Campaign, 20 December 1899; Davey, The Defence of Ladysmith and Mafeking, p58; Marling, Rifleman and Hussar, p262; The Mobile Boer, p78.

⁵² Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 12 and 16 December 1899; Extracts from Notes taken on the Boer Campaign, 14 November 1899, and see 13 December 1899.

⁵³ Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 26 December 1899.

⁵⁴ Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 23 January 1900.

⁵⁵ Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 13 January 1900; Craw, The Siege of Ladysmith, p39, 10 January 1900; Natal Witness, 26 January 1900.

out of a complement of 286.⁵⁶

Most of the town's stores were commandeered by the army, but there was initially considerable wastage.⁵⁷ According to William Watson, such stores as existed were inadequately housed, often in the open at the mercy of the weather and other causes of degradation such as white ants.⁵⁸ Not surprisingly, in these circumstances, the living environment for the inhabitants steadily deteriorated.⁵⁹

The consignment of valuable horses to the slaughterhouse once the prospect of assisting the relief column by means of a flying column had receded, was one of the measures taken to supplement dwindling rations.⁶⁰ On 16 February 1900 Joseph Crosby of the Natal Carbineers lost his horse, 'Kitty', to the slaughterhouse, and in all likelihood, the production of the emergency ration soup, 'Chevril'.⁶¹ Another to lose his horse in this fashion was Trooper Roy Jackson, whose mount was slaughtered when his master fell victim to enteric.⁶² It was an expensive source of nourishment, when it is considered that the average British cavalry charger was worth an estimated £80. The

⁵⁶ Goetzsche, Rough But Ready: An Official History of the Natal Mounted Rifles, pp70-1,83 and 89-90.

⁵⁷ NAR, Leyds 1043, CD 458, South African Despatches, p8, White to Secretary of State for War, 2 December 1899; Watson, The Siege Diary of William Watson, 24 November 1899; Natal Witness, 15 March 1900; McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, p205; Brigadier John Sutton (ed), Waiting for the Waggon: The Story of the Royal Corps of Transport and its Predecessors, 1794-1993, Barnsley, Leo Cooper, 1998, pp38-9.

⁵⁸ The Siege Diary of William Watson, 17 November 1899.

⁵⁹ Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 4,9 and 18 January 1900; Natal Carbineers History Centre, William Gage, Siege of Ladysmith Diary, 16 November 1899; Extracts from Notes taken on the Boer Campaign, 19 and 22 November 1899, 3 and 24 December 1899, 21 January 1900, and 16 February 1900.

⁶⁰ Archie Hunter, Kitchener's Sword Arm: The Life and Campaigns of General Sir Archibald Hunter, Staplehurst, Spellmount Publishers, 1996, p137.

⁶¹ Extracts from Notes taken on the Boer Campaign, 16 February 1900; and see PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Camps, Orderbooks, 3 February 1900; The Times, 6 November 1899; McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, pp199-200.

⁶² Shaw, Tales from the Karkloof Hills, p67.

daily 'horse-meat bill' was as high as £3 200.⁶³ By 25 February 1900, there were only 100 cavalry horses left to each regiment.⁶⁴ Financially, the individual Natal Volunteers were hit harder than their regular counterparts, because they owned their horses.⁶⁵

Despite the hardships, it was a monumental effort that kept the garrison and civilians from starving, attributed in large measure to Colonel Edward Ward CB, late of the Army Service Corps, whom White described as the best commissariat officer since Moses, probably because the town's continued survival appeared miraculous.⁶⁶ On a local Natal Volunteer level, the redoubtable Colonel Royston also exhibited typical initiative in the search for nourishment for his men:

'Early in the investment Colonel Royston purchased from his own purse a field of growing maize. When the military claimed all foodstuffs, Colonel Royston obtained the right to use the corn when eatable for Volunteers only, a concession that the military would probably have not granted to anyone else. As a result the Volunteers were being served out with three heads of green maize daily at a critical time in the siege.'⁶⁷

Each man also had an 'emergency ration' of meat extract (probably a solidified variant of Chevril) and chocolate.⁶⁸

Although by the end of the nineteenth century the new discipline of bacteriology had identified the micro-organism responsible for dysentery and enteric, 'treatment' was often as crude as a diet

⁶³ Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, p254.

⁶⁴ Marling, Rifleman and Hussar, p263.

⁶⁵ Carruthers, Melton Prior, p182.

⁶⁶ NAR, Leyds 1043, CD 458, White to Chief-of-Staff, 23 March 1900, pp26 and 29; KCAL, MS 1513, HB Elstob and Major Peter Carmont, 'Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith', p3; Natal Witness, 12 November 1901; McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, p29; Robinson (ed), The Transvaal War Album, p94; Chisholm, Ladysmith, p193; Sutton, Waiting for the Waggon, p38.

⁶⁷ Natal Witness, 9 April 1900.

⁶⁸ PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Corps, Orderbook, 30 October 1899; PAR, CSO 1629, enclosure in minute paper 8120/1899, 29 September 1899; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p69.

of milk and barley-water.⁶⁹ There were complications when convalescent patients were prematurely returned to a full diet.⁷⁰ The long-term impact of enteric on military efficiency can be gauged from the case of a trooper of the Natal Mounted Rifles who was laid low from 15 December 1899 to 14 January 1900.⁷¹

By mid-February 1900 it was clear that the garrison would have been in no fit physical condition to withstand another determined attack. Arthur Crosby suggested sarcastically that a full bread and biscuit ration on 23 February 1900 was to give the men 'sufficient stamina to be able to stand during the process of greeting Buller'.⁷²

From a Natal colonial perspective, the most prominent siege casualty of disease was to be the Commandant of Volunteers, Colonel William Royston, and it is poignant that on 25 February, shortly before the siege was relieved, mortally ill himself with enteric, he submitted a list of fatalities and sick to the Prime Minister of Natal.⁷³ In his covering letter to this list, Royston commended the fortitude of his troops: 'The men have stood the work and confinement very well, and have taken the ups and downs in excellent spirit.'⁷⁴

Intombi Neutral Camp

'It was not a question of getting better,

⁶⁹ KCAL, KCM 1930, ET Stranack, 'Reminiscences of the Intombi Camp Hospital during the siege of Ladysmith, November 1899 to February 1900', p4; Stone, 'The Victorian Army: Health, Hospitals and Social Conditions', pp12-13; and see Catchpole diary, p34; Extracts taken from Notes on the Boer Campaign, 25,27 and 30 January 1900; Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, pp341-2.

⁷⁰ Maritzburg College Museum and Archive, Nicholson letters, Nicholson to (no name given), 19 January 1900; Times of Natal, 6 March 1900.

⁷¹ NAM, TS 7805/65, Letters by Private H Roole, 1st King's Liverpool Regiment, 9 March 1900; Natal Mercury, 14 March 1900.

⁷² Extracts from Notes taken on the Boer Campaign, 23 February 1900.

⁷³ PAR, CSO 1641, minute paper 1646/1900, Royston to Hime, 25 February 1900. For Sir Thomas Gallwey's medical report on the campaign in Natal in 1899-1900, see PRO WO 33/195, Medical Report of Sir Thomas Gallwey on the Campaign in Natal, 1899-1900, passim.

⁷⁴ Natal Mercury, 7 March 1900.

Initially, medical care for the Volunteer forces had been a hospital on the 'Market Place', alongside the Town Hall, known as the 18th British Field Hospital.⁷⁶ The operating theatres were located in the public library.⁷⁷ The origin of the neutral camp and hospital at Intombi Spruit, five kilometres southwest of the town, lay in General Joubert's rejection of a request from White to allow civilians and casualties to proceed south.⁷⁸ Joubert instead permitted a neutral non-combatant camp at desolate and marshy Intombi Spruit. A train ran from the town at 7am every morning, returning at five in the evening, for the purpose of transporting patients and supplies.⁷⁹

The civil camp component was placed under the charge of Thomas Randall Bennett, the Resident Magistrate of Ladysmith.⁸⁰ It was also under the eyes of the Boers on Bulwana, and its inmates

⁷⁵ Burnett, The 18th Hussars in South Africa, p77.

⁷⁶ Ian Copley to writer, 10 February 1999; Nurse Kate Driver, Experiences of a Siege: A Nurse looks back on Ladysmith, Ladysmith, Ladysmith Historical Society, 1978, p14.

⁷⁷ Driver, Experiences of a Siege, p7.

⁷⁸ See Siege Museum, Ladysmith, Town Guard Papers, 2 November 1899; The Siege Diary of William Watson, 4 November 1899; Humphry, 'Intombi Camp Hospital', p19; Watt, The Siege of Ladysmith, p6; Chalmers, Bombardment of Ladysmith Anticipated, pp52-4.

⁷⁹ NAR, Leyds 1043, CD 458, White to Chief-of-Staff, 23 March 1900, pp17 and 29; and see KCAL, KCM 1930, Stranack, 'Reminiscences of Intombi Camp Hospital', p2; Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 26 February 1900.

⁸⁰ Natal Witness, 11 March 1901; and see the Times of Natal, 6 March 1900; Natal Witness, 20 March 1900. Bennett is another example of the Natal civil servant who formed the core of settler administration in the Colony. In the course of a 50-year career he was Resident Magistrate of the Weenen County, Lower Tugela, Klip River and Umgeni Divisions, as well as Chief Magistrate of Pietermaritzburg from 1904 to 1905, and he served as a judge of the Native High Court. He was also involved with the organisation for two visits of prominent dignitaries, mentioned elsewhere in this study, those of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York in August 1901, and Lord Milner in October-November the same year (See KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Museum Service, TR Bennett Papers, Colonial Secretary's Office, 1745/1894, Principal Under-Secretary to Bennett, 9 April 1894, for his appointment as a JP; 2641/03, Acting Assistant Under-Secretary to Bennett, 25 March 1903, with regard to his appointment as the Magistrate of the Umgeni Division; GW Lines to Bennett, 13 July 1901, and Prime Minister's Office, 7295/1901, Hime to Bennett with regard to the Ladysmith leg of the Royal visit of 1901; telegrams, Hime to Bennett, 15-28 October 1901 with regard to Milner's visit to Ladysmith).

were virtual prisoners.⁸¹ The location of the hospital was, however, a mixed blessing for the besieging Boers because from this site the movements of the burghers could also be observed.⁸² One of the component sections at Intombi was the No.1 Natal Volunteer Field Force Hospital, under the initial command of the Principal Medical Officer of the Natal Volunteer Medical Corps, Major James Hyslop. When he fell victim to enteric, Captain OJ Currie of the Carbineers took over, and was in turn replaced by a Captain HE Fernandez.⁸³

One of the Volunteer Medical Corps officers who served on the medical staff of the Carbineers was an Australian, Captain (Dr) Robert Buntine MLA. Buntine, whose courage at Bester's Station was discussed on page 83, was another prominent Natal settler personality to cross paths with the Colony's Volunteers. He had emigrated to South Africa in 1893, and served for several years as Surgeon-Superintendent of Grey's Hospital in Pietermaritzburg.⁸⁴ During the siege he was attached to the Carbineers from the Natal Volunteer Medical Corps, which in 1895 had absorbed the medical detachments of the Carbineers, the Durban Light Infantry, and the Natal Mounted Rifles.⁸⁵ He did not transfer to Intombi in November, and must have remained at the Volunteer Hospital in the Town Hall.⁸⁶ He was an extremely resilient person, and was the only Volunteer doctor still fit for duty by the end of February.⁸⁷ Following the relief of Ladysmith, Buntine served as Medical Officer-in-Charge of the Legislative Assembly Hospital in Pietermaritzburg.⁸⁸ In 1915 he was elected to the Legislative Assembly for Pietermaritzburg South, and was widely mourned

⁸¹ Times of Natal, 6 March 1900; Natal Advertiser, 19 March 1900.

⁸² Erasmus, 'Die Ineenstorting van die Boeremagte', p78.

⁸³ Natal Witness, 20 March 1900; Natal Mercury, 25 October 1900; Humphry, 'Intombi Camp Hospital', p19; Chisholm, Ladysmith, p99; and for a nominal roll and brief service record of the Natal Volunteer Medical Corps, see Natal Volunteer Record, pp78-9 and 169-170. For a more thorough discussion of Natal Volunteer medical services and personnel, see Graeme Fuller, 'Medical Services', in Wassermann and Kearney (eds), A Warrior's Gateway, pp198-203.

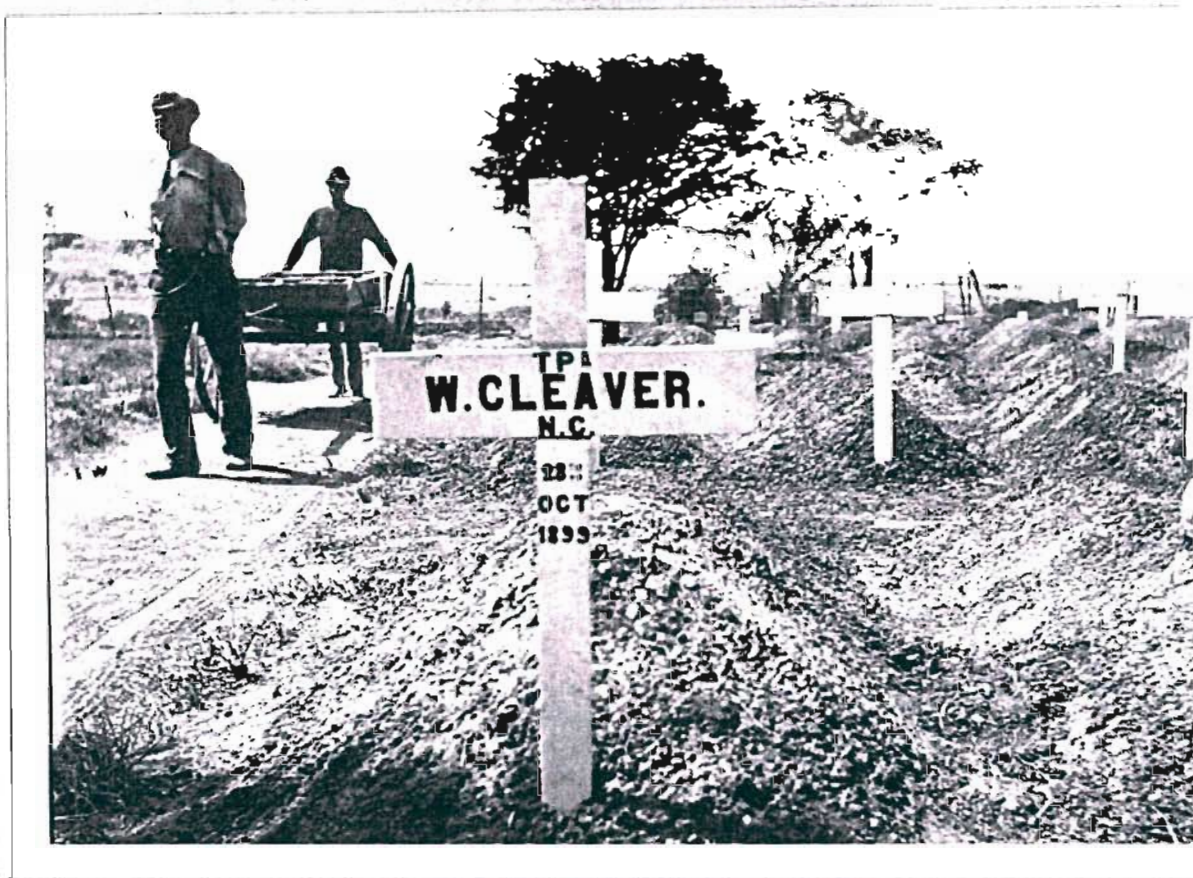
⁸⁴ Natal Mercury, 25 October 1900; RL Wallace, The Australians at the Boer War, AWM and Australian Government Publications, 1976, p57.

⁸⁵ Natal Carbineers History Centre, booklet, '1 Medical Battalion Group 1895-1990'.

⁸⁶ Natal Carbineers History Centre, RA Buntine Papers, 'The Life of Sam Campbell', p223.

⁸⁷ Watkins-Pitchford, Besieged in Ladysmith, pp96-7 and 119.

⁸⁸ Natal Mercury, 25 October 1900.



3. Each fatality among the Natal volunteers was keenly felt.



4. The wheelbarrow race, Volunteer sports meeting, Ladysmith, 2 December 1899.



5. A simple announcement of a major event in the war history of Natal, October 1900.



6. Pietermaritzburg, the pomp and ceremony of the Royal visit of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York, August 1901.

in Natal when he was drowned at sea in September 1918.⁸⁹

The medical facilities at Intombi were poor, with floorboards in lieu of beds for many patients, and two nurses responsible for up to a hundred men, and morale was hard hit by the escalating fatality rate from dysentery and enteric.⁹⁰ By mid-December 1899 the Intombi Camp reportedly 'reeked of enteric'.⁹¹ On 13 February Alfred Wingfield, a Carbineer, lamented that 'our fellows continue to go off one by one - Lewis Birkett NC of Dundee and also another man in that troop died yesterday'.⁹² By early February 1900 the Carbineer staff officer in Pietermaritzburg was fielding queries from anxious relatives of the besieged in regard to Volunteer graves.⁹³ In fact, during this last month of the siege the dead at Intombi were buried at an alarming rate of 28 per day.⁹⁴

Louis Creswicke lamented that in Intombi languished the 'pathetic remnants of the hale and healthy regiments who had marched to the front in October'.⁹⁵ Wingfield commented on the cross-section of Natal society in the Volunteer ward:

'There is a strange assortment of invalid Volunteers in this ward. Some of them, starting from my right, are the Rev GE Pennington, rector of Greytown, and our chaplain (ie, to the Volunteer force); next to him Mr Paul Butler, sergeant-at-arms in the Legislative Assembly, and presently lieutenant in the recently raised howitzer battery of artillery from Maritzburg.

⁸⁹ Natal Witness, 21 September 1918.

⁹⁰ Extracts from Notes taken on the Boer Campaign, 29 January 1900; Driver, Experiences of a Siege, p27; Rita Snyman, 'A Nurse Looks Back on the Siege of Ladysmith', Africana Notes and News, 22/5, 1977, p1.

⁹¹ Driver, Experiences of a Siege, p29, and see p26; Extracts from Notes taken on the Boer Campaign, 1 January 1900.

⁹² Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 13 February 1900; and see Willcox, The Fifth (Royal Irish) Lancers, p258; Sellers, From Aldershot to Pretoria, p204.

⁹³ Natal Advertiser, 8 February 1900.

⁹⁴ Maureen Richards, 'Historic Ladysmith: Focus on Siegetown', Ladysmith Publicity Association, 1995, p20; Sellers, From Aldershot to Pretoria, pp213-4.

⁹⁵ Creswicke, South Africa and the Transvaal War, III, pp79-80.

His next bedmate is one of our Carbineer subalterns, Vanderplank, and next to him is his younger brother, Sergeant-Major Vanderplank. Then there is Dr Currie - one of the leading Maritzburg doctors, surgeon-captain on the Volunteer medical staff. Then a sergeant in the Natal Police, two troopers of the Carbineers, a sergeant-major of the Imperial Light Horse, an AB in the Natal Naval Volunteers, a trooper Natal Mounted Rifles, sundry Border Mounted Rifles etc, etc - a strange medley - a few wounded, the majority enteric fever.⁹⁶

Several of the nurses themselves were struck down with the dreaded infectious diseases such as enteric.⁹⁷

It was unusual in the Anglo-Boer War for female nurses to be found at the front. As a rule they were restricted to ambulance-trains and railheads.⁹⁸ From the mid-nineteenth century until 1949 there was a virtual closed shop against civilian male nurses, but the reverse was the case in military medical facilities. There were several reasons for this, including the risk factor close to the front, and the necessity of special facilities for 'ladies'. Male nurses shared the same quarters as the troops.⁹⁹ In colonial campaigns against 'savage' opponents, the risk of sexual violation for female nurses if captured was considered too great. With the Boers this was not expected to happen.¹⁰⁰ It was also unusual for British military authorities to accept such 'civil aid', as against the public or private philanthropy evident in such facilities as the Princess Christian Hospital Train.¹⁰¹ In the broader context and in the interests of Natal settler progress, the nurses were also highly regarded as settler pioneers.¹⁰²

⁹⁶ Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 24 February 1900.

⁹⁷ Driver, Experiences of a Siege, p29; Natal Advertiser, 19 March 1900.

⁹⁸ Snyman, 'A Nurse Looks Back', p5; and see PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Camps, Orderbooks, 10 November 1899; NAR, Leyds 1043, CD 458, White to Chief-of-Staff, 23 March 1900, p34; Report of the Good Hope Society for Aid to Sick and Wounded in War: South African War, 1899-1902, Cape Town, WA Richards & Sons, 1902, p9.

⁹⁹ Stone, 'The Victorian Army: Health, Hospitals and Social Conditions', pp48-51.

¹⁰⁰ Stone, 'The Victorian Army: Health, Hospitals and Social Conditions', p303.

¹⁰¹ The Times, 13-17 April 1900.

¹⁰² Natal Daily News, 27 February 1950; Natal Witness, 3 March 1950; Ruth E Gordon, Petticoat Pioneers: Women of Distinction, Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter and Federation of Women's Institutes, 1988, pp113-8.

One Volunteer nurse, Kate Driver, had trained at Grey's Hospital, in Pietermaritzburg, under the guidance of Dr OJ Currie, who in 1899 joined the Natal Carbineers as Surgeon-Captain. Many of the siege nurses had trained at Grey's. Nurse Driver herself enrolled as Currie's surgical nurse when war was declared.¹⁰³ On 30 September 1899 Nurse Justin Otto received the following notification: 'Please hold yourself in readiness to proceed to Ladysmith, at short notice, for duty with the Volunteers.'¹⁰⁴

**The Volunteer Response to one of the Adversities
of the Siege: Shellfire**

**'Natal Carbineer, as a shell flies in
the vicinity of his tent:
"Bother these fellows, they're getting
careless with their shooting,
if they don't look out, they'll
be hurting somebody."'¹⁰⁵**

The siege of Ladysmith is possibly best remembered for the Boer bombardment of the town, and its almost ceaseless artillery exchanges. The first Volunteer siege fatality from Boer shellfire was a Trooper Gerard Schram, of the Natal Mounted Rifles, struck in the throat by a splinter while asleep in his patrol tent on the afternoon of 14 November 1899.¹⁰⁶ He was, in fact, the first Volunteer siege casualty of any sort since the death of Taunton on 3 November.¹⁰⁷ Another trooper of the Natal Mounted Rifles, James Crickmore, was killed by a shell on 1 December.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Driver, Experiences of a Siege, pp3 and 6; Snyman, 'A Nurse Looks Back', p181.

¹⁰⁴ Siege Museum, Ladysmith, memorandum, Major Hyslop to Nurse Otto, 30 September 1899; Times of Natal, 19 July 1899.

¹⁰⁵ Ladysmith Bombshell, 24 November 1899.

¹⁰⁶ PAR, GH 1679, Diary of Events, p75, 18 November 1899; CSO 2609, Anglo-Boer War telegrams, Royston to Hime, 16 November 1899; Extracts taken from Notes on the Boer Campaign, 14 November 1899; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p48; Natal Witness, 9 December 1899; Natal Mercury, 28 February 1950; Natal Volunteer Record, p139.

¹⁰⁷ Natal Mercury, 20 November 1899.

¹⁰⁸ Natal Volunteer Record, p139.

Throughout the siege the slightest 'indiscretion' by the garrison drew the fire of the Boer guns.¹⁰⁹ Daily routine and camp relocations were to a large extent dictated by the predictable routine of the Boer shellfire. For example, once the shells struck the ILH lines, the nearby Carbineers knew that they would receive no further attention until the following morning.¹¹⁰ An anonymous veteran left this personal account of being under shellfire in one of the garrison's encampments:

'The writer's first taste of fire was an unexpected shelling of the camp when dinners were being prepared, and all men were in the peaceful frame of mind inseparable from the fragrant smell of cooking meat. A high whistle, like an escape of gas in the air, a heavy thud upon the ground between two rows of tents, an appalling crash and a leap into the air of clods of earth, and a whirring and groaning of fragments of jagged iron'.¹¹¹

The Boer shelling was surprisingly ineffective. On 6 December William Watson wrote: 'I am tired of writing about the shells. It is just shelling always, more or less, and as far as I can see, may continue until the middle of next year, without any advantage to either side.'¹¹² A ratio of an estimated 13 shells for every fatal casualty caused was not a very efficient means of waging war, and greater casualties should have been expected under siege conditions, where the war's general trend of reduced troop densities would have been counterbalanced.¹¹³ Overall casualties from bombardment amounted to only one officer and 33 men killed outright, and 25 officers and 207 men wounded, of whom two officers and 16 men subsequently died.¹¹⁴ Three reasons for the

¹⁰⁹ Extracts from Notes taken on the Boer Campaign, 27 November 1899; Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 27 November 1899; McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, pp101-2.

¹¹⁰ KCAL, KCM 1791, Campbell, 'Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith', 3 November 1899; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p47; The Times, 8 December 1899.

¹¹¹ Natal Witness, 17 January 1902.

¹¹² The Siege Diary of William Watson, 6 December 1899; and see UNISA Archives, Gill diary, 6 November 1899, p75; Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 20 January 1900; Anon., Kruger's Secret Service, 'By one who was in it', London, John MacQueen, 1900, p205.

¹¹³ Copley, 'The Influence of the South African War on Medicine and Surgery', p7; Stone, 'The Victorian Army: Health, Hospitals and Social Conditions', pp239-40; and see Sternberg, My Experience of the Boer War, p229; Porch, 'Imperial War: From the Seven Years War to the First World War', in Townshend (ed), The Oxford History of Modern War, pp101-2; Jeans (ed), Naval Brigades, p223; Louis Changuion, The Silence of the Guns: The History of the Long Toms of the Anglo-Boer War, Pretoria, Protea Book House, 2001, p35.

¹¹⁴ Natal Witness, 23 May 1900; Makins, Surgical Experiences in South Africa, p474.

general ineffectiveness of Boer artillery, and British, during the siege, was due to the limited explosive power of the ammunition of the period, its generally poor quality, the difficulty encountered with the setting of time-fuses, and soft earth that diluted the impact of detonations.¹¹⁵

During the siege the Boers fired an estimated 18 000 to 20 000 shells into the town, to which the British replied with approximately 6 000.¹¹⁶ Shell fragments became prized souvenirs, so much so that this pursuit had to be officially banned.¹¹⁷ There was one amusing case recorded by the Natal Witness in early January 1900:

'On a certain morning a shell fell with a tremendous bang into the garden of the chief constable (Mr McDonald) and made a hole big enough to hide even the burly figure of the CC himself. Immediately from the street there rushed a Carbineer, who began to dig industriously for the buried bomb. The CC from his verandah called out: 'Stop that! I claim all shells that alight in my garden.' The Carbineer was determined to secure the shell, so dug bravely on. The CC then peremptorily ordered him off, adding something about an arrest. The Carbineer reluctantly withdrew, but had a parting shot. 'The next shell', he cried, 'will, I hope, come a little nearer to you.' But the CC got his shell.'¹¹⁸

There were, however, tragic exceptions to this nonchalant amusement and apparent immunity. For the Natal Volunteers the single most devastating shell was that fired from the 6-inch Creusot on Bulwana, which struck the horse-lines of the Natal Carbineers on the early morning of 18

¹¹⁵ Natal Witness, 3 January 1900; McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, pp103-5; Samuelson, Long, Long Ago, pp156-7; Sibbald, The War Correspondents, p87; Hall, The Hall Handbook of the Anglo-Boer War, pp6-8; Darrell Hall, Long Tom, Durban, the author, 1994, chapter 2; Changuion, The Silence of the Guns, 82-3, and see appendices B and C; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p49; Taitz, The War Memories of Commandant Ludwig Krause, pp24,47 and 48; Eksteen, 'Die Wedervaringe van JF van Eerden', p22. During the siege British guns were individually assigned to defensive posts, in a similar fashion to the Boer artillery, but in campaign battlefield situations the British artillery was concentrated in batteries, as at the battle of Colenso.

¹¹⁶ Watt, The Siege of Ladysmith, p27; and see Natal Witness, 26 January 1900; Steevens, From Capetown to Ladysmith, p100; Evans, The Boer War, p29; Changuion, The Silence of the Guns, pp20-21.

¹¹⁷ UNISA Archives, Gill diary, 6 November 1899, p76; PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Camps Orderbooks, 21 November 1899; Carruthers, Melton Prior, p170; Hunter, Kitchener's Sword Arm, p130.

¹¹⁸ Natal Witness, 4 January 1900.

December 1899, immediately after the daily exercise parade.¹¹⁹

The detonation sprayed lethal fragments into the horse-lines.¹²⁰ Arthur Crosby was nearby:

'The shell passed over my head, so close that I could feel the draught. A general stampede of horses with cries for help. I was on the spot in a few seconds to find several poor fellows in death's agony.'¹²¹

Shocked eyewitness reports abounded: Donald Macdonald described the fate of Trooper A Nicholson: 'Nicholson, another private, lay close by, his right leg hanging by a tendon, a piece of the thigh-bone blown yards away.'¹²² He also witnessed a three-legged horse plunging amongst the tents.¹²³ The Volunteer Veterinary Officer, Major Herbert Watkins-Pitchford, was struck by the sight of a man putting five human legs in a sack.¹²⁴

Despite the grisly scene the casualties were modest, three men killed and seven wounded, but the concerned commentary of Natal colonial society, and that of the Volunteer regiments themselves, was immediately apparent. Trooper William Craighead Smith, one of those killed was, for

¹¹⁹ Natal Mercury, 20 November 1900; Tatham, Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith, p9, 18 December 1899; and see McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, p144. There is a curious sequence of apparent tit-for-tat retaliation in this incident. One of the reasons for the colonial attack on Gun Hill was to avenge the Boer bombardment of the Volunteer hospital in the Town Hall. From that date it was said that the Boer gunners, having ascertained that the Carbineers was one of the regiments involved, determined to target this Volunteer regiment.

¹²⁰ KCAL, KCM 1546, letter, Dan Deeves to brother, 18 December 1899; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p55; Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 18 December 1899; 'Artee', Reminiscences of an ex-Carbineer, p9; Craw, The Siege of Ladysmith, p32, 18 December 1899; Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, p142; BW Martin, in A Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith, No.4, 18 December 1899, p38.

¹²¹ Extracts from Notes taken on the Boer Campaign, 18 December 1899.

¹²² Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, p143; and see Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p55.

¹²³ Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, p143.

¹²⁴ Watkins-Pitchford, Besieged in Ladysmith, p41.

example, described as the 'dashing full-back footballer of Dundee'.¹²⁵

One of those fatally wounded, Trooper T Elliot, a boy of 18 years, lost both legs at the thighs, and lived only a few hours after the blast. His father was in the Intombi camp at the time.¹²⁶ The violent death of this youngster touched an emotional chord in many commentators. Another tragic detail was that he had joined up in the Carbineers against the wishes of his mother.¹²⁷

The four casualties from 18 December were buried the following night in the town cemetery. The ceremony was attended by 250 men from the Carbineers, plus two squadrons from the Border Mounted Rifles and the Natal Mounted Rifles.¹²⁸ Despite the measures in place for compensation, the Natal government appeared to have been very slow in this regard in at least one of these cases, that of William Craighead Smith.¹²⁹

According to the Natal Witness, Colonel Greene and his Carbineer officers were deeply moved by the tragedy, a hallmark reaction to losses in action, it would appear, of many a Volunteer officer and NCO throughout the history of these regiments.¹³⁰ Morale took a knock, especially as the incident had come hard on the heels of Buller's defeat at Colenso on 15 December, which had set back any prospect of relief.¹³¹ It must also be borne in mind that until the first major battles

¹²⁵ Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, p142; and see Times of Natal, 23 and 28 December 1899; Natal Witness, 3 April 1900.

¹²⁶ Field-Marshal Lord Carver, The National Army Museum Book of the Boer War, London, Sidgwick and Jackson in association with the National Army Museum, 1999, pp60-1.

¹²⁷ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p55; MW Taylor, 'How we took the Guns: an Incident in the Relief of Ladysmith', The Kelvin Press Christmas Annual, 1913, p63; Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, pp142-3.

¹²⁸ Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 19 December 1899.

¹²⁹ PAR, CSO 1695, minute paper 53/1902, Compensation in the Estate of William Craighead Smith, Shepstone, Wylie & Binns to Colonial Secretary, 3 January 1902, and Permanent Under-Secretary to Shepstone, Wylie & Binns, 7 January 1902.

¹³⁰ Natal Witness, 3 January 1900.

¹³¹ Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 18 December 1899; Natal Carbineers History Centre, Gage diary, 18 December 1899; Wilson, With the Flag to Pretoria, II, p501; Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, p143.

of the Anglo-Boer War, the Natal Volunteers had never faced shellfire of any sort.

However, in a manner suggestive of a conscious effort to refocus interest and restore the shaken morale of Volunteers, and even the Colony at large, considerable attention was devoted to several miraculous escapes from shellfire during the siege. On one occasion Saddler-Sergeant Tom Lyle entered Carbineer folklore when he escaped injury when a shell-fragment struck the wooden milk-box on which he was seated and smashed four rifles strapped to the tent-pole, depositing him unhurt on the ground.¹³² Lyle managed the Dundee branch of a well-known Pietermaritzburg firm of saddlers, Lyle Brothers.¹³³ On 27 December, a Carbineer trooper was lying under a tree cleaning his carbine, when the tree was snapped off a few feet above him, and the barrel of the carbine twisted off its stock, by a shell that exploded less than three yards (2.7 metres) away.¹³⁴

On the whole, with some extra precautions, routine was not disturbed to a marked degree by the shelling. Deep sandbagged shelter-trenches were dug at the rear of the various camps, and trumpeters appointed to sound an alarm on the sighting of the tell-tale puff of smoke from the Boer guns firing.¹³⁵

Another area in which the Volunteers sought to defy the Boer bombardment and boost their morale was that of sport. The Natal Witness sports correspondent, 'Meteor', epitomised the prevailing sentiment of stoic pluck in adversity that was popular in the Empire at this time: 'A plague on them [the Boers] for spoiling sport'.¹³⁶ In the opinion of Donald Macdonald, 'whenever

¹³² Extracts from Notes taken on the Boer Campaign, 18 December 1899; Sibbald, The War Correspondents: The Boer War, p103.

¹³³ Twentieth Century Impressions of Natal, p254.

¹³⁴ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Gage diary, 27 November 1899; Watkins-Pitchford, Besieged in Ladysmith, p25; and see McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, pp121-2; Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, p128.

¹³⁵ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Peter Francis Papers, Band History file; UNISA Archives, Gill diary, 22 December 1899, p104; Extracts from Notes taken on the Boer Campaign, 18 December 1899; Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 22 December 1899; Martin in Unpublished Letters from the Siege, 18 December 1899, p38; Watkins-Pitchford, Besieged in Ladysmith, pp80-1.

¹³⁶ Natal Witness, 5 March 1900.

British armies are in a really serious fix they bluff it on the national affection for sport'.¹³⁷ The role that sport played in the upliftment of the Volunteers was typified by the football match arranged between a combined Carbineer-NMR team and the Gordon Highlanders on 18 November 1899. The scoreline of 2-1 to the Gordons was of secondary importance to the shell that disrupted proceedings, fortunately without casualties!¹³⁸ There was also polo (with several officers mounted on mules), tennis, and cricket.¹³⁹

On Saturday 2 December an ambitious Volunteer Athletics Sports meeting, attended by Generals White and Hunter, was also successfully completed, despite the 'disruption' of shellfire.¹⁴⁰ The Dutch-language Gedenkboek van den Oorlog was sufficiently impressed by these displays of fortitude and 'business-as-usual', to quote, in translation from the Natal Mercury coverage of one of these sports meetings:

'Cricket, polo, en voetbal-wedstrijden zijn aan de orde van den dag. Er werd een cricket-wedstrijd tusschen de Border Mounted Rifles, de Natal Mounted Rifles en de Natal Carabineers, toen een bom vlak in de nabijheid barstte.'¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, p82.

¹³⁸ Extracts from Notes taken on the Boer Campaign, 18 November 1899; Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 18 November 1899; and see McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, pp85-6; and Changouin, The Silence of the Guns, p33. One unusual sporting proposition, that never reached fruition, came from reporter George Lynch, following his capture by Boers outside Ladysmith in early December 1899. Lynch proposed a football match between a British and Dutch team at a 'neutral' venue such as the Intombi Hospital. On Christmas Day 1914, on the Western Front during World War I, German and British troops did emerge from their trenches in a few sectors to exchange pleasantries and kick a football about (Talana Museum, 'The Story of the War', in War Pictures, p260).

¹³⁹ Extracts from Notes taken on the Boer Campaign, 18 November 1899; Craw, The Siege of Ladysmith, 19 November 1899; Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 21 and 25 November 1899; Times of Natal, 1 December 1899.

¹⁴⁰ Talana Museum, 'Diary of a Durban Shop Assistant', p51, 25 December 1899; Extracts from Notes taken on the Boer Campaign, 2 December 1899; Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 2 December 1899; Craw, The Siege of Ladysmith, p23, 2 December 1899; Nicholson diary, 2 December 1899; Catchpole diary, p42; Times of Natal, 10 March 1900; and see Lines, The Ladysmith Siege, p55; Pearse, Four Months Besieged, p161.

¹⁴¹ 'Cricket, polo, and football matches were the order of the day. There was a cricket-match between the Border Mounted Rifles, the Natal Mounted Rifles and the Natal Carbineers, until a
(continued...)

On 4 December a 'Grand Promenade Concert' was held under similar conditions.¹⁴² These regimental activities declined as disease, deteriorating diet and shells took their toll.¹⁴³

Despite the deepening crisis, the Ladysmith garrison's 1899 festive season was also surprisingly buoyant. RJ McHugh remarked that 'the advent of Christmas found us almost as jolly as if we were at home'.¹⁴⁴ On Christmas Eve a group of Carbineers and ILH toured the town and camps singing Christmas hymns and carols.¹⁴⁵ The appetising Christmas Dinner menu for the Carbineers officers' mess was certainly nothing to scoff at, considering the circumstances.¹⁴⁶ Several Volunteer officers, along with British officers such as General Brocklehurst, called for drinks at 'Vine Lodge', home of the prominent Ladysmith family, the Tathams. Vine Lodge appears to have been a regular watering-hole for the colonials.¹⁴⁷

Rumours of Relief

'Cheer up! Will soon be out of this hole. The column is near with lots of grub and bacey [sic].'¹⁴⁸

¹⁴¹(...continued)

shell burst in the immediate vicinity' (Gedenkboek van den Oorlog in Zuid-Afrika, p196).

¹⁴² Times of Natal, 10 March 1900; and see Extracts from Notes taken on the Boer Campaign, 1 January 1900; Lines, The Ladysmith Siege, pp38-9.

¹⁴³ UNISA Archives, Gill diary, 6 November 1899, p79; Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, pp342-3.

¹⁴⁴ McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, p152.

¹⁴⁵ Natal Witness, 3 January 1900.

¹⁴⁶ PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Camps, Orderbooks, 26 December 1899; Natal Witness, 1 March 1900; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p57; Sunday Post, 25 December 1949. This feast included chicken curry and rice, stuffed roast chicken and game. The Border Mounted Rifles enjoyed goat, mutton, potatoes, dried beans, rice, plum pudding jelly and blanc mange, washed down with champagne (Gordon, Honour Without Riches, p273).

¹⁴⁷ Chisholm, Ladysmith, p165.

¹⁴⁸ Maritzburg College Museum and Archive, Nicholson letters, Pepworth to Nicholson, Ladysmith, 25 February 1900.

In November 1899 the troops and residents of Ladysmith anticipated that the siege would be brief, and despite a fatalistic realism regarding the prospects of relief, Buller's relief army was expected to bulldoze its way through with comparative ease.¹⁴⁹ The residents and soldiers of Ladysmith were to have their hopes raised and dashed several times.

Residents were fed an assortment of rumours regarding the circumstances of the siege and the prospects for relief. These rumours had Buller taking Bloemfontein (17 November), and a Boer force appearing at Edendale, near Pietermaritzburg, on 29 November.¹⁵⁰ There was even a mistaken belief on the part of siege diarist, William Watson, that the siege and the relief failures were part of an elaborate subterfuge designed to keep the Boers in Natal while the alternative British thrust developed in the west.¹⁵¹

One of the first false alarms materialised on 28 November when news was received of the British 'victory' at Willowgrange, and 'everyone looked forward to a speedy release now'.¹⁵² The Carbineers remained under orders the next day 'to turn out at a moment's notice', vainly intending to meet the anticipated relief column from Estcourt.¹⁵³ Cynicism soon set in among residents on this issue. RJ McHugh remarked in despair about 'the capacity for imparting misleading information that distinguishes Sir George White's Intelligence Department'.¹⁵⁴

By the first week in December 1899 it was known that Buller's column would soon make an attempt to force the Boer Tugela defence line at Colenso.¹⁵⁵ Preparations were made to assist the anticipated relief:

¹⁴⁹ Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 8 November 1899.

¹⁵⁰ The Siege Diary of William Watson, 17 and 29 November 1899.

¹⁵¹ The Siege Diary of William Watson, 3 November and 18 December 1899.

¹⁵² Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 28 November 1899.

¹⁵³ Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 29 November 1899.

¹⁵⁴ Talana Museum, 'Diary of a Durban Shop Assistant', p28, 1 December 1899; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p54-5; McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, pp57 and 67-8, and see pp149-150.

¹⁵⁵ The Siege Diary of William Watson, 10 December 1899; and see Natal Carbineers History Centre, Gage diary, 13 December 1899.

'Had just finished supper [wrote Arthur Crosby of the Carbineers] and prepared to turn in when an order came to saddle up immediately with day's rations, and two days further rations to accompany us. 250 NC, 125 BMR, and about 70 NMR were picked to form a flying column to meet Buller's column. Marched over river where we took up our respective positions, and about 11 o'clock sent back to camp and dismissed, after being told that we were to take up the same position when the column was called out, which might be at any moment.'¹⁵⁶

Several sweepstakes competitions were opened to predict the relief date.¹⁵⁷ According to Dacre Shaw, 'anyone so hardy as to suggest that Buller would not be with us within a week was jeered at'.¹⁵⁸ The garrison was stunned at the British repulse on 15 December.¹⁵⁹ On the night of 13 December a flying column of 6 000 men, including 250 Carbineers and 100 Border Mounted Rifles troopers, all under Colonel Royston, had been paraded to no effect. The Ladysmith Town Guard was reactivated to free Royston's men for this task.¹⁶⁰

Such was the anticipation that 500 Volunteers reputedly had their horses dyed khaki for the occasion!¹⁶¹ The intention was that this column should fight its way through the Boer lines and link up with a similarly-constituted column from Buller's army.¹⁶² According to Herbert Mocke, Buller compounded the situation by failing to notify White of the rescheduling of his attack from 17 to 15 December.¹⁶³ The setback was announced in the following bland military 'officialese', as noted down by Alfred Wingfield of the Natal Carbineers:

¹⁵⁶ Extracts from Notes taken on the Boer Campaign, 12 December 1899; and see Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p142.

¹⁵⁷ KCAL, KCM 1930, Stranack, 'Reminiscences of the Intombi Camp Hospital', p6; Tatham, Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith, p23, 15 February 1900.

¹⁵⁸ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p54.

¹⁵⁹ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p55; and see Natal Carbineer History Centre, Gage diary, 17 December 1899; Park, Letters from Ladysmith, p19, 17 December 1899.

¹⁶⁰ Amery (ed), The Times History, III, p173; and see PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Camps, Orderbooks, 13 December 1899, for the composition of this column.

¹⁶¹ Talana Museum, 'Diary of a Durban Shop Assistant', p39, 12 December 1899.

¹⁶² Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 14 December 1899; Catchpole diary, p54; Mocke, 'Die Slag van Colenso', pp92 and 152.

¹⁶³ Mocke, 'Die Slag van Colenso', p100.

[Buller] 'had failed to make good his first attack upon Colenso, and that therefore our relief would be necessarily delayed - but that Sir George White is convinced that the garrison will hold out in the same high-spirited manner as up to the present.'¹⁶⁴

On 24 January 1900 Wingfield was on grazing fatigue on the south-western perimeter, in the direction of Colenso, when he heard 'evidence' of the battle of Spioenkop. He fancied, optimistically that 'our fellows must have taken the Boer position there'.¹⁶⁵ Once again confidence in Buller's success was misplaced.¹⁶⁶ On this occasion the rumour was circulated that Dundonald, with a flying column, had bypassed Ladysmith and established himself in a commanding position near Van Reenen's Pass, supposedly cutting off the enemy's line of retreat.¹⁶⁷ On 5 February 1900, another Ladysmith flying column was duly prepared for action that never materialised.¹⁶⁸ On 8 February the garrison's Headquarter's Staff Diary recorded that, as far as supplies was concerned, the anticipated date of the garrison's collapse was 1 April 1900.¹⁶⁹

By 20 February there at last appeared to be some light at the end of the tunnel when Colonel Greene received a heliograph communication from Major Duncan McKenzie that read: 'Best wishes from us all, tides looks much like turning.'¹⁷⁰ Yet, even on 27 February, the day of Cronje's surrender at Paardeberg, Lieutenant-Colonel CW Park 'saw no chance of relief this month now...and I suppose we must once more make up our minds to another 10 days or so.'¹⁷¹

In Pietermaritzburg the ever-imminent relief had the effect of stimulating plans for relief

¹⁶⁴ Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 17 December 1899. Buller's failure was announced in a Natal Field Force Special Order on 17 December 1899.

¹⁶⁵ Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 24 January 1900.

¹⁶⁶ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Gage diary, 17-24 January 1900; and see Cape Argus Weekly Edition, 14 March 1900; Carver, The National Army Museum Book of the Boer War, p82.

¹⁶⁷ Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, p228.

¹⁶⁸ PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Camps, Orderbooks, 5 February 1900.

¹⁶⁹ NAR, FK 1876 (WO 32/885), Headquarters Staff Diary, Ladysmith, 8 February 1900.

¹⁷⁰ Craw, The Siege of Ladysmith, p49, 20 February 1900.

¹⁷¹ Park, Letters from Ladysmith, p48, 27 February 1900.

celebrations in the city starting as early as 22 January 1900.¹⁷² It is uncertain whether on 28 February the forces in Ladysmith had been aware that a Boer retirement from the siege-ring was already well underway. According to Breytenbach, White had contacted Buller that morning, informing him that the garrison could hold out until 1 April.¹⁷³ In fact, the further cutting of rations had convinced the cynical inhabitants that Buller had been repulsed once again.¹⁷⁴ This time, when news was received at about 2pm on the 28th that the Relief Army had "thoroughly beaten enemy", it had been kept strictly secret.¹⁷⁵ However, according to the Natal Witness, both the Natal Carbineers and the Hussars (either the British 18th or 19th Hussars, this is not precisely identified) stood to arms during the course of the afternoon, while the Natal Advertiser of 2 March reported that when 'the first intimation was received that the relief force was approaching, the Border Mounted Rifles and the Natal Carbineers were sent out to escort it in'.¹⁷⁶ On 1 March 1900 one siege soldier wrote rather laconically: 'The siege was raised last night by the Natal Carbineers and ILH. We are all uncommonly pleased at the way our gallant boys relieved us.'¹⁷⁷

One controversial aspect to emerge from the relief saga was Buller's alleged instruction to White, in the wake of the battle of Colenso, to destroy his remaining stores and ammunition and make the best terms with the Boers as possible.¹⁷⁸ According to an observer with the Boers, White had been more than willing to surrender the garrison.¹⁷⁹ Colonel Frank Rhodes in Ladysmith was of

¹⁷² Natal Witness, 22,23 and 27 January 1900.

¹⁷³ Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, III, pp560-1.

¹⁷⁴ Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, III, p562.

¹⁷⁵ Quoted in Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, III, p562; and see Natal Witness, 2 March 1900.

¹⁷⁶ Natal Witness, 2 March 1900; Natal Advertiser, 2 March 1900, located in Durban Local History Museum, DLHM 575/568/1.

¹⁷⁷ Durban Local History Museum, F575/568/1, letter, Tom to FB Stephenson, 1 March 1900; and see Himeville Museum, Harding diary, 28 February-1 March 1900; Chalmers, Bombardment of Ladysmith Anticipated, chapter 10.

¹⁷⁸ Natal Witness, 4 and 11 November 1901, 5 August 1902; Amery (ed), The Times History, II, pp459-463; Pemberton, Battles of the Boer War, p151; Holt, The Boer War, pp155-6.

¹⁷⁹ The Mobile Boer, p76.

the opinion that the surrender proposal came from White and was vetoed by Buller!¹⁸⁰ However, neither of these rumours can be verified. In the light of the sensationalism surrounding Buller's alleged instruction, as well as casualties that for a siege were comparatively light, it is also worth bearing in mind that all three of the sieges of the Anglo-Boer War - Ladysmith, Kimberley and Mafeking - were loosely prosecuted.¹⁸¹ There was little evidence of classic siege warfare, such as the siege of Badajoz (1812) in the Peninsular War.¹⁸²

Congratulations on the relief poured in. On 3 March 1900, for example, the Daily Graphic published an exchange of telegrams between Queen Victoria and White:

'Thank God that you and all those with you are safe after your long and trying siege, borne with such heroism.

I congratulate you and all under you from the bottom of my heart.

Trust you are all not very much exhausted.'

'Your Majesty's most gracious message has been received by me with deepest gratitude, and with enthusiasm by the troops.

Any hardships and privations are a hundred times compensated for by the sympathy and appreciation of our Queen, and your Majesty's message will do more to restore both officers and men than anything else.'¹⁸³

The sovereign's sentiments were echoed on 6 March by the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, Lord Wolseley.¹⁸⁴ These messages may well have reflected conventional official British sentiments couched in correctly formal terms, but for the Natal colonists, for whom the siege had been a trial for many of their number, soldier and civilian alike, there was a need for such praise and re-affirmation of Imperial sentiment. The Queen's message, and several others in the same vein, including one from Milner, the High Commissioner in South Africa, was published in the

¹⁸⁰ NAM, 7812/26, Diaries of Colonel Frank Rhodes, 28 January 1900. Frank Rhodes was the brother of Cecil John Rhodes.

¹⁸¹ Knight, Go To Your God Like a Soldier, p188; Markham, Guns of the British Empire, p7.

¹⁸² Philip Haythornwaite, 'Deadly Breach', Medal News, August 1999, p28; Strachan, European Armies and the Conduct of War, p5; see Smurthwaite, The Boer War 1899-1902, p67.

¹⁸³ Daily Graphic, 3 March 1900.

¹⁸⁴ Willcox, The Fifth (Royal Irish) Lancers, p261.

Natal Volunteer Record under the heading of 'tributes'.¹⁸⁵ There was to be a resurgence of this effusive sentiment on the occasion of the Royal visit of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York to Natal in August 1901.¹⁸⁶

Some of the besieged, such as William Watson, were less complimentary: 'The defence of Ladysmith is no doubt creditable to General White as a soldier. We townsfolk, and our starving Volunteers, however, will long remember it with feelings of horror, anger and disgust.'¹⁸⁷

Conclusion

Within besieged Ladysmith, cut off from the rest of the Colony, the Natal Volunteers, also unable to demonstrate their tactical abilities, did display a fortitude that enhanced their reputation. Once the adjustment to the shock and frustration of the siege, with its attendant boredom, had been made, the Volunteers successfully withstood opponents not hitherto faced on this scale in their history: disease and bombardment.

The large number of deaths suffered from disease, especially enteric and dysentery, as well as the casualties inflicted by shellfire, were met by the Ladysmith garrison with a positive response that turned what should have proved a humiliating capitulation into something of a celebrated triumph for British regulars and colonials alike. The qualities of stoic endurance evident in both soldiers and civilian residents was epitomised by the medical care of the volunteer nurses, especially in Intombi Camp, defiant sports meetings, Christmas festivities, and tales of miraculous escapes from Boer shells.

Ladysmith was cut off from the Colony, but Natal settler society, including some prominent figures, was well represented among the ranks of the defenders, and constituted a focus of settler

¹⁸⁵ Natal Volunteer Record, pp196-7.

¹⁸⁶ See chapter XIII for detailed discussion of the commemoration of the Natal war effort and the associated confirmation of Imperial sentiment. In terms of primary documentary evidence from official British sources, especially political, allowance must be made for the conventions illustrated in the Queen Victoria-White exchange, especially where the sentiments expressed do not necessarily reflect the actual events.

¹⁸⁷ The Siege Diary of William Watson, 21 February 1900.

concern. The risk, however, was that this siege would consequently be interpreted in Natal as the climax of the war, and that a falling-off of commitment would follow its successful resolution.

CHAPTER VII

VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION IN MILITARY OPERATIONS DURING THE SIEGE OF LADYSMITH

Early Skirmishes

Although the Ladysmith garrison chafed at the overall inaction of a passive defence, the besieged Volunteer squadrons were called into action almost immediately after the Boer siege-ring closed around Ladysmith on 2 November 1899.¹ On that day the Natal Carbineers, the Border Mounted Rifles, the Natal Mounted Rifles, two batteries of artillery and elements of the 5th Dragoon Guards and 5th Lancers, all under the command of Colonel Ian Hamilton, were despatched to the west of Ladysmith.²

The purpose of this venture was to confirm the severing of communications, and to make a preliminary determination of the Boer capability to maintain an effective siege.³ It was also, at that point, the only approach to Ladysmith that had not been closed by the Boers.⁴ According to Danes, the colonials were asked to 'remember your ruined farms and homesteads'.⁵

It is difficult to assess the utility of an operation such as this particular one. The force was reported to have captured the camp of a Free State commando, inflicting heavy casualties from artillery fire in the process.⁶ However, other sources suggest that nothing of consequence

¹ See Chalmers, Bombardment of Ladysmith Anticipated, p60; There was even a minor reconnaissance on 30 October involving the Volunteers (Driver, Experiences of a Siege, p11; Natal Witness, 1 November 1899).

² Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 2 November 1899; Natal Witness, 6 December 1899, which has French in command; Burnett, The 18th Hussars in South Africa, p50; Pearse, Four Months Besieged, pp23-4; Sibbald, The War Correspondents, pp88-9.

³ Pearse, Four Months Besieged, pp23-4.

⁴ The Times, 19 December 1899.

⁵ Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p188.

⁶ Natal Witness, 6 December 1899; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, pp97-8; Anon., The
(continued...)

MAP OF LADYSMITH AND DISTRICT.



From a Map issued by the Intelligence Division, War Office.

Scale. $\frac{1}{5600}$ or 1 inch to 2 miles

RAILWAYS ——— ROADS ——— TELEGRAPHS ———

MILE 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 MILES

B

transpired, other than the confirmation that the enemy ring had closed.⁷ In certain quarters the excursion was dubbed 'Brocklehurst's Folly', after Major-General JF Brocklehurst, who had succeeded to the command of the garrison's cavalry force on the departure of Major-General Sir John French.⁸

A more defined action took place the following day, 3 November, also to the west of the town in the vicinity of Lancer's Hill and End Hill. End Hill formed part of a small range of three flat-topped hills, including Middle Hill.⁹ The clash was initiated by a sortie on the part of Imperial troops (5th Dragoon Guards, four squadrons of the 18th and 19th Hussars, the Imperial Light Horse, a mounted infantry company of the 1st Manchester Regiment, and the 21st Battery and 53rd Battery, RFA), which had become hemmed in by Boers of the Heilbron Commando, and needed to be withdrawn.¹⁰ The Volunteers, (a squadron each from the Natal Carbineers, the Border Mounted Rifles and the Natal Mounted Rifles) under the command of Colonel Royston, plus two batteries of artillery, were called upon as reinforcements. They were ordered to occupy Middle and End Hills. Brocklehurst was once again in overall command.¹¹

The mounted contingent advanced at the gallop and, under shellfire from Rifleman's Ridge, took up position on the left flank of the artillery, and on the right flank, and in support, of the Imperial Light Horse. At the foot of End Hill the men dismounted. Both sides then made a bid for the

⁶(...continued)

Boer War, 1899-1900: From the Ultimatum to the Occupation of Bloemfontein, London, RE King Ltd, 1900, p66.

⁷ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', pp39-40; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p155.

⁸ Martin, in A Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith, No.4, p37; Tatham, Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith, 2 November 1899; Natal Witness, 10 October 1899; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, II, p441.

⁹ Natal Advertiser, 8 December 1899; Natal Mercury, 9 December 1899 and 20 November 1900; The Times, 19 December 1899; Sibbald, The War Correspondents, p92.

¹⁰ NAR, Leyds 1043, CD 458, Blue Books, White to Chief-of-Staff, 23 March 1900, p16; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p156; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, II, p540; Sibbald, The War Correspondents, pp91-3.

¹¹ Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p156; Sibbald, The War Correspondents, p92.

feature.¹² An observer left this account of the initial phase:

'I just got over the crest of one of the hills overlooking the town in time to see the Natal Carbineers and Border Rifles galloping across an open piece of country towards the front of the hill on our left, dismount, leave horses, and scramble up the hill in quick time, to take up a position on the crest.'¹³

Here, in a hilltop position with the Natal Carbineers on the right flank, the Volunteers came under intense rifle and shellfire for several hours.¹⁴ The ever-observant Dacre Shaw recorded his impressions of the action:

'A bullet ricocheted off a small stone two or three inches from my head. A man a little way on my right received one bullet through his arm and another shattered his leg below the knee. He yelled with pain and appeared to be in such agony that three of us crawled towards him to render such assistance as was possible. Having removed him from the area of fire I found that two of us, Troopers Miller and Watts, were wounded. I had received a bullet through my right sleeve.'¹⁵

Within fifteen minutes the regiment, which enjoyed no cover, had suffered four wounded, and 48 year-old Major CE Taunton, in command of 'A' Squadron of the Natal Carbineers, was killed a few metres from Dacre Shaw while taking observations through field-glasses and directing the Volunteer fire.¹⁶ Taunton was possibly the most prominent Natal colonial casualty of the war to

¹² Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p42; The Times, 19 December 1899.

¹³ Natal Advertiser, 8 December 1899.

¹⁴ Nicholson diary, 3 November 1899; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p41; Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 3 November 1899; Catchpole diary, p28; Extracts from Notes taken on the Boer Campaign, 3 November 1899; Martin, in A Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith, No4, p31; Natal Advertiser, 8 December 1899; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, II, p540; Sibbald, The War Correspondents, p93.

¹⁵ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p42.

¹⁶ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p42; Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 3 November 1899; 'Artee', 'Reminiscences of an ex-Carbineer', 1949, p9. After Taunton's death there was an exchange of correspondence between the executors of his estate, Hathorn and Company, and the Colonial Secretary's Office in Pietermaritzburg, which reveals something of the legal complications and ramifications of death in action for citizen soldiers, particularly under siege conditions. It was, for example, impossible to register his death in Ladysmith in the
(continued...)

date.

Another account, specifically 'inspired' by Taunton's death, was published in the columns of the Times of Natal in early December 1899:

'The gallant major was observing the movements of the enemy with his glasses, and turned to his men, shouting, 'Take cover, take cover!' - when he was shot through the left arm and heart.'¹⁷

Another thoroughly recorded casualty was Sergeant FG Mapstone. An eyewitness recalled:

'I saw - exposing himself very much and was just warning him to take shelter when he was shot through the chest and spine. One of our men went to help him and give him water, and just as he was handing his water bottle, a bullet struck him on the head and knocked him down.'¹⁸

It was also during this action that Carbineer diarist, Dacre Shaw, earned the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM), and several others were recommended for recognition.¹⁹ The British-colonial force was compelled to withdraw, leaving the Boers in occupation of the hill, the real victors in this minor episode.²⁰

The Natal Mercury's report of this skirmish, replete with gory tales of devastating British-colonial volleys, bayonet slaughter and Boers mown down by lance-wielding Hussars, bore little

¹⁶(...continued)

conventional manner, so in order to satisfy claimants on the estate, letters had to be drafted for each creditor, detailing the circumstances of his passing on 3 November (PAR, CSO 1631, minute paper 8798/1899, enclosure, Hathorn & Co to Colonial Secretary, 17 November 1899).

¹⁷ Times of Natal, 9 December 1899.

¹⁸ Gordon, Honour Without Riches, p268; and see Natal Mercury, 9 December 1899.

¹⁹ Catchpole diary, p27; Times of Natal, 6 November 1899; Natal Witness, 6 April 1900; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p156; and see Natal Carbineers History Centre, anonymous Natal Carbineers Anglo-Boer War manuscript, p3; Natal Volunteer Record, p149.

²⁰ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p43.

resemblance to the facts.²¹ Enthusiastic but often misleading coverage such as this in contemporary sources is a timely reminder of the gap between the fanciful perception in the Colony of the performance of its Volunteers, and the more sober evaluation of publications such as Cassell's History of the Boer War, which stated:

'But these colonial brethren of ours...knew one thing, and that was how to take cover. They were, in fact, irregulars fighting against irregulars, and they cared even less than they knew about the drill of the barrack-yard and parade-ground'.²²

Contemporary accounts of the engagements of 2 and 3 November do focus on favourable accounts of Volunteer conduct, such as that by Conan Doyle, who described the action

'as chiefly remarkable for the excellent behaviour of the Colonials, who showed that they were the equals of the Regulars in gallantry and their superiors in the tactics which such a country requires'.²³

However, the forthright diary of D Howard Gill of the 21st Battery, Royal Horse Artillery, sheds an illuminatingly negative light on these events and the role of the Natal Volunteers. Gill dismisses Brocklehurst as 'the laughing-stock of Ladysmith', and the action of 3 November as one of several 'Poggelhurst Affairs'.²⁴ His account of the day's events pours scorn on the Volunteers:

'They suffered hardly any loss (one or two men hit, Major Taunton killed) but we thought they were having a frightful time, as one of their doctors galloped back very pale saying they were in an awful fix, that the squadron must be cut to pieces and asking for reinforcements. They (the ILH) were the only people who attempted to make any sort of an attack, this idiotic day'.²⁵

²¹ Natal Mercury, 6 November 1899; and see Gedenkboek van den Oorlog in Zuid-Afrika, p185.

²² Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p203.

²³ Conan Doyle, The Great Boer War, p209; and see Artee, 'Reminiscences of an ex-Carbineer', 1949, p8.

²⁴ UNISA Archives, Gill diary, 3 November 1899, pp60 and 67.

²⁵ UNISA Archives, Gill diary, 3 November 1899, p61.

Gill dismissed any notion of a crisis, suggesting that the Volunteer reinforcements that day were, in fact, unnecessary.²⁶ He continued his demolition of the colonials:

'I think one man was hit only; one trooper's horse was shot and he was footing it back about 2 000 yards [1 800 metres] from the enemy's fire without anyone taking any notice of him, when an officer pulls up and catches a loose horse for him and mounts him on it and they gallop in.

There is nothing particularly venturesome in this owing to the great distance from the enemy, yet a picture of the incident drawn by Maud (who wasn't there) appeared in The Graphic entitled "A gallant candidate for the VC".²⁷

As was the case after the Bester's skirmish, the Boers once again entertained a caustic view of the Volunteer performance:

"n Sterk Britse berede mag 'n uitvalsbeweging in die rigting van Colenso gedoen, maar weer het die berede magte van die Boere oombliklik hul superioriteit laat geld. In wilde vaart moes die Britse ruitery ná 'n paar hewige skermutselinge terugvlug na Ladysmith'.²⁸

The military value of such 'curiously arranged reconnaissances' was nil, and there was evident frustration amongst the participants and the residents of the town, especially when soldiers and townspeople alike were already demoralised after the siege became a reality on 2 November (see pages 181-3).²⁹ Yet, in terms of intensity and casualties, the engagement of 3 November was the most serious of the siege for the Natal Carbineers. The Border Mounted Rifles and the Natal Mounted Rifles were more fortunate, only suffering five wounded between them. The Imperial Light Horse suffered five killed and ten wounded.³⁰

²⁶ UNISA Archives, Gill diary, 3 November 1899, pp62-3; McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, pp57-61.

²⁷ UNISA Archives, Gill diary, 3 November 1899, pp63-4.

²⁸ Weeber, Op die Natalse Front, p91.

²⁹ Extracts from Notes taken on the Boer Campaign, 3 November 1899; Wingfield diary, 3 November 1899. For reports of several lesser scattered incidents, see NAR, Leyds 1043, CD 458, Blue Books, White to Chief-of-Staff, 23 March 1900, p18; Craw, The Siege of Ladysmith, p8, 7 November 1899; Natal Witness, 6 November 1899; Sibbald, The War Correspondents, p100.

³⁰ Natal Volunteer Record, p149; Goetzsche, Rough But Ready: An Official History of the Natal Mounted Rifles, pp57 and 79; Klein, Light Horse Cavalcade, p29.

'The Death of Long Tom':
The Attack on Gun Hill, 7-8 December 1899

**'The attack, which was successful beyond expectation,
reflects the utmost credit upon the Volunteers,
who have all along played so prominent
part in this campaign.'**³¹

Although it was obvious to certain civilian observers, such as William Watson, that in order to break the deadlock in Ladysmith it would be essential to storm the Boer artillery emplacements, whatever the cost in lives, it was not until early December that such an attempt was to be made on Gun Hill.³²

Once the tentative ventures of early November had passed, Sir George White resisted calls for offensive action.³³ On the Boer side the burghers were vulnerable as complacency and inefficiency in the siege laagers had replaced the initiative and drive associated with their war of movement. They were as unsuited to a static war as were the Natal Volunteers.³⁴ The weaknesses evident in the Boer ranks did not escape the British, who kept an eye on their besiegers, courtesy of a small 'army' of scouts under command of Major David Henderson, White's Deputy Assistant Adjutant-General for Intelligence.³⁵ According to Cassell's History of the Boer War, the decision to attack Gun Hill was ironically arrived at at least partially on the evidence of 'one or two colonials who

³¹ Cape Argus Weekly Edition, 10 January 1900.

³² The Siege Diary of William Watson, 31 October and 1 November 1899; also see Natal Witness, 6 January 1900.

³³ Martin, in A Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith, No.4, p43; Amery (éd), The Times History, III, p166-7. In the British ranks there also appears to have been debate as to exactly what form of offensive action to take (Ian BM Hamilton, The Happy Warrior: A Life of General Sir Ian Hamilton GCB GCMG DSO, London, Cassell, 1966, p142). Watkins-Pitchford mentions the posting of an anonymous canard, shortly before the foray, to the effect that White was an ineffective coward (Watkins-Pitchford, Besieged in Ladysmith, p29). One dissenting view here was that of John Stuart in Pictures of War, London, John Constable & Co, 1901, p143, who says that Hunter had 'no difficulty' in securing White's permission (Hunter, Kitchener's Sword Arm, p131).

³⁴ Gustav Preller, quoted in Smurthwaite, The Boer War, p70; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, II, p437.

³⁵ Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, II, pp437-8.

were willing to enter the Boer camp and see what they could find out.³⁶

On or shortly before 1 December the Boers created a gun emplacement on Gun Hill and transferred there the Creusot 6-inch (Long Tom) gun from Pepworth Hill.³⁷ It was now closer to the British-colonial positions, and became a tempting target for a raid, especially after it bombarded the Imperial Light Horse camp on 2 November.³⁸

The planning for the attack on Gun Hill also inherited the controversy surrounding British laxity in permitting the Boer occupation of Bulwana and Lombard's Kop, in the immediate vicinity of Gun Hill, during the last days of October.³⁹ British Intelligence had incorrectly concluded that it would be impossible to get heavy weapons onto the summit of Bulwana, which would in any event be out of range of Ladysmith, and that water was not available.⁴⁰

White's sanction for the raid was secured only with some difficulty, with the proviso that Major-General Sir Archibald Hunter, his Chief-of-Staff, led the expedition in person, with a force of at least 500 men.⁴¹ The attack was also apparently in response to the shelling of the Town Hall

³⁶ Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p343.

³⁷ Craw, The Siege of Ladysmith, p22, 1 December 1899; and see UNISA Archives, Gill diary, 30 November 1899, p93; Natal Mercury, 9 December 1899; Amery (ed), The Times History, III, p167; Hall, Long Tom, pp49 and 67; Changuion, The Silence of the Guns, pp27-8.

³⁸ Natal Witness, 6 January 1900; Steevens, From Capetown to Ladysmith, p137; report by Steevens, in Natal Carbineers History Centre, Woods newspaper cuttings, nd; Changuion, The Silence of the Guns, pp51-2.

³⁹ PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Corps, Orderbooks, 29 October 1899; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', pp38-9; GW Willis to brother, 29 March 1900, in Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith, No.4, pp14-15.

⁴⁰ NAR, Leyds 1043, CD 458, South African Despatches, White to Secretary of State for War, p4, 2 December 1899; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, pp154-5; and see NAM, 7812/26, diaries of Colonel Frank Rhodes, 17 October and 9 November 1899; UNISA Archives, Gill diary, 25 October 1899, p28 and p52, 30 October 1899; Natal Mercury, 31 October 1899; Wilson, With the Flag to Pretoria, II, p488; McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, p15; Changuion, The Silence of the Guns, p25.

⁴¹ Amery (ed), The Times History, III, p167.

hospital on 30 November.⁴² This incident elicited outrage from British observers such as Donald McDonald, who quoted a harsh reaction from an unnamed Carbineer: 'I heard one of the Carbineers say, with clenched fists, "and may God Almighty help the first Boer who asks me for quarter."⁴³

Until the last moment, details of the target and planning were kept strictly confidential, largely on account of the suspected number of Boer sympathizers and informants in Ladysmith.⁴⁴ Such suspicion later developed to a level of paranoia, even impacting on Natal colonial civilians. On 28 December 1899, for example, a Ladysmith civilian accused of corresponding with the Boers was severely punished (three years penal servitude) by a British court-martial.⁴⁵ Then, in February 1900, a prominent Natal cyclist, Herbert Foss, was sentenced to 12 months hard labour simply for 'circulating reports calculated to cause despondency among Her Majesty's troops'.⁴⁶

In Volunteer camp orders on 6 and 7 December there was no mention of the proposed Gun Hill operation. In fact, there was every indication of another routinely dull siege day.⁴⁷ Hunter only met with Royston on the afternoon of the 7th to arrange the details of the operation.⁴⁸ The decision to proceed with the operation was influenced by the motivation of Major CB Addison,

⁴² Natal Carbineers History Centre, Harte Anglo-Boer War photo album; McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, pp77-9 and 108; Watkins-Pitchford, Besieged in Ladysmith, p25; and see The Boer War, 1899-1900: From Ultimatum to the Occupation of Bloemfontein, p136.

⁴³ Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, p107; and see NAR, Leyds 1043, CD 458, White to Chief-of-Staff, 23 March 1900, p19; and see Gill diary, 30 November 1899, p93; NAR, Leyds 1043, CD 458, White to Chief-of-Staff, 23 March 1900, p20; Natal Mercury, 9 December 1899.

⁴⁴ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Ian Hamilton Papers 2/1/1, Private manuscript diary, 8 December 1899; UNISA Archives, Gill diary, 29 October 1899, p33; NAR, Leyds 1043, CD 458, White to Chief-of-Staff, 23 March 1900, p19; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p135; Pearse, Four Months Besieged, pp40-2; McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, pp5 and 13-14; Watkins, Chaplains at the Front, p90.

⁴⁵ Marling, Rifleman and Hussar, p262.

⁴⁶ Daily Graphic, 16 February 1900; Bizley, 'Maritzburg during the Siege of Natal', pp85-6.

⁴⁷ PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Corps, Orderbooks, 6 and 7 December 1899.

⁴⁸ Natal Advertiser, 7 December 1899; Tatham, Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith, pp6-7, 7 December 1899; Pearse, Four Months Besieged, p105.

a staff officer with the Natal Carbineers, who pointed out that this was a rare opportunity offered to the Volunteers to distinguish themselves.⁴⁹

In the light of the criticism directed at White for retaining cavalry during the siege, it was significant that this was to be a dismounted operation, in which wire-cutters and sledgehammers were called for.⁵⁰ The anticipated challenge of the operation was such that selection of the raiding party was strict.⁵¹ One of the siege correspondents, NW Nevinson, suggested that in terms of security, one reason behind the selection of the Volunteers for the operation was that they were more distinctly under headquarters control, rather than falling under a more porous (in terms of intelligence) brigade structure.⁵²

The Natal Carbineer component once again read like a 'who's-who' of Natal colonial society. Apart from Major Addison, the officers present were Major GJ Macfarlane (mayor of Pietermaritzburg), Captains FE Foxon (magistrate, Ixopo), John Weighton (mine secretary, Pietermaritzburg), Walter Shepstone (surveyor) and Alexander Hair (stock inspector, Pietermaritzburg), and Lieutenants WA Bartholomew (farmer, Mooi River), WA Vanderplank, CNH Rodwell (civil servant), E Lucas, David Sparks (general dealer and chairman of the Ladysmith Town Board), WT Gage (Public Works Department, Newcastle), AC Townsend (civil servant, Treasury, Pietermaritzburg) and AW Smallie (farmer).⁵³ The Natal Mounted Rifles

⁴⁹ Natal Witness, 14 November 1900.

⁵⁰ NAR, Leyds 1043, CD 458, White to Chief-of-Staff, 23 March 1900, p20; KCAL, MS 1513, Elstob and Carmont diary, p9; Nicholson diary, 7 December 1899; Wilson, With the Flag to Pretoria, II, p488.

⁵¹ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p50; Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 7 December 1899.

⁵² Nevinson, Ladysmith: The Diary of a Siege, pp144-5.

⁵³ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Natal Carbineers Service Register, passim; PAR, CSO 1299, minute paper 3014/1891, Appointment of David Sparks to chairman of Ladysmith Town Board; PAR, Master of the Supreme Court Estates (MSCE), 1501/1949, David Sparks Estate 13522; Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 7 December 1899; Natal Advertiser, 3 January 1900; Natal Witness, 18 April 1949; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, Anglo-Boer War muster roll, and p135.

contingent included Major RW Evans, who was a leading Durban merchant.⁵⁴ The force made history with the inclusion of Pietermaritzburg's 'first citizen', Major Macfarlane, probably the only serving mayor in South Africa to participate in such a military action in any war.⁵⁵

Estimates of the force's strength vary from 546 to 650, and comprised largely of the Natal Carbineers (200 to 270) and the Border Mounted Rifles (180) as well as 100 men of the Imperial Light Horse.⁵⁶ The column moved off from Devon(shire) Post between 9pm and 11pm on 7 December, on the Helpmekaar road that skirted the northern slopes of Gun Hill and Lombard's Kop.⁵⁷

Hunter's briefing stipulated that gunfire was to be avoided to secure the element of surprise.⁵⁸ This emphasis on stealth was well-suited to the colonials, 'many of whom know by sporting experience on the veldt that silence is a virtue'.⁵⁹ The Times of Natal suggested another, more personal reason why the Volunteers were an ideal choice for this assignment:

'They [the colonial troops] were the very fellows to entrust with such a job. As smart on the kopjes as the Boer himself, they knew his peculiarities, and what is more, they were simply consumed with the desire to administer to him a special dose of Natal mixture. I believe the Boers would sooner be licked 50 times by Imperial troops than once by

⁵⁴ Natal Witness, 24 February 1902.

⁵⁵ Natal Witness, 4 January 1900; Natal Advertiser, 5 January 1900; Twentieth Century Impressions of Natal, p237. Macfarlane was re-elected to the position of Mayor in May 1900 (PAR, CSO 1646, Minute Paper 32388/00, Town Clerk to Permanent Under-Secretary, 4 May 1900).

⁵⁶ Martin in A Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith, No4, p33; Tatham, Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith, p7, 8 December 1899; Natal Witness, 6 January 1900; George Archibald to Rosie, quoted in Gordon, Honour Without Riches, pp269-70. George Archibald included an account of Gun Hill in an essay he later submitted to the London Evening News, which was published on 17 April 1900 (pp275-7); Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, II, p438.

⁵⁷ KCAL, KCM 1546, letter, Dan Deeves to brother, 8 December 1899; Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 7 December 1899; Natal Mercury, 11 December 1899; Natal Witness, 6 January 1900; Amery (ed), The Times History, III, p167; Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, p119; Stuart, Pictures of War, p147; Willcox, The Fifth (Royal Irish) Lancers, p237.

⁵⁸ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p50; Nevinson, Ladysmith: The Diary of a Siege, p147.

⁵⁹ Pearse, Four Months Besieged, pp23-4 and 106.

The column was guided to the foot of Gun Hill by scouts from the Corps of Guides, led by a Major Henderson, apparently of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.⁶¹ Henderson's identity is uncertain, as he could well have been the Natal colonist, Alfred Fairlie Henderson, of the Field Intelligence Department, who received the CMG for his service with the Corps of Guides. He was one of only two colonial soldiers to enjoy this distinction. The other recipient being Duncan McKenzie.⁶² However, this Henderson could also have been Major (later Lieutenant-General Sir) David Henderson, one of the 'special officers' despatched to South Africa in June 1899 to lay the groundwork for British field intelligence operations.⁶³ The latter is the more likely choice considering the British penchant for utilising colonial troops and scouts only when commanded by British officers. There were also three civilian guides.⁶⁴ Major GF Tatham (who, until the beginning of the siege, had commanded the Ladysmith Troop of the Natal Carbineers, and during the siege served on the Natal Volunteer Staff) did, however, serve as Royston's guide on the right flank of the assault.⁶⁵

An assault force of about 200 men was told off for the attack.⁶⁶ Dacre Shaw recalled that everyone

'was hugely delighted at having been selected for the adventure (rather than the regular infantry), the more so as all of us realized the novelty of using (dismounted) horsemen for

⁶⁰ Times of Natal, 20 February 1900.

⁶¹ Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p135; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, II, p438.

⁶² Peter Hathorn and Amy Young, Henderson Heritage, Pietermaritzburg, the authors, 1972, p239.

⁶³ Fergusson, British Military Intelligence, pp148 and 159, and see chapter 9.

⁶⁴ Natal Witness, 6 January 1900.

⁶⁵ Tatham, Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith, p7, 8 December 1899.

⁶⁶ Nicholson diary, 7 December 1899; Pennington, 'Anglo-Afrikander War', p45; Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 7 December 1899; Natal Witness, 6 January 1900.

storming a position'.⁶⁷

The final approach over broken ground was difficult, a cause for concern if the men were exposed to Boer fire in daylight.⁶⁸ The final phase of the attack was launched at 2.45am. The Natal Carbineers contingent was on the right flank, opposite Lombard's Nek, the Imperial Light Horse and others in the centre, and the Border Mounted Rifles on the left.⁶⁹

There were at least 100 Carbineers in the final assault party scrambling up the steep, boulder-strewn 500-foot slope just behind General Hunter himself.⁷⁰ In the words of Cassell's History of the Boer War: 'they [the ILH] and the Carbineers went up the hill like cats - noiselessly, and often on all fours'.⁷¹ A startled Boer sentry was encountered about halfway up the hill.⁷² The frantic warnings from such inadequate sentries came too late, and the storming party was close enough to their objectives successfully to rush the posts, under the personal and inspired 'from-the-front' leadership of General Hunter himself.⁷³ The defence 'crumpled up like tissue-paper' the moment

⁶⁷ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p50; Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p343.

⁶⁸ Pearse, Four Months Besieged, p107-8; Extracts from Notes taken on the Boer Campaign, 7 and 8 December 1899.

⁶⁹ Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 7 December 1899; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p50; Steevens, in Woods Newspaper Cuttings; and see Martin, in A Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith, No.4, p33; Natal Advertiser, 5 January 1900; Times of Natal, 8 August 1900.

⁷⁰ Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 7 December 1899; Times of Natal, 12 December 1899 and 20 February 1900; Natal Witness, 6 January 1900; and see Pearse, Four Months Besieged, p108.

⁷¹ Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p344; and see Greytown Museum, letter, Douglas Campbell to mother, 14 December 1899.

⁷² Pennington, 'Anglo-Afrikaner War', p45; Natal Witness, 6 January 1900; Pearse, Four Months Besieged, p108; Nevinston, Ladysmith: The Diary of a Siege, p146; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p135; Amery (ed), The Times History, III, p168; Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, p120.

⁷³ Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, p120; and see Nicholson diary, 7 December 1899.

the Boers realised that the assailants were practically at close quarters.⁷⁴ The gun-emplacement had been guarded by only 16 men, with a further 25 in the immediate vicinity, and a laager of 250 men in the rear of the hill.⁷⁵

Once the Boer defenders were alerted, the attackers faced volleys of Mauser fire, and they dropped to the ground for cover and replied with volleys of their own. This tactic was a novel one for the time, when the importance of seeking cover during an attack was not yet widely appreciated.⁷⁶ Reaching the summit was, in Alfred Wingfield's words, the 'proudest moment of our lives!'⁷⁷ The Natal press painted a disparaging picture of Boers and German volunteers fleeing in panic.⁷⁸ The English popular press in turn ridiculed the apparent Boer fear of the bayonet, and by implication, close quarters combat.⁷⁹

The most celebrated incident of the assault, the order to fix largely non-existent bayonets during the final phase, thereby exploiting the popular perception of an Achilles' Heel in the Boer makeup - namely a reluctance to engage at close quarters with 'cold steel' - was attributed to Colonel AHM Edwards, 5th Dragoon Guards, in command of the Imperial Light Horse contingent on the night.⁸⁰

The only troops actually equipped with bayonets were the dozen Royal Engineers responsible for the demolition of the guns. However, the others, by knocking their rifle-butts lightly against

⁷⁴ Times of Natal, 20 February 1900.

⁷⁵ Gedenkboek van den Oorlog in Zuid-Afrika, p197.

⁷⁶ Natal Witness, 6 January 1900.

⁷⁷ Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 7 December 1899.

⁷⁸ Natal Witness, 6 January 1900; Times of Natal, 20 February 1900.

⁷⁹ Black and White Budget, II/18, 10 February 1900, p7; and see Times of Natal, 20 February 1900; McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, pp114-6; Stuart, Pictures of War, p153.

⁸⁰ Creswicke, South Africa and the Transvaal War, II, p147; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, pp187-8; Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, p120; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, II, p440. In Nevins, Ladysmith: The Diary of a Siege, p147, the order was attributed to Major Karri-Davis of the ILH. According to Stalker, it was Captain Foxon of the Carbineers who gave the order (Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p135).

stones, created the realistic effect of fixing bayonets.⁸¹ The bayonet order appears to have been the defining moment in the operation.⁸²

The focus of the daring sortie, the demolition of the artillery pieces on Gun Hill by an Engineer party, was completed in about ten minutes.⁸³ The sophistication of the emplacement came as another unwelcome realisation by the British of their underestimation of the Boers.⁸⁴ The operation was, however, only partially successful and the Creusot gun was subsequently repaired in Pretoria.⁸⁵ A 4.7-inch howitzer was also disabled in the attack, and a Maxim carried off.

What had been the military significance of the operation? Minimal, if Carbineer WS Warwick's diary entry is anything to go by: 'Sent out at 10pm to capture boer [sic] gun at Lombard's cop [sic] great success no one hurt, gun blown up retired back to camp at 5.30[am].'⁸⁶ Nevertheless it was thought to be the first time in British military history that mounted infantry had stormed guns.⁸⁷ Night attacks were also a rarity in the Anglo-Boer War, partly because of British ignorance of the country.⁸⁸

⁸¹ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p50; Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p343; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, II, p440; Wilson, With the Flag to Pretoria, II, p499.

⁸² Amery (ed), The Times History, III, p168; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, II, p440.

⁸³ PAR, CSO 2609, transcript telegrams, White to GOC, Lines of Communication, Pietermaritzburg, 8 December 1899; Cape Argus, Weekly Edition, 10 January 1900; Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 7-8 December 1899; Willcox, The Fifth (Royal Irish) Lancers, p238; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, II, p438; Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, p121; and see Leon to Joubert, 9 December 1899, in CWL de Souza, No Charge for Delivery, Cape Town, Books of Africa, 1969, p145.

⁸⁴ Natal Witness, 6 January 1900; Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, p121; and see McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, pp117-18.

⁸⁵ De Express en Oranjevrijstaatsche Advertentiblad, 15 December 1899; Natal Witness, 1 February 1900; Amery (ed), The Times History, III, p168; Hall, Long Tom, corrigenda and addenda; Changuion, The Silence of the Guns, pp51,55-6,63 and 65.

⁸⁶ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Warwick notebook-diary, nd.

⁸⁷ Times of Natal, 12 December 1899; Creswicke, South Africa and the Transvaal War, II, p148.

⁸⁸ Sternberg, My Experience of the Boer War, p223.

The propaganda value and impact on morale for the Natal colonial forces was considerable. The Long Tom breechblock, for example, was carried back in triumph by troopers of the Imperial Light Horse.⁸⁹ The rangefinder and ramrod were also removed.⁹⁰ It was also recorded that the attackers scratched their names on the damaged gun.⁹¹

Eyewitnesses from nearby Intombi Camp and Ladysmith were suitably impressed:

'Then suddenly a flash leapt up from its [Gun Hill's] crest followed some seconds after by the roar of an explosion, quickly followed by another, and this gave us the welcome tidings that our vicious teasers were no more.'⁹²

Newspaper and popular accounts were replete with praise. RJ McHugh commented: 'Thus far it is the most brilliant incident of the siege, and it was carried out without a hitch.'⁹³ HHS Pearse recorded that the Natal Carbineers 'deserve full credit for an important share in the night's success'.⁹⁴ Nevinson records that the main difficulty of the retirement of the colonial force was to persuade the men to leave the scene of their adventure: 'The Carbineers especially kept crowding round the old gun like children in their excitement.'⁹⁵ The raiding force arrived back in Ladysmith by 3.30am on 8 December, to the enthusiastic cheers of all the regiments it passed.⁹⁶ It had been

⁸⁹ Steevens, in Natal Carbineers History Centre, Woods Newspaper Cuttings, nd; Craw, A Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith, p26, 8 December 1899; Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, p123; McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, p119. The breechblock was later presented by that regiment to General Smuts, and is now housed in the Siege Museum, Ladysmith (Hall, Long Tom, p8).

⁹⁰ Gerald Robinson to writer, August 1999 - this rangefinder is on loan to the Siege Museum, Ladysmith; Cape Argus, Weekly Edition, 10 January 1900; McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, p119.

⁹¹ Changuion, The Silence of the Guns, p52.

⁹² Watkins-Pitchford, Besieged in Ladysmith, pp32-3; and see Pennington, 'Anglo-Afrikander War', p44.

⁹³ McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, p109.

⁹⁴ Pearse, Four Months Besieged, p111.

⁹⁵ Nevinson, Ladysmith: The Diary of a Siege, p148.

⁹⁶ Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, pp187-8; Gordon, Honour Without Riches, p276.

'a memorable day in the history of our Volunteers: a deed of daring and success that will want a lot of beating in the war'.⁹⁷ According to Steevens, it 'had all the requisites of successful night work - absolute secrecy, picked men, a daring and cool-headed leader, accomplished guides, silence, celerity and luck'.⁹⁸

It was, in the words of war correspondent Donald Macdonald, 'a feat which cheered our drooping spirits'.⁹⁹ The stirring writing of Daily Telegraph correspondent RJ McHugh, was typical: 'The manner in which they accomplished this duty will be an honour ever to be remembered, and the story of it will be told in Natal for many a generation.'¹⁰⁰ A diversionary British operation to seize Limit Hill was largely ignored amidst the blaze of publicity surrounding Gun Hill.¹⁰¹

At noon on the 8th the Volunteers formed up on open ground adjoining the Volunteer camp for a congratulatory address by the garrison commander, Sir George White, in which the credit owed to them by both the Colony and the Empire was given special emphasis. There was also a large turnout of civilian spectators.¹⁰² White also visited each of the Carbineer, Guides and Imperial Light Horse camps in turn. On the afternoon of 8 December White telegraphed a brief report to Pietermaritzburg on the outcome of the sensational expedition:

'Last night I sent out General Hunter with 500 Natal Volunteers under Royston, and 100 Imperial Light Horse under Edwards, to surprise Gun Hill. The enterprise was admirably carried out and was entirely successful, the hill being captured and a six-inch gun and a

⁹⁷ Pennington, 'Anglo-Afrikaner War', p43; and see Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 7 and 8 December 1899.

⁹⁸ Steevens, in Natal Carbineers History Centre, Woods Newspaper Cuttings, nd.

⁹⁹ Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, p118.

¹⁰⁰ McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, p113, and see p115.

¹⁰¹ See NAR, Leyds 1043, CD 458, p20, White to Chief-of-Staff, 23 March 1900; McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, pp120-1; Burnett, The 18th Hussars in South Africa, pp61-2; Chisholm, Ladysmith, p130.

¹⁰² Talana Museum, 'Diary of a Durban Shop Assistant', p36, 8 December 1899; The Times, 13 December 1899; Natal Witness, 3,4 and 6 January 1900; Creswicke, South Africa and the Transvaal War, II, p149. For the full text of White's address see Times of Natal, 12 December 1899, and McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, pp124-6.

four-point-seven howitzer destroyed.¹⁰³

In an editorial on 12 December 1899, the Natal Witness commented that the

'words of appreciation and encouragement addressed by General White to the Volunteers were timely and well chosen. It is gratifying to the colonists to learn in such unmistakable terms that the services of our Volunteers are thoroughly appreciated by officers of the Imperial troops.'¹⁰⁴

The Carbineers also received a congratulatory letter from the Gordon Highlanders.¹⁰⁵ The Natal Witness went as far as to say that the Carbineers,

'after their brilliant success of Gun Hill were regarded by regulars and civilians alike as one of the best, bravest, and most reliable corps in camp - Gun Hill immensely increased the prestige of Natal's Volunteers'.¹⁰⁶

Popular sentiment aside, the dramatic nocturnal action was one of the few positive pieces of war news to have reached the Natal press for some time.¹⁰⁷

The Boers admired the skill and judgement displayed by the attackers, but the low standard of burgher discipline was brought into sharp focus.¹⁰⁸ Some time later the Boer leadership, who had

¹⁰³ PAR, CSO 2609, transcript telegrams, White to GOC Lines of Communication, Pietermaritzburg, 8 December 1899; Natal Witness, 11 December 1899.

¹⁰⁴ Natal Witness, 12 December 1899. News of the attack was also read out to troops of Buller's Army at Sunday church-parade on 10 December (UNISA Archives, notebook diary, RC Alexander, 10 December 1899).

¹⁰⁵ Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p136.

¹⁰⁶ Natal Witness, 3 January 1900.

¹⁰⁷ Natal Mercury, 13 December 1899.

¹⁰⁸ Erasmus, 'Die Ineenstorting van die Boeremagte', p79; Eksteen, 'Die Wederwaringe van JF van Eerden', p57; De Wet, Three Years War, p31; Von Warmelo, On Commando, p21; Taitz, The War Memories of Commandant Ludwig Krause, p23; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, II, pp449-50; Nasson, The South African War 1899-1902, p92; Pretorius, Life on Commando, pp108-9 and 117. There was a flurry of telegrams on the 8th and 9th between Pretoria, Commandant-General Joubert at Volksrust, and Modderspruit (the Boer 'hoofdlager' at Ladysmith) with accusations
(continued...)

been shaken out of their complacency, also belatedly sought to inject some enthusiasm into the burghers, and venom into their siege, by offering incentives or 'rewards' for the destruction or capture of British guns.¹⁰⁹

The British regulars had reacted indignantly to their exclusion from the successful foray, and after Gun Hill General Hunter had sourly commented that with the Devonshire Regiment he could have captured the guns on Bulwana too.¹¹⁰ They were anxious to also reap some glory for themselves,¹¹¹ and on 11 December launched a similar, but more ambitious, strike on Surprise Hill (called Vaalkop by the Boers).¹¹² However, this time the approach was past Boer-held positions, and the Boers were more alert, with the result that the Surprise Hill operation was a costly one.¹¹³ Although the guns were reached successfully and without casualties, as was the case at Gun Hill, the Boers inflicted heavy casualties on the attackers on their return march.¹¹⁴ On this occasion the British committed the cardinal error of returning from a night operation during daylight,

¹⁰⁸(...continued)

of negligence, countercharges and recriminations (PAR, Leyds 712e, including Hoofddlaager to Pretoria, 8 December 1899; Staats Procureur to Staats Sekretaris, 8 December 1899; Staats Sekretaris to Commandant-Generaal, Volksrust, 8 December 1899; Staats Sekretaris to Staats Prokureur, Ladysmith, 8 December 1899; NAR, Leyds 712e, war telegrams, Erasmus to Joubert, 8 December 1899; Chisholm, Ladysmith, pp131-2; McNab, The French Colonel, p95; De Souza, No Charge for Delivery, pp141-5; Changuion, The Silence of the Guns, pp52-5).

¹⁰⁹ Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, II, p451. The informal siege broadsheet, Ladysmith Bombshell, satirized the Boer indignation at the audacious attack (Earl Robert, Ladysmith Bombshell: A Souvenir of the Siege of Ladysmith, Durban, Bennett and Davis, 1900, 1 January 1900).

¹¹⁰ Park, Letters from Ladysmith, pp16-17, 8 December 1899.

¹¹¹ Carruthers, Melton Prior, p188; and see McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, pp111 and 130.

¹¹² Creswicke, South Africa and the Transvaal War, II, pp149-150; and see Friend of the Free State and Bloemfontein Gazette, 12 December 1899; Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, chapter 13; Conan Doyle, The Boer War, p220.

¹¹³ Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, II, p450. However, Dietlof von Warmelo suggests that his own warnings to his field-cornet about British reconnaissance forays over the preceding few nights, had gone unheeded (Von Warmelo, On Commando, p23). Fortifications around gun-sites were improved, although these measures were probably implemented only after the Surprise Hill sortie (UNISA Archives, Gill diary, 31 December 1899, p107; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, II, p451).

¹¹⁴ NAR, Leyds 1043, CD 458, White to Chief-of-Staff, 23 March 1900, p21; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p53; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, pp136-7; and see McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, pp130-8.

presenting the Boers with their favourite tactic of pursuing a retiring enemy.¹¹⁵ It should perhaps be noted that irregulars of the Mafeking garrison also failed in a similar attack on 26 December 1899.¹¹⁶

The severe casualties suffered in the British operation at Surprise Hill led a correspondent to the Natal Witness to question the deployment of colonial mounted infantry as infantry in a high-risk operation such as a night attack on a prepared position, despite the success of the attack on Gun Hill.¹¹⁷ Shortly after Gun Hill, on 15 December, the Volunteers with Buller's Relief Column were themselves deployed as infantry at the battle of Colenso, eliciting similar protest from commentators in Natal. The reaction in colonial circles to Surprise Hill and Colenso points to concern about the Volunteers becoming involved in British operations that incurred heavy casualties.

Within a few days of the Gun Hill operation, Colonel Royston collected together a column of Volunteers for the proposed demolition of the Wasbank railway bridge. The operation was, however, aborted.¹¹⁸

Wagon Hill/Platrand

The Natal Volunteers played little direct part in this, the best-known military action of the siege of Ladysmith: the concerted Boer attack on the British perimeter at Wagon Hill and Caesar's Camp (known as Platrand to the Boers) on 6 January 1900.

The defeats of Black Week (10-15 December 1899) had not been followed by British offers of peace terms as the Boers had hoped, and instead bred a new determination. The Boer commanders realised that in order to inflict further telling blows like Colenso before massive

¹¹⁵ Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, pp124-6.

¹¹⁶ Perrett, Against All Odds!, pp112-3.

¹¹⁷ Natal Witness, 15 February 1900.

¹¹⁸ Stirling, The Colonials in Africa, p34. Gun Hill itself was again the focus of another night attack, by the Gloucestershire Regiment, in the latter weeks of the siege (NAR, Leyds 1043, CD 458, White to Chief-of-Staff, 23 March 1900, p25).

British reinforcements negated any advantages of a siege, Ladysmith had to be conquered by assault, rather than by slow strangulation,¹¹⁹ since it had become apparent that bombardment alone would not bring about the capitulation of the garrison.¹²⁰ An assault on Platrand was just the sort of aggressive action required.

From the outset of the siege, the Boers considered Platrand to be the key to Ladysmith, with its capture leading directly to the fall of the town. As early as 7 November it had been intended to attack the hill.¹²¹ However, this attack had not materialised, and further assault plans for 30 November and 1 December had also been abandoned due to the poor co-operation between the Transvaal and Free State commandos.¹²² Similar lack of co-operation had also compromised the effectiveness of the southward probe by the Boers towards Estcourt in November 1899.

On 6 January the Carbineers were scheduled to provide a routine picquet of three officers and 65 NCOs and men.¹²³ However, at 4.15am Colonel Royston received information that a Boer attack was underway.¹²⁴ There is no evidence that the Volunteers played an identifiable role in this battle, although there were assertions at the time that the Natal Mounted Rifles, the Border Mounted Rifles and the Natal Carbineers reinforced the fringes.¹²⁵ There is also some uncertainty

¹¹⁹ Delport, 'Die Rol van Generaal Marthinus Prinsloo', p69; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p137; Mangold, Vir Vaderland, Vryheid en Eer, p59.

¹²⁰ Delport, 'Die Rol van Generaal Marthinus Prinsloo', p68; McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, pp36 and 95; Watt, The Siege of Ladysmith, pp9 and 12; and see Best, 'Restraints on War by Land before 1945', in Howard (ed), Restraints on War, pp29-31.

¹²¹ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', pp45-6; Watt, The Siege of Ladysmith, p18; also see Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p134.

¹²² Erasmus, 'Die Ineenstorting van die Boeremagte', p80; Delport, 'Die Rol van General Marthinus Prinsloo', pp70-1; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, II, p654, Appendix 14; Von Warmelo, On Commando, p18; Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, p166; McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, p161; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, III, pp10-13; and see Natal Witness, 8 January 1900.

¹²³ PAR, NDR 2/8, Volunteer Camp Orders, Ladysmith, 6 January 1900.

¹²⁴ Royston report, quoted in Stirling, The Colonials in Africa, pp35-7.

¹²⁵ See KCAL, KCM 1546, letter, Dan Deeves to brother, 17 January 1900; Natal Witness, 12 January 1900; Natal Mercury, 16 January 1900; Times of Natal, 17 January and 9 August (continued...)

surrounding the distance of the Volunteer positions from the battle,¹²⁶ which were probably located inward of the southern perimeter focus of the attack.¹²⁷ The Volunteers were, however, close enough to have a clear view of the Boers on the slopes of Wagon Hill.¹²⁸ On the night of 5-6 January this picquet line was occupied by elements of the Natal Carbineers and the Natal Police.¹²⁹

The only indications in Volunteer records that anything out of the ordinary transpired that day was the preparation of a flying column to sally forth, if necessary, and a church-parade, under arms, to be held at 7am the next morning.¹³⁰ Although it is almost certain that the Natal Volunteers would have become involved had the battle flared up again on the 7th, it had been the Imperial Light Horse that had once again played a pivotal role.¹³¹

Carbineer Major GF Tatham, on the Natal Volunteer Staff, was one Volunteer officer involved

¹²⁵(...continued)

1900; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', pp59-60; Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 6 January 1900; Extracts from Notes taken on the Boer Campaign, 6 January 1900; Tatham, Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith, p16, 6 January 1900; Humphry, 'A Victoria Cross Anomaly?', passim; Royston report, quoted in Stirling, The Colonials in Africa, p35 and see p36; Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, p171. According to George Archibald, the BMR acted in support of the 53rd Battery, Royal Artillery (George Archibald, in the London Evening News, 17 April 1900, quoted in Gordon, Honour Without Riches, p277).

¹²⁶ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p59; Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 6 January 1900.

¹²⁷ Extracts from Notes taken on the Boer Campaign, 6 January 1900; Natal Advertiser, 27 January 1900.

¹²⁸ Amery (ed), The Times History, III, p189.

¹²⁹ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p59; Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 6 January 1900.

¹³⁰ PAR, NDR 2/8, Volunteer Camp Orders, Ladysmith, 6 January 1900; and see Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p61; Warwick notebook-diary, 6 January 1900; Natal Witness, 18 January 1900. The Carbineers remained under saddle that entire day (Extracts from Notes taken on the Boer Campaign, 6 January 1900).

¹³¹ UNISA Archives, Gill diary, 6 January 1900, p27; Natal Witness, 18 January 1900.

in urgent support operations on the day.¹³² Dr Buntine (one of the Volunteer Medical Corps officers) enhanced his reputation at Wagon Hill by performing a delicate and daring surgical operation, under fire, on a wounded British officer.¹³³

The morning after the battle the Carbineers were called upon to assist in the gory task of collecting the Boer dead and handing them over to the enemy.¹³⁴ According to Hunter, the Natal Carbineers were also kept in reserve as an emergency personal escort for Sir George White in case Ladysmith fell on that day.¹³⁵ This escort was presumably an addition to that furnished to White for the duration of the siege by the Natal Mounted Rifles, under the command of Captain FS Tatham (Natal Carbineers and Natal Volunteer Staff).¹³⁶

Conclusion

Operationally, the Natal Volunteers were effectively marooned in Ladysmith during the siege, even if they did participate in a few successful localised ventures. Best-known is the night assault on the Boer artillery position on Gun Hill which was subsequently milked for every drop of propaganda to boost the sagging morale of the garrison and of the Colony. More obscure to history, and certainly less palatable to the sensibilities of settler Natal, was the reality behind the unproductive forays from Ladysmith at the outset of the siege, notably on 3 November, ventures that were considerably inflated to provide reassurance at a time of crisis, and later to embellish the achievements of the Volunteers. Commentators in Natal were critical of the Gun Hill saga itself, suggesting that the garrison should in the first place have occupied this feature and those nearby, and that once again the mounted Volunteers had been incorrectly deployed in the role of

¹³² Tatham, Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith, pp13-16, 6 January 1900; Natal Witness, 26 January 1900.

¹³³ Wallace, The Australians at the Boer War, p57.

¹³⁴ Gage diary, 7 January 1900; Catchpole diary, p64; Natal Witness, 26 January 1900; 'The caterer', in Natal Witness, 28 February-1 March 1900; Watkins-Pitchford, Besieged in Ladysmith, pp56-8; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p160.

¹³⁵ British Library, White Papers, MSS Eur F108/69, BA 4/21, Duff to White, 1 November 1903; Royal Commission on the War, III (Minutes of Evidence), p136, evidence of General Hunter.

¹³⁶ Natal Volunteer Record, pp142-3.

infantry in an operation that could easily have incurred heavy casualties, unacceptable to colonial sentiment.

CHAPTER VIII

THE RELIEF OF LADYSMITH

'Clear the line. Lord Dundonald, with Natal Carbineers and Composite Regiment, entered Ladysmith last night'.¹

The Battle of the Tugela Heights

On 9 February 1900 the Composite Regiment returned to Chieveley, escorting artillery and covering the left flank of the columns returning from the battles of Spioenkop and Vaalkrans.² The small Natal Volunteer component in Buller's army was consistently active only in the first of a new series of operations to relieve Ladysmith, known as the battle of the Tugela Heights.

~~On this occasion Buller secured his right flank with a wide sweeping movement to the south and east of Colenso, and advanced through the village along the railway line while securing his other (left) flank along the line of kopjes adjacent to the NGR line.³~~ This engagement was to be a prototype for the twentieth century multi-day battle.⁴ It entailed drastically new tactics centred on concerted massed infantry assaults with the strongest possible artillery support.⁵ The Natal Volunteers, especially the mounted infantry, were unsuited to this tactic of prolonged assault, particularly in the hilly terrain to the north-east of Ladysmith on which this battle would be fought.

¹ Telegraph message, Buller to the Governor of Natal, Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson, 3am, Thursday 1 March 1900, in the Natal Witness, 2 March 1900.

² Churchill, London to Ladysmith, p368.

³ Oliver Knesl and Helen Griffin, 'Buller's back route into Ladysmith', Medal News, 39/2, February 2000, p18.

⁴ Pakenham, The Scramble for Africa, p573.

⁵ Carver, The National Army Museum Book of the Boer War, p115.

On 12 February the Estcourt-Weenen Squadron of the Natal Carbineers revisited Hussar Hill as part of a reconnaissance-in-strength preparatory to the recapture of this strategic feature, essential to British plans to force Boer positions along the Hussar Hill-Cingolo-Monte Cristo axis.⁶ Dundonald's mounted brigade provided cover for the re-occupation of the hill on the 14th.⁷ There were some further innovative tactical developments such as the creeping barrage, concealment, dispersion and the effective use of ground.⁸

The operation against Hussar Hill initially proceeded without incident. The hill had been occupied by only a small Boer picket, who were surprised and easily driven off.⁹ Cassell's History of the Boer War commented that

'the irregulars spread out in crescent shape all around the further side of the hill. Their business was the holding back of any reinforcements that might come up to support the Boer patrol, and keep the ground safe for the commander.'¹⁰

Buller rode up with his staff to make observations and then ordered a retirement to Chieveley. During this retirement the rearguard of the brigade was attacked by a small Boer force.¹¹ Churchill, once again an eyewitness to events, described the incident as

⁶ See PAR, CSO 2609, translated telegrams, 13 February 1900; Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p678; Ken Gillings, The Battle of the Thukela Heights: 12-28 February 1900, Randburg, Ravan Press, 1999, pp2-3.

⁷ Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD/233/124/1, Copies of Documents connected with Lord Dundonald's Brigade, Section 3, Hussar Hill Orders, 13 February 1900; NAR, Leyds 1043, CD 458, White to Chief-of-Staff, 23 March 1900, p46; Gillings, The Battle of the Thukela Heights, p4.

⁸ Powell, Buller: A Scapegoat?, pp172-3; Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, IV, p120.

⁹ Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p680; Jeans (ed), Naval Brigades in the South African War, p261.

¹⁰ Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p680.

¹¹ Amery (ed), The Times History, III, p497; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, II, p433; Natal Volunteer Record, pp153-4; Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p680; Taitz, The War Memories of Commandant Ludwig Krause, p62.

'a strange little skirmish which would have been a bloody rifle duel but for the great distance which separated the combatants and for the cleverness with which friends and foes concealed and sheltered themselves'.¹²

Though weakened by the despatch of Bethune's Mounted Infantry to the Natal-Zululand frontier on 11 February, the Composite Regiment played a valuable role on Buller's right flank encircling Colenso after having languished for a time protecting the army's flanks, and the railway at Chieveley.¹³ On the 16th the Volunteers reconnoitred Cingolo ridge, (of which Monte Cristo constituted the highest point) and then scaled its south-eastern slopes in an incident-free operation. It was found that the few Boers in position had neglected the strategic importance of the position, and had not bothered to entrench, possibly because they considered the precipitous slopes, strewn with boulders and covered in almost impenetrable bush, to be sufficient deterrent.¹⁴

On 17 February the Carbineers returned to Cingolo when a full-scale attack was launched after a British flanking march.¹⁵ Dundonald, to his credit, displayed admirable initiative on this occasion. He took two of his regiments, the Composite Regiment and the South African Light Horse, and manoeuvred through the thorn and scrub of the Blaauwkrantz River valley onto the south-eastern slopes of the enemy positions on Cingolo, from where he launched an attack.¹⁶ It was a risky undertaking considering the difficult terrain.¹⁷

¹² Churchill, London to Ladysmith, p374.

¹³ Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD 233/124/2, Mounted Brigade Record, p8; Wilson, With the Flag to Pretoria, II, p374; Pakenham, The Boer War, p347, and chapters 29 and 30.

¹⁴ Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD 233/124/2, Mounted Brigade Record, pp8-10; The Times, 14 November 1900; Creswicke, South Africa and the Transvaal War, IV, p124; Wilson, With the Flag to Pretoria, II, p442; Churchill, London to Ladysmith, p388; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, III, pp416-7; Gillings, The Battle of the Thukela Heights, pp6-7.

¹⁵ Gillings, The Battle of the Thukela Heights, pp7-8.

¹⁶ Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD 233/124/2, Mounted Brigade Record, pp8-10; Gillings, The Battle of the Thukela Heights, p8.

¹⁷ Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD 233/124/2, Mounted Brigade

(continued...)

The southern apex was successfully stormed under heavy fire.¹⁸ During the latter part of this operation, Dundonald's men were aided by the diversion of many Boer defenders to repel infantry assaults on the western slopes.¹⁹ The Carbineers, the only Natal Volunteer component of the Composite Regiment, were on the extreme right flank on this occasion.²⁰ The Volunteers earned a mention in Cassell's History of the Boer War for their role in the operation:

'There were Boers scattered about the ground in twos and threes, hidden by bushes and concealed in dongas and behind boulders. These the hardy colonials and the steady British infantry drove from bush to bush in skirmishing fashion.'²¹

It was on this occasion that the Estcourt-Weenen Squadron, Natal Carbineers, sustained their only fatal casualty outside of the battle of Colenso. He was Trooper Mark Goldstein.²²

Dundonald's brigade was complimented by Buller on their performance, and continued with a similar but more difficult operation on 18 February, this time seizing the north-eastern slopes of Monte Cristo, pursuing the Boers as far as the feature's precipitous drop to the Thukela.²³ Here

¹⁷(...continued)
Record, pp8-10.

¹⁸ Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD 233/124/2, Mounted Brigade Record, pp9-10; Natal Witness, 27 February 1900; Natal Advertiser, 28 February 1900; Amery (ed), The Times History, III, pp500-2.

¹⁹ Natal Witness, 9 November 1900; Wilson, With the Flag to Pretoria, II, p453.

²⁰ Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p685.

²¹ Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p686.

²² There is confusion regarding the date of the Cingolo action, with 15 and 16 February also cited (Natal Mercury, 21 and 23 February 1900; Natal Volunteer Record, p153; McKenzie, Delayed Action, p183).

²³ NAM, NAM 7607/49, Lieutenant SG Francis diary, 18 February 1900, p16; Times of Natal, 19 February 1900; Taitz, The War Memories of Commandant Ludwig Krause, p65.

they crossed the river over a temporary footbridge.²⁴ Danes was impressed with the mounted infantry on this occasion:

'Every horseman had to ride and fight on his own account, merely being told in a general way what work was to be done. But, despite the difficulties and dangers, the irregular horse hunted the Dutchmen up and down, and prevented them from taking up positions from which they could annoy the advancing infantry.'²⁵

A typical tactic employed by McKenzie of the Natal Carbineers in the Cingolo and Monte Cristo actions was to advance one troop at a time, appropriate in the broken country described above because there was not the same room for manoeuvre as there had been, for example, at Acton Homes.²⁶

In a situation reminiscent of the skirmish at Acton Homes, there were, however, missed opportunities for pursuit and further gain at both Cingolo and Monte Cristo. Amery concludes that on these occasions, and following the battle of Pieter's Hill on 27 February, the Boers were permitted almost unopposed withdrawals. He specifically cites the limited scouting during a period of the campaign in which the Carbineers do not appear to have been extended.

After the Monte Cristo engagement, Buller doubled back towards Colenso, crossing the Thukela south of the village. On 20-21 February the Carbineers found themselves back at their old nemesis, Hlangwane, evacuated by the Boers on the 18th. From there they observed the right flank of a re-directed advance by the 2nd and 4th Brigades, the sequel to the capture of Monte Cristo.²⁷ On the night of the 20th most of Dundonald's Mounted Brigade bivouacked on Hlangwane, with vedettes on Monte Cristo and along the Thukela as far as its junction with the

²⁴ Amery (ed), The Times History, III, pp502-3; Gillings, The Battle of the Thukela Heights, p10.

²⁵ Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p687.

²⁶ McKenzie, Delayed Action, p172; Taitz, Ludwig Krause, p67.

²⁷ Natal Mercury, 20 February 1900; Erasmus, 'Die Ineenstorting van die Boeremagte', pp48,66-7; Mocke, 'Die Slag van Colenso', p151; and see Gillings, The Battle of the Thukela Heights, p11.

Blaauwkrantz River.²⁸ The brigade played a limited part in the localized battles for Wynne Hill, Hart's Hill and then Pieter's Hill. Instead of participating directly in these infantry assaults, the brigade, after crossing at a pontoon bridge opposite Hart's Hill and Hlangwane, probably on the 21st, endured a miserable three days (22-24 February) amidst rain and shellfire, awaiting orders.²⁹

On 26 February Dundonald was ordered by Buller to assist in the following day's infantry attack on the hills north of the Thukela, most notably Pieter's Hill.³⁰ At dawn on the 27th the Carbineers, bivouacked on the neck between Monte Cristo and Cingolo, bestirred themselves with a special enthusiasm - in anticipation of the news later that day of infantry successes at Pieter's Hill- though as usual they had spent an uncomfortable night with uniforms and boots on.³¹ On the 27th Dundonald's brigade assumed positions on the south bank of the Thukela, and provided supporting fire for the infantry operations in the hills opposite.³² Breytenbach described the day's mounted infantry (in)action:

'Die vurige Dundonald wie se berede troepe die hele dag niks anders gedoen het as om die vyandelike stellings oorkant die rivier met geweerkoeëls te bestrooi nie, wou graag die pontoonbrug oorsteek om die vyand te agtervolg. Buller het hom egter belet om dit te doen omdat dit so laat was en hy dit onwaarskynlik geag het dat hy in die nag enige voordeel op die moeilike terrein tussen die Tugela en Kliprivier sou behaal.³³

Although the Natal Volunteers played a subdued role in these operations, the Boer retirement from the Tugela Heights has been defended in several sources as a model success. The Earl of

²⁸ Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, II, p462; Gillings, The Battle of the Thukela Heights, p12.

²⁹ Natal Volunteer Record, p154; McKenzie, Delayed Action, pp172 and 184.

³⁰ Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD 233/124/2, Mounted Brigade Record, Ladysmith Day and Orders for Day After, p15.

³¹ Churchill, London to Ladysmith, p433.

³² Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD 233/124/2, Mounted Brigade Record, Ladysmith Day and Orders for Day After, pp15-17; Gillings, The Battle of the Thukela Heights, pp38-46.

³³ Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, III, pp552-3.

Rosslyn, a roving correspondent with the Daily Mail and the Sphere, who received a commission in Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry, commented:

'In all humility I venture an opinion that the Boers fought a very fine rearguard action to give them time to remove their transport and guns to some other position...

In fact, the Boers relieved Ladysmith of their own account, and not from any defeat by General Buller's force.'³⁴

The unabashedly jingoistic Donald Macdonald conceded that 'no British force of equal magnitude could have got away in the same time, and taken their guns with them'.³⁵ In fact, the Boer decision to retire appears to have been a considered one, taken at a council-of-war (krygsraad) on the night of the 27th.³⁶

After the battle of Pieter's Hill the Queen's Christmas gift of a specially decorated tin of chocolate was served out, belatedly, amidst renewed optimism as this last major barrier before Ladysmith was eliminated.³⁷ Chocolates, as the symbol of Queen Victoria's appreciation for the efforts of her soldiers in South Africa, may not appear to be of central importance to an assessment of military effectiveness, but the seriousness with which it was considered by her colonial subjects in Natal reflects the strong sentimental attachment to the Empire. By June 1901 some Volunteers had not yet received the chocolate, and this led to the exchange of a flurry of minute papers between the Natal Department of Lands and Public Works and the Volunteer Department. The matter was

³⁴ The Earl of Rosslyn, Twice Captured: A Record of Adventure during the Boer War, Cape Town, Juta/Blackwood & Sons, 1900, pp132-3.

³⁵ Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, p287; and see Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, IV, pp122-3; Taitz, The War Memories of Commandant Ludwig Krause, pp76-7; Headlam (ed), The Milner Papers 1899-1905, p71.

³⁶ Delport, 'Die Rol van Generaal Marthinus Prinsloo', pp109-110.

³⁷ Stephen Dance, 'As Good as a Medal: The Queen's Chocolate: Some Answered Questions', Soldiers of the Queen, 75/December 1993, pp20-2; Natal Volunteer Record, p154; McKenzie, Delayed Action, p184; Bridgland, Field Gun Jack versus the Boers, pp76-7.

even brought to the attention of the British Commander-in-Chief, Lord Roberts.³⁸ In August 1901 the office of the Prime Minister of Natal fielded a complaint from one Frank Lean, a Special Service member of the Carbineer siege garrison in Ladysmith, regarding the non-receipt of the Queen's chocolate by certain Volunteers.³⁹ However, on 22 August 1901 the following notice appeared in the Times of Natal for the benefit of the Carbineers:

'Regular members of the Natal Carbineers who served during the siege of Ladysmith, and relatives of members who lost their lives prior to and during the siege, and consequent upon it, can obtain their 'Queen's Chocolate' on personal application at the Orderly Room of the Regiment.'⁴⁰

28 February 1900: into Ladysmith

**'Welcome, Sir Redvers, glad to see you here,
Although I cannot offer you the festive season's cheer.
How do, Sir George? I'm sorry you have had
to wait so long.
But Boers were thick as bumble-bees
and in positions strong.'**⁴¹

The 28th of February, the 119th day of the siege, dawned with business as usual for the Carbineers, encamped in the vicinity of Railway Hill, but was to end as one of the most memorable days in the regiment's history and that of the Natal Volunteer war effort. Dundonald's orders for the day: 'work north and northwest towards Ladysmith', gave no hint of the drama to follow.⁴² The brigade completed breakfast and ablutions as usual, and crossed the Thukela

³⁸ PAR, MJPW 85, minute paper, Lands and Works 3053/1901, 6-10 June 1901.

³⁹ PAR, PM 23, minute paper PM 1380/1901, Lean to Hime, 31 August 1901 and Adjutant, Natal Carbineers, 29 August 1901.

⁴⁰ Times of Natal, 22 August 1901.

⁴¹ 'Ladysmith Bombshell', 23 December 1899.

⁴² Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, II, p523.

between 7am and 8am, in a traffic-jam of artillery, infantry and irregular horse.⁴³ They moved forward through the debris of the previous day's battle, passing columns of Boer prisoners.⁴⁴

The Mounted Brigade comprised Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry, the South African Light Horse, and the Composite Regiment.⁴⁵ In the vicinity of Pieter's Station there was ample evidence of the precipitate retirement of the siege commandos, including abandoned saddlery and ammunition.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, pursuit was delayed by a hesitant and cautious Dundonald who, although under orders from Buller to probe forward as the advanced guard of the corps, was mindful of his superior's intention 'simply to discover what enemy positions the enemy held still between his foremost infantry posts and Ladysmith'.⁴⁷ Buller's caution here can be attributed to his anticipation of further Boer resistance following the battle of Pieter's Hill on the 27th.⁴⁸ Amery contends, with specific reference to the earlier operations at Cingolo and Monte Cristo, that Buller hoped to relieve Ladysmith with a minimum of confrontation with the Boers. This is what he was achieving, but he was also fortunate that the Boers made no further stand following Pieter's Hill.⁴⁹

⁴³ Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, II, p524.

⁴⁴ Rosslyn, Twice Captured, p133; McKenzie, Delayed Action, p173.

⁴⁵ Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD 233/124/2, Mounted Brigade Record, Ladysmith Day and Orders for Day After, p16.

⁴⁶ Delport, 'Die Rol van Generaal Marthinus Prinsloo', pp110-1; Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, pp734-5; Weeber, Op die Natalse Front, p206; Taitz, The War Memories of Commandant Ludwig Krause, p76; Farrar-Hockley, Goughie, p52; and see Gustav Preller, 28 February 1900, in Smurthwaite, The Boer War, p112.

⁴⁷ Farrar-Hockley, Goughie, p52.

⁴⁸ CM Bakkes, Die Britse Deurbraak aan die Benede-Tugela op Majubadag 1900, Pretoria, Sentrale Dokumentasiediens, SAW Publikasie Nommer 3, 1973, pp53-4; and see Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, II, p526.

⁴⁹ Amery (ed), The Times History, III, pp505-6; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, III, pp474-5; Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, IV, p121; also see Taitz, The War Memories of Commandant Ludwig Krause, p70; Gillings, The Battle of the Thukela Heights, pp12-3.

Although the advance gathered momentum when Gough's Composite Regiment took over the advance guard at 2pm, 'the mounted brigade had advanced barely two miles beyond the ground captured by the infantry the previous evening'.⁵⁰ Gough spent the afternoon scouting and clearing successive ridges, until, at nightfall, Dundonald hesitated again south of Intombi, probably mindful of Buller's wishes, and nervous that the rough terrain and limited reconnaissance opportunities might conceal Boer threats on his flanks, and compromise the security of the brigade.⁵¹ Although the Volunteers were finally able to play a meaningful part in these relief operations, Cassell's History of the Boer War was probably being grandiose when it enthused that

'the Carbineers were working at high pressure, and they swept the ground as a housemaid sweeps a carpet. Some Dutchmen they captured, others they slew, more they drove ahead of them. The ground was littered with the flotsam and jetsam of an army in retreat.'⁵²

The bulk of the brigade returned that evening to its bivouac position at Nelthorpe.⁵³

At an unspecified point during the day McKenzie's squadron assumed a position behind a ridge commanding the road leading from Grobelaarskloof to a Boer-held bridge over the Klip River, to the south of Bulwana. Soon thereafter a sizeable Boer column approached, but McKenzie's prospects for a second successful ambush during the course of the campaign were dashed when an unidentified machine-gun opened fire on the Carbineers' right flank. The Boers simply wheeled their horses and retired before the trap could be sprung.⁵⁴

The pockets of resilient Boer riflemen defending every ridge and available piece of cover were dislodged by the despatch of troops around the flanks. The process was repeated until, at about

⁵⁰ Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, II, p523; Farrar-Hockley, Goughie, p52.

⁵¹ Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, II, p527.

⁵² Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p734, and see p736.

⁵³ Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD 233/124/2, Mounted Brigade Record, Ladysmith Day and orders for Day After', pp17-18; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, II, p527; Dundonald, My Army Life, p151.

⁵⁴ Farrar-Hockley, Goughie, p52; McKenzie, Delayed Action, p173.

5.30pm, the Carbineers found themselves in an open valley south of Intombi Hospital, at the outer defences of Ladysmith.⁵⁵

Shells from the Boer artillery on Bulwana elicited an order from Dundonald to retire and rejoin the brigade.⁵⁶ Gough ignored this instruction and pressed on, sending Dundonald a note to this effect.⁵⁷ This was a far cry from the assertion by Churchill, in a letter to the Daily Mail in 1901, that it was Dundonald who had determined to 'attempt to enter the town by galloping through the intervening space'.⁵⁸

Soon the Composite Regiment was passing the jubilant occupants of Intombi Hospital and the picquets on Wagon Hill. By this time Gough was left with only his squadrons from the Natal Carbineers and the Imperial Light Horse.⁵⁹ According to the brigade narrative, it was at about this point that Dundonald again hesitated, concerned about the lateness of the hour, rocky terrain, the non-arrival of some supplies, and supposedly insufficient scouting, and therefore ordered a halt, mindful of the risk the army would be taking of losing 'practically all its mounted rifle regiments'.⁶⁰ However, the advance guard commanded by Gough continued into Ladysmith.

A minor crisis of 'emulation and rivalry' between the Carbineer and Imperial Light Horse squadrons regarding the delicate matter of which regiment was to be the first into Ladysmith on

⁵⁵ See Farrar-Hockley, Goughie, p53.

⁵⁶ Farrar-Hockley, Goughie, p53.

⁵⁷ Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 2, GD 233/124/1, Copies of Official Documents connected with Lord Dundonald's Brigade, Section 3, Gough to Dundonald, 3.30pm, 28 February 1900; McKenzie, Delayed Action, p174; Farrar-Hockley, Goughie, pp52-3.

⁵⁸ Natal Mercury, 23 August 1901.

⁵⁹ Farrar-Hockley, Goughie, p53.

⁶⁰ Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD 233/124/2, Mounted Brigade Record, Ladysmith Day and Orders for Day After, p18.

this historic occasion called for some tactful diplomacy on the part of Gough.⁶¹ Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry had been scheduled to lead that day, according to Dundonald's squadron rotation, but Captain Herbert Bottomly, commanding 'A' Squadron of the Imperial Light Horse, reminded Dundonald of a promise made several weeks earlier that his squadron be permitted to lead the final advance on Ladysmith where the balance of that regiment was also besieged. Consequently, that day's lead scouting was entrusted to Gough's regiment.⁶² However, a minor crisis was imminent, consequent on a similar promise allegedly made to the Natal Carbineers.⁶³ The solution was to recall all scouts and the two squadrons were formed into half-sections (double file), with Gough leading the column.⁶⁴

It was no doubt a thrilling moment and the excitement of the occasion was reflected in some almost hysterical reporting in several contemporary sources on the final entry to the town. Typical was Danes's Cassell's History of the Boer War: 'The pace was more like Epsom than Aldershot...And in one yelling mass the Natal Carbineers galloped headlong over the valley.'⁶⁵ According to Gough, a 'dignified calm' prevailed as the column proceeded at a walk past Caesar's Camp and Wagon Hill, eliciting cheers from the troops in the sangars above.⁶⁶ At Fourie's Spruit, on the outskirts of the town, the first of the besieged troops were encountered, 'ghastly figures,

⁶¹ Craw, The Siege of Ladysmith, p52; Gough, Soldiering On, p76; McKenzie, Delayed Action, pp173-8.

⁶² Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, II, pp526-7; Dundonald, My Army Life, p150; Griffith, Thank God we Kept the Flag Flying, p355; Chisholm, Ladysmith, p212.

⁶³ Memoirs of Field-Marshal Lord Birdwood, as quoted in McKenzie, Delayed Action, p187; also see Field-Marshal Lord Birdwood, Khaki and Gown: An Autobiography, London, Ward, Lock and Co Ltd, 1942, p106.

⁶⁴ Natal Volunteer Record, p154; Gibson, The History of the Imperial Light Horse in the South African War, p161; Chisholm, Ladysmith, p212.

⁶⁵ Times of Natal, 3 March 1900; Natal Volunteer Record, p154; Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, pp736-7; McKenzie, Delayed Action, p178; Smurthwaite, The Boer War, p113.

⁶⁶ Gough, Soldiering On, p77.

like animated skeletons'.⁶⁷ One of these men threw caution to the wind. He

'jumped up, climbed bareback on to a wretched worn-out horse, and with nothing but a halter round its neck, kicked it, with a considerable display of energy, into a weak and lumbering canter, and advanced to meet us. He was so speechless with excitement that he could say nothing, but taking off his slouch hat and waving it...galloped down the length of our column shouting "What ho!" He never said another word till he found old friends in the column and joined them.'⁶⁸

Descriptions of the celebration of a heroic trial were very evident.⁶⁹ This perspective may appear to be at odds with the 'siege-worn', 'fever-stricken', and 'shrunkened-limbed' welcoming committees that could not raise much of a cheer despite their obvious relief and enthusiasm.⁷⁰ On 1 March 1900 one siege soldier wrote rather laconically: 'The siege was raised last night by the Natal Carbineers and ILH. We are all uncommonly pleased at the way our gallant boys relieved us.'⁷¹ Dr Frederick Treves, a medical doctor with Buller's army, wrote a few days after the relief that there 'were no evidences of rejoicing, no signs of interest or animation'.⁷² Danes, in turn, is typically exaggerated: 'pallid women and ghastly men, with pale shrunkened faces and tottering limbs, pressed round the horses of the stalwart troopers'.⁷³ However, in the context of the siege these accounts are not necessarily a contradiction. To take the Natal Volunteers, for example, these men had successfully endured the sternest trial that the war was to demand of them, at the

⁶⁷ Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p737.

⁶⁸ Gough, Soldiering On, pp77-8; also see Times of Natal, 3 March 1900; Natal Mercury, 28 February 1900; Farrar-Hockley, Goughie, p53; Pearse, Four Months Besieged, p240; Watkins-Pitchford, Besieged in Ladysmith, p121.

⁶⁹ Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, pp204-5; Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, p280; and see Tatham, Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith, p26.

⁷⁰ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', pp73-4; and see Wilson, With the Flag to Pretoria, II, pp478-9.

⁷¹ Durban Local History Museum, F575/568/1, letter, Tom to Miss FB Stephenson, 1 March 1900; and see Himeville Museum, Harding diary, 28 February-1 March 1900; Chalmers, Bombardment of Ladysmith Anticipated, chapter 10.

⁷² Treves, The Tale of a Field Hospital, p99.

⁷³ Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p737.

cost of their most severe casualties. It was inevitable that the excitement and euphoria of relief after many setbacks would be tempered by the effects of this ordeal.

Following the initially confused arrival of the small relief column, a more formal greeting from senior Natal Volunteer officers was held later the same evening at the Klip River drift on the outskirts of the town.⁷⁴ Amongst the Klip River Drift reception committee was Colonel William Royston, the Commandant of Volunteers and a former Commanding Officer of the Natal Carbineers, who was to die a few weeks later from enteric contracted during the siege.⁷⁵

Following the speeches of welcome, the Carbineer contingent's needs were taken care of by their garrison compatriots, and at about 8pm Gough retired to General White's quarters.⁷⁶ Many of those recently liberated 'gathered in the Relief Column camp, and the men, who had given away their rations to others more hungry than themselves, told us of the long fights upon the Tugela'.⁷⁷ White, whatever his military faults, delivered some moving words amidst emotional scenes that, according to Donald Macdonald, swept away the resentment that many soldiers and residents had borne towards him during the siege:

'People of Ladysmith, I thank you one and all for the heroic and patient manner in which you have assisted me during the siege of Ladysmith. From the bottom of my heart I thank you.'⁷⁸

Though dirty and ragged from two weeks bivouacking in the open, the Relief Column Volunteers appeared sleek and fit alongside their recently liberated friends who had been on half rations for several weeks, and had been ravaged by enteric and dysentery.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p73; Farrar-Hockley, Goughie, p54.

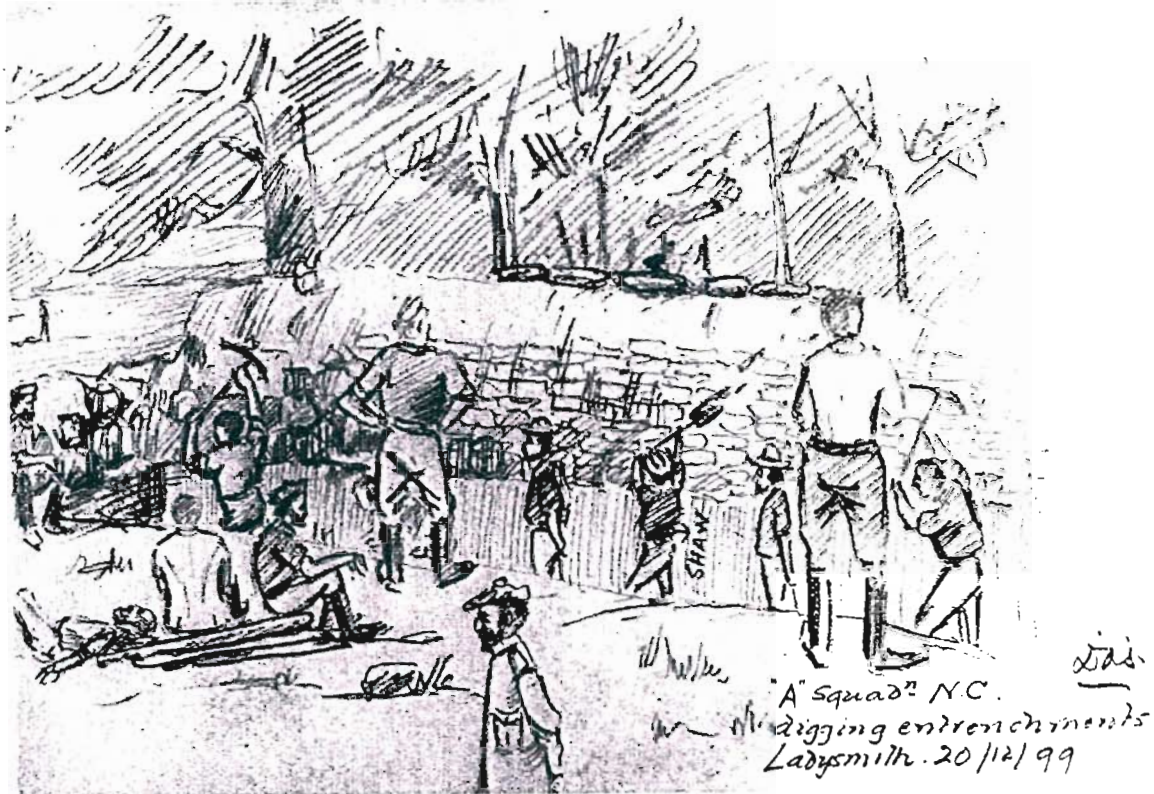
⁷⁵ McKenzie, Delayed Action, pp174 and 177.

⁷⁶ Gough, Soldiering On, p79.

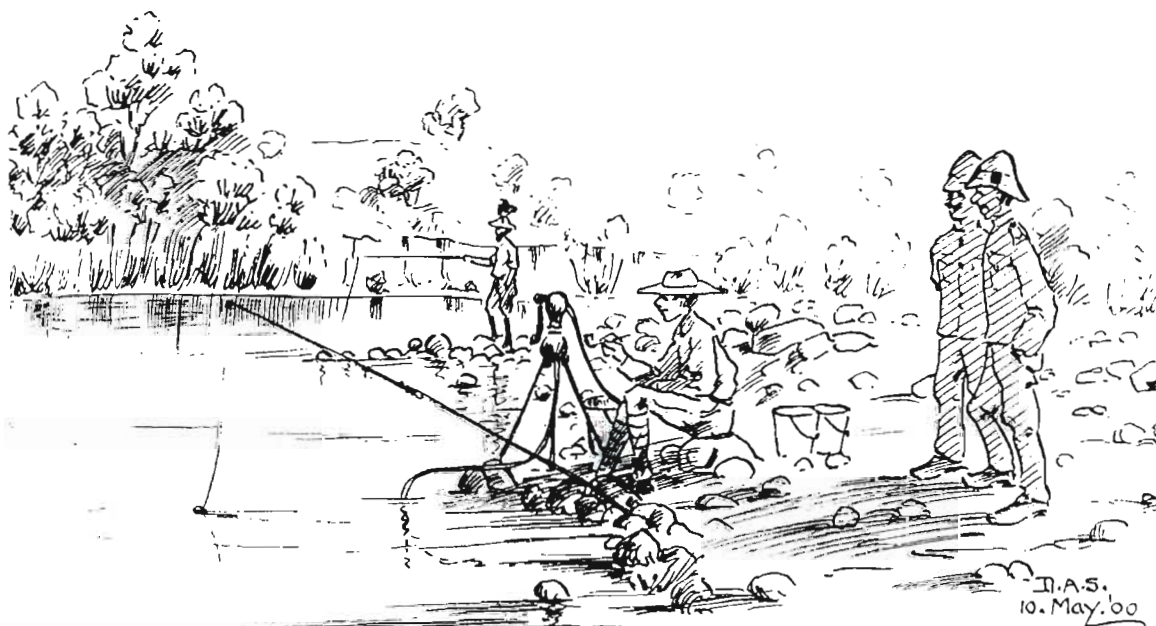
⁷⁷ Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, pp285-6.

⁷⁸ Natal Witness, 3 March 1900; Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, 281.

⁷⁹ McKenzie, Delayed Action, p174.



7. 'A' Squadron, Natal Carbineers, digging entrenchments.' (siege of Ladysmith)
Dacre Shaw, 20 December 1899.



8. 'Business and pleasure, fishing in the Klip River.'
Dacre Shaw, 10 May 1900.



9. *'The dentist, Mount Prospect.'*
Dacre Shaw, 7 June 1900.



10. A VCR patrol departing Dundee on 28 July 1901.

In various melodramatic accounts of the relief it was claimed that both Dundonald and Churchill were present.⁸⁰ However, Dundonald himself recalled that 'I did not arrive until 20 minutes after you [McKenzie]...having naturally the brigade to attend to'.⁸¹ Churchill makes the mistake of identifying the lead relief squadrons as South African Light Horse, the regiment he served with after his escape from Boer captivity.⁸² Dundonald continued to attract popular attention at home. In June 1901 the Natal Witness reported on an exhibition of art at the Royal Academy, that included a work entitled 'Dundonald's Dash'. The picture is described in all the heroic and mythological prose that surrounded him.⁸³

There is also an unsubstantiated account by the acting Adjutant of the Natal Carbineers, Captain Richards, who claimed to have entered Ladysmith on the night of 27 February, after he was apparently tasked by McKenzie with escorting transport to the outskirts of Ladysmith, in preparation for the march in the following morning.⁸⁴

At the end of this emotional day of the relief, one thing was undeniable: it had come, wrote Macdonald, 'at last with dramatic suddenness. Different men saw it in different aspects, with different eyes. To all of us, though, it stands the personal experience of a lifetime, something that next to the battle scenes we shall never forget'.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Times of Natal, 2 March 1900; Natal Witness 3 March 1900; Farrar-Hockley, Goughie, p54; Churchill, London to Ladysmith, pp462-5; Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, p280; McKenzie, Delayed Action, pp174-7; Dundonald, My Army Life, p151; Artists and Illustrators of the Anglo-Boer War, Vlaeberg, Fernwood Press, 1992, p28.

⁸¹ Dundonald to McKenzie, quoted in McKenzie, Delayed Action, p191; and see Amery (ed), The Times History, III, p545; Dundonald, My Army Life, p151; Griffith, Thank God We Kept the Flag Flying, pp359-60; Sandys, Churchill: Wanted Dead or Alive, p176.

⁸² Churchill, My Early Life, p322.

⁸³ Natal Witness, 25 June 1901.

⁸⁴ GR Richards, 'Whither Bound: Some South African Essays', pp22-4.

⁸⁵ Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, p273. The relief campaign had been one of considerable fortitude, and for once Roberts was in agreement with his much-maligned commander in Natal:

(continued...)

Conclusion

The final phase of Sir Redvers Buller's controversial campaign to relieve Ladysmith, the battle of the Tugela Heights, was characterised by multi-day attritional assaults on fortified Boer positions in hilly terrain. This tactic and terrain were not suitable for the mounted Volunteers, who were once again marginalised in terms of large-scale battles. However, the Volunteers did enjoy success in less prominent actions at Hussar Hill, Cingolo, Monte Cristo, and on the outskirts of Ladysmith itself. This perhaps suggests that these were, after all, regardless of British Army prejudice against the Volunteers, the type of action they were best suited to.

There was an awareness that the relief of Ladysmith would be a crucial point in the war in Natal, and for the Colony the trials endured and losses suffered by its soldiers and civilians were to a significant extent compensated for by the fact that one of its regiments had been involved in the symbolically important entry into the town on 28 February 1900.

⁸⁵(...continued)

'I concur with Sir Redvers Buller in his admiration of the courage and tenacity displayed by the troops. Undeterred by previous failures, and regardless of fatigue, exposure, and the heavy losses which decimated their ranks, they gallantly assaulted one position after another until they found or made a way into Ladysmith'

(NAR, FK 1790, file 2290, Roberts to Secretary of State for War, 28 March 1900).

CHAPTER IX

LIFE AFTER LADYSMITH

**'Many of you Colonials as well as Britishers
I hope to meet again, but those, I may never see
more, will live in my memory, and be
held in high regard to my life's end.'**¹

In Anglo-Boer historiography the period of formal campaigning in Natal from the relief of Ladysmith to the demobilization of the Colony's Volunteers in October 1900 is only cursorily considered as a postscript to the Ladysmith campaign. However, these months were far from uneventful.

Buller's Decision to 'Mark Time'

The Natal Volunteer camp daily orders for 1 March, the day following the relief, and issued in Ladysmith on 28 February 1900, were the epitome of uneventful siege routine, and must have been compiled before the arrival in the town of the Composite Regiment column that evening.² The dull routine seemed set to continue when the Natal Carbineers found themselves listed to guard a mealie-field on the night of 1-2 March.³ Although the Natal Carbineer and Imperial Light Horse relief column squadrons paraded at dawn on 1 March, intending to pursue the retreating Boers at once, they instead rejoined Buller's army assembled outside the town.⁴ According to one civilian diarist, a small 20-man patrol of mounted Volunteers also visited Gun Hill before dawn

¹ Lord Roberts, Farewell Army Order, Pretoria, 29 November 1900, quoted in McKenzie, Delayed Action, p192.

² PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Orderbooks, 28 February 1900.

³ PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Orderbooks, 1 March 1900.

⁴ NAR, Leyds 1043, CD 458, White to Chief-of-Staff, 23 March 1900, p25; Willcox, The Fifth (Royal Irish) Lancers in South Africa, p260; Gough, Soldiering On, p80; McKenzie, Delayed Action, p193; Dundonald, My Army Life, p152; and see Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD 233/124/2, 'Ladysmith Day and Day After'; Farrar-Hockley, Goughie, p54; Gordon, Honour Without Riches, pp279-80.

on this day.⁵

The Relief Column entered Ladysmith on 2 March. A formal parade through the town followed the next day, and the Natal Volunteers took their place in lining the dusty streets.⁶ Accounts suggest that the parade fell short of the triumph suggested by elements of the Natal press.⁷ Those Volunteers from the Relief Column encountered a 'semi-comatose' garrison.⁸ The recently relieved garrison were described as a 'sickly looking lot...white, pinched and drawn faces, and clothes hanging like rags'.⁹ However, Buller's own force had completed a gruelling series of battles in the Tugela Heights to effect the long-awaited relief. The relieving troops, therefore, were themselves 'a dirty-looking lot, whiskers on, trousers with the knees out and all the seat, some poor lads with hardly anything on their feet'.¹⁰

These contrasting debilities carried by both the relieving and relieved forces in Ladysmith, to which must be added the severe losses in horses and draught animals, suggested logistical constraints which influenced Buller's decision not to launch any immediate pursuit of the Boers. On 2 March Buller's principal medical officer indicated that a full month would be necessary before the siege veterans were fit for further service.¹¹ On 13 March Buller in turn informed the

⁵ Talana Museum, 'Diary of a Durban Shop Assistant', p90, 1 March 1900; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p76; Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, p287.

⁶ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p77.

⁷ Natal Witness, 6 March 1900; Natal Advertiser, 25 April 1900; Pamela Todd and David Fordham, Private Tucker's Boer War Diary, London, Elm Tree Books, 1980, pp88-9.

⁸ Times of Natal, 3 March 1900; Natal Advertiser, 5 March 1900; Natal Witness, 6 March 1900; Marling, Rifleman and Hussar, p264; Dickson, The Biograph in Battle, pp173-4. According to Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p745, Buller was accompanied by an escort of mounted Volunteers.

⁹ Willcox, The Fifth (Royal Irish) Lancers in South Africa, p261.

¹⁰ NAM, 7607/47, Drummer H Goodwin, 2nd West Yorkshire Regiment diary, p9, 2 March 1900; Natal Advertiser, 25 April 1900; and see Riall, Boer War, p63.

¹¹ NAM, 8307/121, Greening diary, 2 March 1900.

War Office of the extensive refitting required for his relief column and the Ladysmith garrison.¹² Consequently, there was to be no significant advance for the next two months.

Buller's decision was a controversial one, marked by a dispute with his successor as Commander-in-Chief in South Africa, Lord Roberts, in which Buller, with his reputation for overly meticulous preparation and consolidation, was usually saddled with the blame.¹³ Indeed, Buller's decision to 'mark time' on the Natal front until 7 May was essentially logistical, rather than strategic.¹⁴ At about this time, in the Orange Free State, Roberts's army experienced such severe shortages of animals, supplies and transport as to induce a paralysis of movement that lasted for two months, and that was without the complication of a four-month siege!¹⁵ Buller, with his painful experience of Boer military ability and tenacity, was more aware than most critics have given him credit that the Boers could still be more dangerous than his exhausted army was prepared for. He therefore believed that hasty pursuit would be tactically risky.¹⁶ Yet, according to Maurice, Buller had,

¹² PRO, WO 32/7897, 079/2107, Buller to Under-Secretary of State for War, 13 March 1900; Natal Witness, 23 May 1900; Powell, Buller: A Scapegoat?, p175-9; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, II, p651, Appendix 13, 'Buller's reasons for not pursuing the Boers on 28 February 1900' (extract from Royal Commission on the War in South Africa, II, Minutes of Evidence, pp182-3); III, p250. On 2 March no less than 73 wagons laden with rations and medical supplies trundled into the town (Daily Graphic, 7 March 1900).

¹³ For example, see NAR, FK 1792, file 3156, Buller to Roberts, 5 March 1900; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p75; Ken Gillings, 'The Helpmekaar Duel', Military History Journal, 6/6, December 1985, pp210-11; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, VI, pp67-8.

¹⁴ NAR, FK 1792, file 3156, Buller to Secretary of State for War, 24 May 1900; Roberts to Buller, cipher c315, 3 March 1900; and see PRO WO 32/7896, 079/2103, Buller to Secretary of State for War, 8 March 1900; NAR, FK 1792, file 3156, Roberts to Secretary of State for War, 3 July 1900; PRO, WO 32/7985, 079/3156, Operations Natal Field Force, 3 March to 18 May 1900, Roberts to Secretary of State for War, 3 July 1900; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p144.

¹⁵ Ian Bennett, 'Supply and Transport in the Boer War 1899-1902', Soldiers of the Queen, 87/December 1996, p6; Keith Surridge, 'Lord Kitchener and the South African War 1899-1902', Soldiers of the Queen, 101/June 2000, pp20-1; Sutton (ed), Waiting for the Waggon, p43.

¹⁶ Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, II, p651, Appendix 13; Gedenkboek van den Oorlog in Zuid-Afrika, p252. Buller seems to have been aware, though, that the strategically vital railway was at risk if the Boers were not shifted (PRO, WO 32/7896,

(continued...)

despite his caution, been anxious to proceed with three brigades to reoccupy the northern Natal districts of Dundee and Newcastle, and to deploy two divisions to force the Drakensberg passes to the Free State.¹⁷

The Volunteer siege veterans in the ranks of Buller's recently re-united army were dismayed that the relieving troops, whom they considered to be relatively fresh, were not given the opportunity to pursue the Boers retreating towards Elandslaagte.¹⁸ Instead, while the Relief Column remained inactive, it was the exhausted garrison that sent forth a pathetic column.¹⁹

On 1 March Gough's squadrons, with their small Natal Volunteer component, got as far as ascending Bulwana from the Ladysmith side while the Boers retired down the opposite slope, before Buller halted all offensive action.²⁰ There is also a report of a skirmish involving the Volunteers, during a foraging mission near Pepworth's Hill,²¹ and evidence of the widespread

¹⁶(...continued)

079/2103, Buller to Secretary of State for War, 8 March 1900).

¹⁷ Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, III, p250, quoting telegrams from Buller to Roberts, 2 and 5 March 1900; and see NAR, FK 1792, file 3156, Buller to Roberts, 2 March 1900; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, VI, p68.

¹⁸ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', pp74-5.

¹⁹ There is only sketchy detail on this column, but it appears to have comprised two squadrons of the 5th Dragoon Guards, plus elements of the Liverpool Regiment, the Devonshire Regiment, the Gordon Highlanders, the 10th Mountain Battery of artillery, the RFA, the Natal Police, and the Natal Volunteers (Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', pp74-5; Times of Natal, 5 March 1900; Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, pp289-90; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p144; and see NAR, FK 1790, file 2290, Buller to Secretary of State for War, 14 March 1900, Roberts to Secretary of State for War, 28 March 1900; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, III, p562; Willcox, The Fifth (Royal Irish) Lancers in South Africa, p260).

²⁰ Amery (ed), The Times History, III, pp546-7; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, II, p542, Appendix 13; Nicholson diary, 1 March 1900; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p74.

²¹ Nicholson diary, 1 March 1900; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p144. This may have been the expedition described by RC Archibald of the BMR (RC Archibald to mother, 2 March 1900, quoted in Gordon, Honour Without Riches, pp279-80).

destruction of farms in the Ladysmith district.²² The latter probably contributed to the often merciless response of colonial troops when instructed to burn Afrikaner farms in northern Natal later in 1900.²³

The deserted Boer artillery emplacements that had tormented the town exerted a strong fascination for the besieged, as did their camps.²⁴ Both were unabashedly looted for supplies.²⁵ This loot allegedly included cases of modified ammunition, fuelling the controversy surrounding the use of 'illegal' or dum-dum' ammunition on both sides.²⁶ The issue was brought to the attention of Natalians by the death of a Natal Volunteer, Sergeant Andrew Colville, at Rietfontein/Tinta Inyoni on 24 October 1899, allegedly from an 'explosive' bullet.²⁷

In this context military theorists have posed the question whether 'just war restrictions apply to all enemies, or only to those who share certain cultural values?'²⁸ This consideration was a complicating factor for Natal Volunteers when they fought the Boers. So too was Clark's question whether a state can expect its soldiers to risk their lives on its behalf and then shackle their military efforts. Against this must be weighed the likelihood of escalation if such methods were used against a technologically advanced enemy.²⁹

²² Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p211.

²³ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p76; Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, p288.

²⁴ Talana Museum, 'Diary of a Durban Shop Assistant', p91, 4 January 1900; BW Martin, in A Diary of the Siege, No.4, p38.

²⁵ Craw, A Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith, p52; Catchpole diary, book 1, p76, undated, probably 1 March 1900; Macdonald, How We Kept the Flag Flying, p289.

²⁶ See, for example, Times of Natal, 22 February 1900; Natal Witness, 8 May 1901; Musgrave, In South Africa with Buller, pp203-4; Makins, Surgical Experiences in South Africa, pp91-100; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p208.

²⁷ Natal Mercury, 26 October 1899; and see Natal Witness, 26 January 1900.

²⁸ Clark, Waging War, p45.

²⁹ Volkstem, 12 March 1900; Clark, Waging War, p86; Geoffrey Best, 'How Right is
(continued...)

Significantly, Great Britain in 1907 was one of the last major powers to sign the 1899 Hague Declaration concerning the use of expanding bullets. In fact, the British openly manufactured expanding ammunition in India for use against indigenous colonial opposition, and sent it to South Africa. The reason this ammunition was not officially used during the Anglo-Boer War was not the Hague Convention, but rather its supposed malfunction under the service conditions likely to be encountered in South Africa. Volunteer troops were considered likely culprits in terms of weapon maintenance.³⁰

Too Early to Celebrate?

'We have reached a new and cheerful phase in the state of the campaign in Natal. The tide now runs in our favour.'³¹

On 2 March a cautiously optimistic Buller despatched the following telegram to the Governor, Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson:

I find the defeat of the Boers is more complete than I had dared to anticipate. This whole district is completely clear of them, and except the top of Van Reenen's Pass, where

²⁹(...continued)

Might? Some Aspects of the International Debate about How to Fight Wars and How to Win Them, 1870-1918', in Best and Wheatcroft (eds), War, Economy and the Military Mind, pp120-1.

³⁰ Royal Commission on the War in South Africa, II, Minutes of Evidence, p72; Edward M Spiers, 'The Use of the Dum Dum Bullet in Colonial Warfare', The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, 4/1, October 1975, especially p10; and see NAR, Leyds 92ii, Frederick Rompel to Gezantschap der ZAR, Brussels, 19 March 1901; South African National Museum of Military History, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, The Hague Declaration (IV,3) of 1899, concerning expanding bullets, Washington, 1915; Transvaal Leader, 2 August 1899; Natal Mercury, 9 September 1899; SB Spies, Methods of Barbarism? Roberts and Kitchener and Civilians in the Boer Republics: January 1900-May 1902, Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1977, pp13-15.

³¹ Times of Natal, 1 March 1900.

several wagons are visible, I can find no trace of them.³²

Despite the general inaction and disputed deployment during the Ladysmith relief campaign, there was effusive praise for the Volunteers from the British Army higher command. On 7 March 1900 Lord Dundonald paid the Estcourt-Weenen Squadron of the Natal Carbineers a glowing tribute, a contrast to his dismissal of their qualities earlier in the campaign (see pages 138-9):

'You belong to a regiment whose reputation stands high, and you have done much to cover it with honour. For the time I have commanded you, you have had much hard and dangerous work, but I have never feared that, however difficult the task set you to perform, and however dangerous that task, it would be well-accomplished; and were I intending to join any regiment, and were it open for me to choose, I would prefer to join the Natal Carbineers.³³

Dundonald's apparent about-turn in his appraisal of the Natal Volunteers must alert the reader to the ritual nature of official commendations, especially in the light of the actual opinion held by senior ranking British officers like Dundonald. At the close of his despatch on the siege, Sir George White had similar words of praise for the colonials which should be treated with the same caution:

'The Natal Volunteers have performed invaluable service; their knowledge of the country has been of the very greatest use to me, and in every action in which they have been engaged they have shown themselves most forward and daring.³⁴

The relief of Ladysmith was the first major military success in the Natal theatre, and it carried immediate impact for the Colony's Volunteer regiments and for the morale of the settler community. It was therefore the first opportunity for effusive official praise. Further opportunities

³² PAR, CSO 2609, transcript telegrams, Buller to Hime, 2 March 1900.

³³ Natal Volunteer Record, p155; and see Natal Witness, 23 March 1900 and 28 January 1901. In January 1901 Dundonald was accused in the South African press of omitting mention of the Natal Volunteers in a speech he had delivered on 15 December 1900. He responded at some length with a letter to the Natal Witness (Natal Witness, 28 January 1901).

³⁴ NAR, Leyds 1043, CD 458, White to Chief-of-Staff, 23 March 1900, p27; Stirling, The Colonials in Africa, p38.

were to follow, most notably when the Volunteers were released from active service in October 1900, and on the occasion of the visit to Natal of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York in August 1901.

Nor was official praise lacking from colonial quarters. When Sir George White left Ladysmith in early March, and received an enthusiastic reception in the colonial capital, Pietermaritzburg,³⁵ the Town Clerk, in his address, assured him that:

'Maritzburg is proud to know that the Natal Carbineers, the BMR, the Hotchkiss Field Force, the Naval Volunteers, and the ILH, raised in this city, have, during this long and trying time, performed their duties in such a manner as to command your unstinted praise.'³⁶

When an encomium such as this was delivered by a Natal colonial official, it was probably sincere, but should be interpreted with the same caution in light of the Colony's rose-tinted perspective on its general war effort and the performance of the Volunteer regiments. The importance in Victorian colonial society of civic protocol and decorum adds another filter to the interpretation of such an address.³⁷ Criticism of White and his conduct of the siege of Ladysmith, which had not been a strategic success and had cost the Natal Volunteers dearly, would never have been articulated on an occasion such as a civic reception.

A month later, in early April, White paid the Volunteers a further compliment from Cape Town, shortly before his departure to take up the post of Governor of Gibraltar:

'A gallant force, under that distinguished and very able officer, Colonel Royston, from the very commencement of the campaign in Natal, were the eyes and ears of the force, and to the end they had but one purpose and that was to keep the flag up.'³⁸

³⁵ Natal Advertiser, 7 March 1900; Natal Witness, 12 March 1900.

³⁶ Times of Natal, 10 March 1900; and see Cape Argus, Weekly Edition, 14 March 1900.

³⁷ See Cannadine, Ornamentalism, pp11 and passim.

³⁸ Natal Advertiser, 4 April 1900.

Both the Relief Column and the besieged garrison also received extensive praise from the Natal press and colonial institutions, including the Prime Minister and Pietermaritzburg's exclusive Victoria Club.³⁹ A wave of celebratory enthusiasm swept through the colonial capital.⁴⁰ The celebrations in Maritzburg were reflected in all the principal centres of Natal, and a day of thanksgiving was proclaimed in the Colony for 2 March.⁴¹ Durban was 'in a ferment of excitement', and even distant Cape Town was in celebratory turmoil. London itself was described as being 'delirious with joy'.⁴² A message of congratulation was also received from the Natal Agent-General in the British capital:

'Natalians in London unite in offering the Governor, Government and people of Natal heartfelt congratulations on [the] relief [of] Ladysmith. Please convey [the] same to Generals Buller, White and all under their commands, especially Darnell, Royston, officers and men of [the] Natal Volunteers and local forces.'⁴³

The Volunteers, together with the Imperial Light Horse and the Natal Police, formed a guard-of-honour for the Governor, Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson, during a visit to Ladysmith on 6 and 7 March.⁴⁴

The colonial enthusiasm and relief was reflected in calls for the issue by the Natal government of

³⁹ PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Camps, Orderbooks, 5 March 1900; Times of Natal, 1 March 1900.

⁴⁰ PAR, GH 1679, Diary of Events, pp170-1, 1 March 1900, and see Times of Natal, 1-3 March 1900; Natal Witness, 2 March 1900; Bizley, 'Maritzburg during the Siege of Natal', pp89-90.

⁴¹ PAR, CO (microfilm), 1/1/1/203 [PRO 179/210], Natal Government Gazette, 1 March 1900; Stott, The Boer Invasion of Natal, p207.

⁴² Natal Mercury, 2 March 1900; Natal Witness, 5 March 1900; Cape Argus, Weekly Edition, 7 March 1900.

⁴³ PAR, CSO 1641, minute paper 1593/1900, Congratulations on relief of Ladysmith, telegram, Agent-General, London, to Colonial Secretary, Pietermaritzburg, 2 March 1900.

⁴⁴ PAR, GH 1679, Diary of Events, p174, 7 March 1900; Craw, A Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith, p54, 7 March 1900; Times of Natal, 8 March 1900.

some sort of decoration for the defenders and citizens of Ladysmith.⁴⁵ This request was turned down in favour of a proposed decoration for all regular and Volunteer veterans of the relief and siege campaigns. The decoration was, however, never issued, and Natal Volunteers had to be content with clasps to the general campaign medal, the Queen's South Africa Medal.⁴⁶

Ladysmith, the Natal town most heavily affected by the war, itself recovered quickly, and its enthusiastic Imperial sentiments, which had waxed during the siege, rapidly waned.⁴⁷ In the immediate wake of the siege the town petitioned the Natal government for financial assistance to compensate for reduced revenue and increased expenditure during this period.⁴⁸ Unlike Estcourt, the town was also unable easily to shake off the military yoke, and in the wake of the siege became the headquarters of the Ladysmith Military Sub-District, and subject to continued restrictions.⁴⁹ Eighteen months later the enthusiasm and patriotism of the burgesses certainly appears to have dimmed. In September 1901 they presented the British military authorities with claims for damage caused during the siege. This included a bill for £4 408 for the Town Hall that had been damaged by shellfire.⁵⁰ As far as Lieutenant SG Francis of the West Yorkshire Regiment

⁴⁵ PAR, PM 22, 950/1901, Resolution, Mid-Illovo Farmers' Club, Honorary Secretary, Mid-Illovo Farmers' Club, to Hime, 16 June 1901; PAR, MJPW 74, minute paper 3297/1900, minute from Commandant Volunteers, Buys Farm, to Hime, 25 April 1900, Hime to Dartnell, 1 May 1900, Dartnell to Hime, 3 May 1900, Minister of Lands and Works to Hely-Hutchinson, 20 September 1900, Permanent Under-Secretary to Hime, 6 October 1900, Dartnell to Minister of Lands and Works, 23 October 1900; PAR, CO (microfilm) 1/1/1/205, [PRO 179/211], despatch 131, Governor to Chamberlain, 24 April 1900; and see PAR, CSO 1710, minute paper 6292/1902, Enquiries, Natal Star, Brooks to Principal Under-Secretary, Natal, 14 August 1902, Principal Under-Secretary to Brooks, 2 September 1902.

⁴⁶ PAR, PM 22, minute paper PM950/1901, Resolution, Mid-Illovo Farmers' Club, Prime Minister to Honorary Secretary, Mid-Illovo Farmers' Club, 19 June 1901; Natal Witness, 31 May 1900. For further comment on the rewards, such as medals, for Volunteer war service, see pages 386-93.

⁴⁷ Natal Witness, 3 March 1902.

⁴⁸ Natal Mercury, 14 June 1900.

⁴⁹ Times of Natal, 16 March 1900; Natal Mercury, 21 April 1902.

⁵⁰ Natal Advertiser, 6 September 1901. For detail on this incident see Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 27 December 1899.

was concerned, the feeling was mutual. He wrote on 30 April 1900: 'I have to go into Ladysmith pretty often and the more I see of it the more I wonder why we spent so much trouble and so many lives in relieving such a dirty, dusty little hole.'⁵¹

**The Post-siege Recovery and Replenishment of the
Volunteer Force, and the First Calls for
a Reduced Natal Commitment to the War**

**'Good Colonial Men, who can ride and shoot
well and pass medical examination,
will be enrolled in the Natal
Carbineers, Natal Mounted Rifles
and Border Mounted Rifles.'**⁵²

In March 1900, with the raising of the siege of Ladysmith, the Natal colonial war effort entered its first transitional phase. This included the first calls from the settler public in Natal for the withdrawal or downsizing of the military commitment, and for an indication in the field of a more appropriate tactical deployment now that the siege and set-piece phase in Natal was making way for a more mobile war of pursuit.

The Volunteer camp at Ladysmith was struck on 7 March, and the regiments departed for a recuperation camp at Highlands on the high ground between Estcourt and Mooi River.⁵³ The positive attitude of the Colony towards its soldiers was evident in the reception accorded the Volunteers in Estcourt. Dacre Shaw recorded that 'the townspeople turned out and cheered lustily as we slowly on our feeble steeds passed down the main street'.⁵⁴ The Carbineer, Natal Mounted Rifles, and Border Mounted Rifles troops were also welcomed by the local garrison of the Durban

⁵¹ NAM, 7607/49, SG Francis diary, p21, 30 April 1900.

⁵² Natal Volunteers recruitment notice, in Natal Witness, 13 March 1900.

⁵³ PAR, NDR 2/8, Volunteer Camp Orders, 6 March 1900; Catchpole diary, book 1, p77, 7 and 8 March 1900; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p81; Times of Natal, 5 and 9 March 1900; Natal Advertiser, 6 and 10 March 1900; Natal Witness, 14 March 1900.

⁵⁴ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p81; and see Times of Natal, 12 March 1900.

Light Infantry.⁵⁵

While the Highlands 'rest-camp' may have been welcomed by the regiments, the Natal public anticipated the demobilization of the Volunteers at this point, especially the veterans of the siege. The immediate threat to the heart of the Colony, and to settler interests, appeared to have receded with the relief of Ladysmith. One of the regiments that was dispensed with during this immediate post-siege period was the Colonial Scouts, which handed in its equipment at Mooi River in early March. It disappeared amidst allegations of shabby treatment by the colonial authorities.⁵⁶ On 12 April the Maritzburg Home Guard Rifle Association was also effectively stood down when a government notice was issued for the return of carbines issued on loan.⁵⁷

Was it in fact appropriate for the political leadership and people of Natal to call for the cessation of the Colony's involvement in the war? The theoretical underpinning of this debate hinges on the general inclination of soldiers to pursue total victory rather than the waging of war in pursuit of limited objectives, often favoured by politicians.⁵⁸ In The Pursuit of Victory, Brian Bond discusses an important evolution in the nature of military victory that perhaps helps explain the response of the Natal government. In classical warfare, wars were usually decided in a very short space of time, but with the evolution of modern state warfare, battles and wars became more lengthy and convoluted.⁵⁹

In mid-March 1900 a concerned mother wrote an acrimonious letter to the Natal Witness:

'How much longer are the authorities going to keep the Volunteers who have passed through the siege of Ladysmith from their homes?... This useless detention of our sons and

⁵⁵ Natal Mercury, 14 March 1900; Natal Witness, 14 March 1900.

⁵⁶ Natal Advertiser, 8 and 16 March 1900.

⁵⁷ Natal Witness, 12 April 1900.

⁵⁸ Weigley, 'The Soldier, the Statesman and the Military Historian', pp816-7 and 820. See Jeffery, Ireland and the Great War, p54, for a similar waning of Irish support for the British war effort in World War I.

⁵⁹ Bond, The Pursuit of Victory, pp1-2,5 and 12-27.

husbands at Highlands seems to me nothing but a stupid, wanton, and cruel exhibition of authority'.⁶⁰

This was followed by further letters, such as the following, expressing similar sentiments:

'This question is purely academic, since the Imperial authorities have the power to retain our breadwinners in the field, and they clearly mean to use it, but I should like to protest against remarks as if we were unreasonable and unpatriotic in asking for the return of the tillers of the soil, while Canadians and Australian volunteers are still in the field.

Our trans-oceanic cousins volunteered as units and only a small percentage of the able-bodied men of their colonies; presumably also to them volunteering did not mean ruin to farm and family'.⁶¹

This was a debate in which the Natal government, and Colonel Edward Greene, commanding the Natal Carbineers, in particular, became embroiled. Greene was one who subscribed to the official position that ultimately prevailed, namely that 'merely sentimental reasons should not be allowed to intrude in the matter'.⁶²

One of the more realistic comments in the press on the advisability of dispensing with the service of the Volunteers at this point, emerged from the Natal Advertiser on 12 April, in response to a Government Gazette announcement of 10 April that the Natal Volunteers would continue on active service for at least another three months (until 11 July 1900). This, hoped the Advertiser:

'will close the mouths of the agitators for their disbandment for another three months, supposing that the war continues for that period...Had it been possible to allow those who wished to leave their regiments at this juncture to do so, both parties would have been satisfied, but this the Government appears to consider either impolitic or impracticable'.⁶³

⁶⁰ Natal Witness, 14 March 1900; and see Natal Mercury, 24 March 1900.

⁶¹ Natal Witness, 4 April 1900; and see Times of Natal, 14 and 23 March 1900; Natal Witness, 9 April 1900.

⁶² Natal Advertiser, 24 March 1900.

⁶³ Natal Advertiser, 12 April 1900.

Despite public agitation for the release of the Natal men, the Natal Advertiser predicted that no more than 5 per cent of Pietermaritzburg Volunteers would have opted to return home.⁶⁴ The Natal Mercury also conceded that there were 'a large number of Volunteers who lose little by being out in the field, who enjoy the life, and gain in health and strength by it, and who prefer it to the hum-drum work of their ordinary lives'.⁶⁵

However, in the field the Volunteers themselves were not entirely happy. As far as the Boers were concerned, an impression prevailed among the Volunteers that the ordinary burgher was sick of the war and that it was only their political leadership that was prolonging it.⁶⁶ Then there was the delicate relationship with the British military machine. On 14 February 1900, before the relief of Ladysmith, the Times of Natal published this letter from a Carbineer trooper to his father:

'They talk of disbanding us as soon as we get through to Ladysmith. We cost the Government too much. We get 9s a day and rations. We are the highest paid men in the field. We don't care much if they do disband us, as we are pretty tired of being messed about by Imperial officers. They don't understand the country or the Boers, and they won't give us our way.'⁶⁷

Several Volunteer officers resigned because of differences with officers of the British Army. At the core of the dissatisfaction was resentment at what was considered the inappropriate appointment of Imperial officers.⁶⁸ The personal style and bearing of Imperial officers was also criticised:

'These men (the colonials) are accustomed to be consulted, rather than ordered, and if the imperial officers had borne this in mind in addressing the colonial officers under their

⁶⁴ Natal Advertiser, 12 April 1900.

⁶⁵ Natal Mercury, 24 March and 11 April 1900.

⁶⁶ NAM, 8307/121, Greening diary, 24-30 April 1900.

⁶⁷ Times of Natal, 14 February 1900.

⁶⁸ Times of Natal, 21 February 1900.

command, some of the friction might, perhaps, have been avoided.⁶⁹

In terms of British military history, the Anglo-Boer War was the first time 'Britain was calling upon Volunteers from its part-time soldiers to reinforce the regulars in significant numbers in a serious crisis'.⁷⁰ Mobilization of the Imperial Yeomanry had been prompted by the military defeats of 'Black Week' in December 1899. Prior to December 1899, however, Yeomanry offers of service had been dismissed with the same professional contempt for part-timers exhibited towards the Natal Volunteers.⁷¹ The first contingent of the British Imperial Yeomanry embarked for South Africa between 27 January and 14 April,⁷² the period during which the future deployment of the Natal Volunteers was being debated. It is uncertain whether the mobilization of the Yeomanry was intended to supplement the Natal Volunteers, replace them in the field as an economy measure (the Yeomanry soldier was to cost only 1s 6d per day compared to six shillings for the Volunteer), or to release British regular troops for field operations, or whether it was a combination of all these factors.⁷³

The War Office emphatically denied the rumour of an amalgamation of the Volunteers with the Yeomanry,⁷⁴ and the Natal Advertiser announced:

'We are asked to state that the authorities in Pall Mall have never even thought of such an act of injustice towards men [the Natal Volunteers] who are acknowledged to be the finest scouts in the world, and who, by their conduct during the war, have won the good opinion

⁶⁹ Times of Natal, 21 February 1900.

⁷⁰ Bennett, Absent-Minded Beggars, p2.

⁷¹ Bennett, Absent-Minded Beggars, p8.

⁷² Bennett, Absent-Minded Beggars, pp7,9-11,12 and 20-1.

⁷³ Royal Commission on the War in South Africa, I: Report, pp70-2; Clark, Waging War, pp15-6; Bennett, Absent-Minded Beggars, pp10-11.

⁷⁴ Times of Natal, 15 February 1900; Natal Mercury, 15 February 1900. Bennett, Absent-Minded Beggars, p12.

of the Empire at large.⁷⁵

Despite calls from certain quarters in the Colony for disbandment, popular support for Volunteer welfare remained strong. For example, the troops received daily consignments of fruit and vegetables from a fund established by the Times of Natal and the Natal Mercury.⁷⁶ However, many siege veterans were suffering from the debilitating after-effects, sometimes permanent, of deprivation and illness, and were granted extended recuperative leave.⁷⁷ Several were hospitalised or released from service, and others died weeks or months after the siege.⁷⁸ The reception of BW Martin, of the Border Mounted Rifles, in Richmond on 7 March, reflects the mood of colonists who thought the war was coming to a close: 'On arrival there we found the station platform crowded with relatives of the Richmond men waiting to welcome their boys home.'⁷⁹

The Natal Volunteers remained at Highlands until 5 April. Here they were rested and re-equipped,

⁷⁵ Natal Advertiser, 15 February 1900.

⁷⁶ Times of Natal, 19 March 1900; and see George Archibald to Rosie, 12 March 1900, quoted in Gordon, Honour Without Riches, p281, for the gratitude with which gifts for the Umzinto men of the BMR was received.

⁷⁷ PAR, MJPW 74, minute paper L&W 958/1900, 22 and 23 March 1900; Natal Carbineers History Centre, Harte Papers; Natal Carbineers History Centre, Natal Carbineers Letterbook, No.2, March-April 1900, Capt W[eighton] to Trooper WHF Harte, Buys Farm Camp, 14 April 1900; and see Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Lyttelton Papers, NGL/fam/392a, Lyttelton to Spencer, 17 April 1900; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', pp81-2; Nicholson diary, 7 March 1900; Warwick diary, 21 July 1900; Watson, The Siege Diary of William Watson, 23 February 1900; Natal Witness, 29 March 1900; Times of Natal, 22 April 1901.

⁷⁸ PAR, MJPW 74, minute paper L&W 1213/1900, 9 April 1900; Natal Carbineers History Centre, WHF Harte Papers, Weighton to Harte, 14 April 1900; and Harte to Town Treasurer, Pietermaritzburg, 22 April 1902; and Harte to Adjutant, Natal Carbineers, 21 December 1902; and Olive Harte to writer, 7 February 1996; Natal Carbineers History Centre, Natal Carbineers letterbook, No.2, March-April 1900, 31 March 1900; Weighton to Trooper Cundill, 2 April 1900; Weighton to Lieutenant Owen, 3 April 1900; Weighton to Lieutenant Owen, 4 April 1900; Natal Witness, 23 March 1900; Times of Natal, 30 April 1900.

⁷⁹ BW Martin in Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith, No.4, p44.

and absorbed new recruits and horses.⁸⁰ Recruitment notices for the Carbineers, the Natal Mounted Rifles, and the Border Mounted Rifles appeared in Natal newspapers.⁸¹ Siege losses were more than compensated for, to the extent that short service enrolments were declined.⁸² The Natal Advertiser commented that

'the active recruiting which is going on in the City [Pietermaritzburg] for the Carbineers and Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry certainly does not point to the disuse of the Volunteer regiments during the remainder of the campaign, and the disbanding of the various Irregular Corps, as some have predicted.'⁸³

The core regiments of the Natal Volunteer force, and those which enjoyed the most active deployment, were mounted. It is therefore relevant also to consider the replenishment of horses in addition to that of manpower. Remounts must be viewed in the context of the very high attrition rate in horseflesh in the British Army during the Anglo-Boer War, and of the problems of keeping sufficient serviceable horses in the field. During the course of the war the army lost 120 per cent of its horses, no fewer than 347 000!⁸⁴ Of a list submitted in May 1900, no less than

⁸⁰ McKenzie, Delayed Action, p193; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p162. For details of Volunteer camp routine during the war see PAR, MJPW 87, minute paper L&W4348/1901, 'Standing Orders and Regulations, Volunteer Camp, Showgrounds, Maritzburg, August 10th to 16th, 1901', in 'Volunteer and cadet arrangements for the Royal Visit'; PAR, MJPW 87, minute paper L&W 4348/1901, Volunteer Camp Regulations, August 1901; PAR, MJPW 87, minute paper L&W 4348/1901, 'Standing Orders'.

⁸¹ Natal Mercury, 12 March 1900; Natal Witness, 13 March 1900.

⁸² Natal Carbineers History Centre, anonymous Natal Carbineer manuscript, p4; Natal Carbineers Letterbook No.2, March-April 1900, Captain Weighton to CSO Volunteers, 2 April 1900; Captain Weighton to CSO Volunteers, Highlands, 4 April 1900; Captain Weighton to FR Brickhill, 14 April 1900; Natal Volunteer Record, p155.

⁸³ Natal Advertiser, 24 March 1900.

⁸⁴ Royal Commission on the War in South Africa, 1, Report, pp97-9; Natal Mercury, 8 April 1902; Farmer's Weekly, 10 September 1999, p24, 17 September 1999, p20; and 17 October 1999, p20; Cooper, Animals in War, pp12-27; and see PRO, 30/57/22, Kitchener Papers, Y38, Kitchener to Broderick, 29 March 1901; Y105, Kitchener to Broderick, 22 November 1901; Y108, Kitchener to Broderick, 29 November 1901; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p82; Robinson (ed), Navy and Army Illustrated, XIII, p33; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, IV, Appendix 2; Amery (ed), The Times History, V, pp73
(continued...)

45 of the 85 remounts requisitioned through Messrs Scott and Hyde in Ladysmith had been lost, died, or slaughtered for food.⁸⁵

It is not surprising, therefore, that a significant Natal colonial reaction to the siege was that it had been wasteful, not only of men, but also of horseflesh, although the colonial horses and cobs had shown greater resilience than the bigger British chargers, which also received larger rations.⁸⁶ Grazing and forage had been quickly depleted in Ladysmith.⁸⁷ By late December 1899 Carbineer Alfred Wingfield's own troop-horse, 'Aaron', had turned into 'a veritable hat-rack'.⁸⁸ The elite British Lancers had been de-horsed and issued rifles by the end of January 1900, and by 21 February starving horses took to eating the bark off trees.⁸⁹

The root of the remount problem for the British Army was the initial conviction that this was to be an infantryman's war. Consequently, the hastily mounted and trained mounted infantrymen later in the war were poorly prepared to care properly for their horses.⁹⁰ The British post-mortem on

⁸⁴(...continued)

and 247; Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, IV, pp307-17. For an assessment of the logistics of the supply of remounts in an earlier context, see PR Edwards, 'The Supply of Horses to the Parliamentary and Royalist Armies in the English Civil War', Historical Research: The Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research, 68/1995, pp49-66.

⁸⁵ PAR, MJPW 81, L&W 1782/1900, minute paper, Scott and Hyde to Minister of Lands and Works, 14 May 1900.

⁸⁶ Natal Witness, 20 March 1900; and see Benjamin Christopher, Natal Field Force Orders, 1 and 17 November 1899, 8 January 1900; Devitt, Gallop Jack, pp42-3; Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, IV, pp66-8.

⁸⁷ KCAL, MS 143, Thomas Brooks, 'Diary of Events during the Boer War and Siege of Ladysmith', 29 January 1900; Catchpole diary, pp55 and 69; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p64; Watson, The Siege Diary of William Watson, 5 December 1899; Nicholson diary, 5 December 1899; McHugh, The Siege of Ladysmith, pp196-8.

⁸⁸ Wingfield, 'Ladysmith Siege Diary', 21 December 1899.

⁸⁹ Watson, The Siege Diary of William Watson, 21 February 1900; Talana Museum, 'Diary of a Durban Shop Assistant', p73, 30-31 January 1900; Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, IV, p68.

⁹⁰ Brian Johnson Parker, A Concise Dictionary of the Boer War, Cape Town, Francolin
(continued...)

the utilization of horses during the war was undecided as to who were the worse culprits, the British cavalry, British mounted infantry, or the colonial horsemen.⁹¹ However, Natal colonial regiments such as the Natal Carbineers, like their Boer counterparts, were more familiar than the British with horses as an element of everyday life, and knew how best to keep horses healthy and fed in local conditions. It is therefore likely that the Volunteers practised more efficient and humane horse management in the field than did many of the mounted troops in the British Army. The Volunteers' horse management probably incorporated the instructions attributed to Brigadier-General Rimington for the men of his regiment, Rimington's Guides. Rimington called, for example, for horses to be allowed to graze at every opportunity, and for troopers to unsaddle during halts to keep the burden on horses to a minimum. Horses from units such as Rimington's Guides often survived the entire war.⁹²

There had been only a basic remount system in place at the outbreak of war.⁹³ It was assumed that any shortfall could be made good from local sources on arrival.⁹⁴ In the early months of the campaign, horses for the Volunteer corps were provided from the Military Remount Establishment, and men could also bring their own horses, which were then sold or hired to the

⁹⁰(...continued)

Publishers, 1999, p66; and see Royal Commission on the War in South Africa, Volume 1, Report of His Majesty's Commissioners, p47; John Singleton, 'Britain's Military Use of Horses 1914-1918', Past and Present, 139/May 1993, pp180-182; Jim O'Brien, 'Mounted Infantry in the Boer War', Soldiers of the Queen, 106/September 2001, p20; Farmer's Weekly, 17 September 1999, p20; Sternberg, My Experience of the Boer War, pp237-240; Anthony Baker, Battles and Battlefields of the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902, London, The Military Press, 1999, pp238-9; Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, IV, pp356-375; Cooper, Animals in War, p23.

⁹¹ PRO, WO 108/261: Report from Assistant Inspector Remounts, to C-in-C, July 1900; and WO 108/282.

⁹² Farmer's Weekly, 17 September 1999, p22.

⁹³ Natal Mercury, 8 April 1900; and see Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, IV, pp280-301.

⁹⁴ Carver, The National Army Museum Book of the Boer War, p12.

military.⁹⁵ The local supply of available remounts soon dried up. As early as November 1899 the British inspector of remounts, Colonel R Stevenson, was calling at various Natal midlands centres for suitable cobs for the mounted infantry.⁹⁶

Imported horses were often unsuitable, and most were considered not to have the endurance of the smaller and unpretentious local horses.⁹⁷ When the 2nd Imperial Light Horse was mobilizing at Volksrust in December 1900, the comment was made that 'it is hoped that the Remount Depot will see its way to supplying Colonial ponies instead of the stubborn and useless Argentine cobs, which require a really good rider to manage properly'.⁹⁸ Many remounts were lost at sea, and those that arrived safely were often rushed prematurely to the fronts by rail.⁹⁹ Despite the difficulties in securing remounts from overseas sources, the disinclination to utilise local horses persisted.¹⁰⁰ One British officer who experimented with a local Basuto pony conceded that it was

⁹⁵ PAR, CSO 1632, minute paper 9223/1899, Military Secretary, Government House, to General Commanding Lines of Communication, 29 November 1899.

⁹⁶ Natal Witness, 30 October and 11 November 1899; Natal Mercury, 8 and 16 November 1899 and 7 and 8 December 1899; and see Bollmann, 'War and Natal Urban Communities', p51.

⁹⁷ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p82; Natal Advertiser, 15 October 1900; and see Natal Advertiser, 15 October 1900; Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, IV, pp339-347; Robinson (ed), Navy and Army Illustrated, XIII, p33; G Tylden, 'The Army Horse', Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research, 21/1942; and G Tylden, 'Mounted Infantry and the Burma Pony', Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research, 46/1968; Farmer's Weekly, 17 September 1999, p20; Glover, introduction to Swinton, Duffer's Drift, p6.

⁹⁸ Natal Mercury, 24 December 1900.

⁹⁹ UNISA Archives, Gill dairy, 4 October 1899, p2; Davey, The Defence of Ladysmith and Mafeking, pp32 and 36; Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, IV, pp52,79,320-8. Also, for this and other aspects of the remount system in Natal during this conflict, see Hazel England and Brian Kearney, 'Horses, Mules and Donkeys of War', in Wassermann and Kearney (eds), A Warrior's Gateway, pp182-192.

¹⁰⁰ NAR, Journal of the Principal Events connected with South Africa, Part 3, p15, 9 March 1900, p62, 5 April 1900, Part 4, p46, 29 May 1900.

not much to look at, but 'turned out splendidly, seems able to go all day'.¹⁰¹

In June 1901 a major remount depot was established at Mooi River, the closest suitable site inland from Durban.¹⁰² A debate over the availability of local horses suggests that Natal colonists may have withheld remounts from the war effort.¹⁰³ However, in early 1900 most of the remounts for the Natal Carbineers were obtained from farms in the Natal midlands.¹⁰⁴ Troopers of the Carbineers were prepared to use the £20-£25 horse insurance, to which they were entitled for horses dying on active service, to purchase remounts, but this money was not forthcoming from the government, suggesting a certain lack of support at official level.¹⁰⁵

In June 1901 the British War Office sought to establish a register of suitable horse-flesh in the 'horse-breeding colonies', to enable a prompt and efficient response to a demand for remounts in the event of a future crisis. The Natal agent-general replied that consequent on the 'very serious diminution in the number of horses in the Colony', it would be difficult enough securing remounts for the colonial forces in the event of a future disturbance, without additional demands from the Imperial army.¹⁰⁶

Inaction at Elandslaagte

¹⁰¹ UNISA Archives, RC Alexander diary, 21 and 23 November 1899.

¹⁰² PAR, MJPW 82, minute paper L&W 89/1901, correspondence, 7 January to 31 May 1901; PAR, MJPW 85, minute paper 4756/1901, 7 June 1901; Young, 'History of Mooi River and District', p51; and see Natal Mercury, 8 November 1900; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, IV, pp655-6; Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, IV, pp330-8.

¹⁰³ Natal Witness, 18 March 1901.

¹⁰⁴ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Natal Carbineers Letterbook, No.2, March-April 1900, Capt Weighton to CSO Volunteers, 1 April 1900; Times of Natal, 22 March 1900.

¹⁰⁵ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Natal Carbineers Letterbook, No.2, March-April 1900, Capt Weighton to CSO Volunteers, 2 April 1900; Times of Natal, 21 February 1901.

¹⁰⁶ PAR, CSO 1682, minute paper 6481/1901, War Office to Natal Agent-General, 29 June 1901 and Colonial Secretary, Natal, to Agent-General, 24 August 1901.

**'Notice is hereby given that all leave is cancelled,
and members must report themselves at
Highlands Camp at once.'**¹⁰⁷

Between 5 and 19 April 1900 the Volunteers returned to the Ladysmith district.¹⁰⁸ At Ladysmith itself they rejoined Buller's field army.¹⁰⁹ They presented a very different picture to the regiment of a month past: 'The men were now positively fat, bronzed with the keen wind always blowing at Highlands, and in great fettle.'¹¹⁰ When the camp at Highlands was disbanded the headquarters of the Volunteer force was transferred to Pietermaritzburg.¹¹¹

Two key personnel were missing though, both of them prominent colonists, whose loss from disease contracted during the siege reverberated through Natal settler circles. The first was Colonel William Royston, the respected Commandant of Volunteers (and the 'inventor' of the much-maligned 'Royston Patent Equipment'), the highest ranking Natal colonial soldier to lose his life in the war. Colonel Royston, who had contracted enteric towards the end of the siege, died in Pietermaritzburg of the disease on 6 April.¹¹² The second notable casualty was Natal Carbineers Regimental Sergeant-Major Bernard Bowen (ex-3rd Dragoon Guards), who died of enteric on 28 March 1900.¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ 'By Order, J Weighton, Captain and Adjutant, Pietermaritzburg, 28 March 1900', in Natal Witness, 28 March 1900.

¹⁰⁸ PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Camp Orders, 1, 4 and 18 April 1900.

¹⁰⁹ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Natal Carbineers Letterbook, No. 2, March-April 1900, Captain Weighton to Sergeant Stevens, 14 April 1900; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', pp84-5; Catchpole diary, book 2, p4, 5 April 1900.

¹¹⁰ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p84.

¹¹¹ PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Camps, Orderbooks, 15 April 1900. According to the Natal Witness, the breakdown of the Natal colonial units at the front at this time was: Natal Naval Volunteers - 150, Natal Carbineers - 465, NMR - 200, BMR - 270, UMR - 130, NFA - 120, NRR - 145, and DLI - 400 (Natal Witness, 2 March 1900).

¹¹² Blockhouse Private Museum, Ladysmith, Deaths and Burials Register, p130; Natal Volunteer Record, pp105-6; Stirling, The Colonials in Africa, p40.

¹¹³ His replacement as RSM was another British officer, William Burkimsher, ex-Lancers
(continued...)

At Ladysmith on their return to active status, the Natal Volunteers formed a component of the Volunteer Mounted Brigade under the command of Colonel (local Brigadier-General) John George Dartnell CMG, founder and first Commanding Officer of the Natal Mounted Police/Natal Police (1874). On 8 April he succeeded Royston as Commandant of Volunteers,¹¹⁴ and his appointment was well received by Volunteers and regulars alike.¹¹⁵ However, although Dartnell's name became a permanent fixture in the Natal Volunteer Staff list, by February 1902 no formal appointment to this position appears to have been made, and the apparent preference for Imperial officers in positions of command over colonial troops was considered in colonial circles as a slur on the ability of the Volunteers.¹¹⁶ This concern would appear to be confirmed when a British officer, Colonel HP Leader, was appointed to the post on 1 July 1902.¹¹⁷ The brigade in turn fell under the 3rd Cavalry (Mounted) Brigade, under the command of Dundonald.¹¹⁸

On 3 March Buller had unveiled his views on the optimum and appropriate use of the Natal Field Force. He considered that three divisions of infantry and a single brigade of cavalry would suffice

¹¹³(...continued)

(Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p84; Natal Witness, 23 and 30 March 1900 and 3 October 1900; Natal Advertiser, 31 March 1900; 'Arte', 'Reminiscences of an ex-Carbineer', 1949, p9).

¹¹⁴ PAR, NCP, 6/1/1/53, Natal Government Gazette, 52, No.3095, p248, 17 April 1900, Volunteer Notice No.6; PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Camps, Orderbooks, Special Order, Buys Farm 14 April 1900 in Volunteer Camp Order, Highlands, 19 April 1900; Natal Witness, 13 April 1900; and see Times of Natal, 13 April 1900; Natal Volunteer Record, pp106-7. During the period from 1889 to 1902, the post of Commandant of Volunteers underwent several changes in designation, and these need be noted briefly for clarification. In 1889 Royston had been appointed Adjutant of the Volunteers, as second-in-command to Dartnell, but in 1898, upon the separation of the Volunteers and the Natal Police, he took command of the Volunteers. On his death in April 1900, Dartnell appears to have resumed the dual control of the Police and Volunteers that he had exercised prior to 1898.

¹¹⁵ Times of Natal, 17 April 1900; Natal Mercury, 17 April 1900.

¹¹⁶ Natal Witness, 5 February 1902; and see Natal Volunteer Record, p35.

¹¹⁷ PAR, NCP 9/4, Natal Civil Service List, 1902, p77.

¹¹⁸ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Anonymous Natal Carbineers Manuscript, p4; Amery (ed), The Times History, IV, pp509-10.

for the pacification of northern Natal.¹¹⁹ However, the military reality that very soon overshadowed the course of military events in Natal was that with the relief of Ladysmith, the separate strategic existence of Buller's Natal Field Force came to an end. It became, in effect, a covering force for Roberts's right flank in the Free State, and was also intended to hold the attention of as many Boers as possible.¹²⁰

On the Boer side, poor co-operation between the Free State and Transvaal forces, which had hampered Boer operations around Ladysmith, continued to have an adverse effect on the commandos. This eased the recuperation of the British-colonial siege and relief armies.¹²¹ On the British side, the debate between Roberts and Buller on exactly what military action to take, and when, discouraged Buller and paralysed British movements.¹²² For these reasons both the Boers and the British neglected offensive opportunities during March and April 1900.¹²³ However, the Boers, despite having their numbers reduced during March and April from approximately 16 000 to between 6 000 and 7 000 by transfers to the OFS, were sufficiently motivated to decide at a 'krygsraad' (war council) on 10 March to make a stand on the Biggarsberg range of hills, which they proceeded to entrench.¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ PRO, 30/57/19, Kitchener Papers, (volume 4), Buller telegram, 3 March 1900.

¹²⁰ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Lyttelton Papers, letter 11, Lyttelton to Margaret, 1 April 1900; Ken Gillings, 'After the Siege: The British Advance and Boer Retreat through Natal, March to June 1900', Military History Journal, II, 3/4, October 1999, p87; Amery (ed), The Times History, IV, p165.

¹²¹ Scholtz, 'Die Betrekkinge tussen die Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek en die Oranje Vrystaat', pp92-7.

¹²² NAR, FK 1792, file 3156, Buller to Roberts, 19 March 1900; NAR, FK 1792, file 3156, Buller to Roberts, 27 March 1900; Carver, The National Army Museum Book of the Boer War, pp51, 159-60.

¹²³ Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, VI, pp71-2 and 80.

¹²⁴ Times of Natal, 17 April 1900; and see PAR, CO (microfilm), 1/1/1/1/205 [PRO 179/211], Jno Pitts to Commandant, Durban, 27 April 1900; Erasmus, 'Die Ineenstorting van die Boeremagte op die Natalse Front', p51, 63-5, 73 and 74-5; Gillings, 'The Helpmekaar Duel', p211; Gillings, 'After the Siege', p88; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, III, p253; Viljoen, My Reminiscences of the Anglo-Boer War, p80; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, VI, pp63- (continued...)

If the Natal Volunteer forces had hitherto been marginalised within a critically important theatre, now the theatre itself was marginalised. Firstly, Buller's army had to restore order around Ladysmith, essentially a policing role.¹²⁵ Then came the repair of the railway line, especially towards Van Reenen's Pass. This army was also to demonstrate in the vicinity of the Drakensberg passes (but not to force them until Roberts's army in the Free State had reached at least Kroonstad). In the Volunteer regiments the constant relocation of campsites and relative inaction was frustrating, as reflected in this extract from a letter by Trooper Jim Gordon of the Border Mounted Rifles on 11 April:

'Since we left Highlands, we have been stationed at three different camps and of course you will have an idea what it is shifting about; in fact I wish we were besieged in Ladysmith again, but of course with plenty of scoff...I don't know what we are supposed to be doing out here but we get plenty of patrolling about the country...there are plenty of Tommys here and plenty of Boers in the hills and we don't have a smack at them'.¹²⁶

Beginning on 7 April, the Volunteers bivouacked at various locations in the vicinity of Elandslaagte until Buller's advance resumed on 10 May.¹²⁷ There was minimal military activity, restricted to fatigues and the provision of outposts.¹²⁸ Nicholson describes one of the regular overnight standing picquets (also known as 'cossack posts'), from which scouting patrols were sent out:

'The whole squadron went out, about 50-odd men on patrol. We camped there and eight

¹²⁴(...continued)

5.

¹²⁵ Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, pp965-7.

¹²⁶ Himeville Museum, Gordon letters, Gordon to Mary, 11 April 1900. This sentiment is echoed by George Archibald, also of the BMR (George Archibald to Rosie, 14 and 29 April 1900, quoted in Gordon, Honour Without Riches, pp283-6).

¹²⁷ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', pp86-7; Catchpole diary, book 2, p5, 7 April 1900; The Times, 13 April 1900; Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p1218; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p163; Gordon, Honour Without Riches, p283.

¹²⁸ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', pp86 and 88-9; Nicholson diary, 22 April 1900; Times of Natal, 17 April 1900.

men were told off for advanced picquet. I among them. We went on about 400 yards [360 metres] and took posts.¹²⁹

A regular task for the Volunteers was to intercept patrols of regular troops, and deter them from inadvertently riding into the arms of the enemy, further comment on the relative local knowledge, respectively, of regulars and Natal colonials.¹³⁰ African scouts were also used at this point.¹³¹

The Elandslaagte interlude even spawned a local football league, and Major GJ Macfarlane of the Natal Carbineers found it possible to accept re-election on 5 May as Mayor of Pietermaritzburg.¹³² Many Volunteers, convinced that further active operations in the Natal theatre were unlikely, requested transfers to Roberts's Army in the west.¹³³ Indeed, the Imperial Light Horse, along with a sizeable portion of the Natal Field Force, were transferred to the OFS at this point, where they joined the advance to relieve Mafeking.¹³⁴ However, in accordance with the provisions of the Natal Volunteer Act of 1895, the Volunteers were not permitted to serve outside Natal, and therefore could not join the ILH, an Imperial irregular regiment that had been raised for general service in South Africa, and was therefore not bound by this restriction.¹³⁵

¹²⁹ Nicholson diary, 25 April 1900.

¹³⁰ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p89.

¹³¹ PAR, CSO 1646, minute paper 3287/1900, various correspondence, 5 May to 10 December 1900.

¹³² Times of Natal, 5 May 1900; Natal Witness, 10 May 1900.

¹³³ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Natal Carbineers letterbook No2, March-April 1900, Greene to Brocklehurst, 17 April 1900.

¹³⁴ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p86; The Times, 14 November 1900; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, III, p258; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, VI, pp68 and 79; Klein, Light Horse Cavalcade, pp40-2. Compensation came in the form of the 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers, the Natal Royal Rifles, and the DLI, the latter finally transferred from the lines of communication to the field army on 17 May (NAR, FK 1776, Natal Army Staff Diary, 5 May 1900; Natal Mercury, 17 October 1900).

¹³⁵ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Peter Francis Collection, Natal Carbineer Chronicles, p6; PAR, NCP, Sessional Papers, Legislative Assembly, 1900, p58; Royal Commission on the War in South Africa, I, Report, p81; and see NAR, Leyds 1050, CD 1789. For details of early
(continued...)

Organisational and commissariat-related problems again beset the Volunteers, indicating that all was not well on this front. On occasion rations were limited to bread, cheese and water - akin to siege fare!¹³⁶ It therefore comes as no surprise that there was a severe outbreak of dysentery and enteric among the relief force during this static period, complicated by an exceptionally hot and dry late summer.¹³⁷ Further problems ranged from deficient transport, the short delivery of meat, difficulty in securing arms and ammunition supplies languishing at the showgrounds in Ladysmith, to an urgent application on 14 April for funds to pay the men.¹³⁸ Postal arrangements were also poor, and the Volunteers were compelled to engage 'native' runners to get letters through to Ladysmith.¹³⁹

The only military action of any magnitude during this period occurred on 10 April when the British (and Volunteer) positions at Elandslaagte were heavily shelled by the Boers in what was intended to be part of an attack that did not materialise. The Volunteers, despite all the practical lessons of the siege and the relief campaign, do not appear to have played any part in detecting this Boer force, once again calling their effectiveness into question.¹⁴⁰ According to Breytenbach,

¹³⁵(...continued)

English Volunteer service which was restricted to shires, see Haswell, Citizen Armies, pp23-4.

¹³⁶ Gordon, Honour Without Riches, p284.

¹³⁷ Natal Mercury, 17 May 1900; Amery (ed), The Times History, IV, p168. For details of one Carbineers dysentery death during this period see the Natal Witness, 11 May 1900.

¹³⁸ PAR, MJPW 74, minute paper L&W 1313/1900, 17 and 19 April 1900; Natal Carbineers History Centre, Natal Carbineers letterbook, No.2, March-April 1900, Buys Farm, Captain Weighton to CSO Volunteers, 9 and 13 April 1900; Captain Weighton to paymaster, 14 April 1900. In May camp relocations were a trial for the inefficient Volunteer transport (PAR, MJPW 74, minute paper L&W 1313/1900, Dartnell to Minister of Lands and Works, 18 April and 1 May 1900).

¹³⁹ Times of Natal, 23 May 1900.

¹⁴⁰ NAM, 7607/47, Drummer Goodwin diary, 10 April 1900, p12;; 'Diary kept by Trooper HG Bizley, Natal Carbineers and Volunteer Composite Regiment, March 1900-March 1902', 10 April 1900; Times of Natal, 12 April 1900; The Times, 12 April 1900; Scholtz, 'Die Betrekkinge tussen die Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek en die Oranje Vrystaat', p97; Jeans (ed), Naval Brigades in the South African War, pp275-6; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p162; McKenzie, Delayed Action, p194; Riall, Boer War, pp69-70; and see Natal Advertiser, 11

(continued...)

this unexpected deluge of shells nevertheless caused sufficient confusion among the British and colonials for the Boers to have exploited.¹⁴¹

Through the Biggarsberg, Dundee, and Beyond

**'At last we appear to be going to do something,
and I am precious glad of it, for we were
getting fearfully sick of doing nothing
at Modderspruit.'**¹⁴²

Despite the problems in its static camps, the 3rd Mounted Brigade had entered May in excellent condition for the task ahead.¹⁴³ Also, by the beginning of May Buller had identified a weak link between Dundee and Helpmekaar.¹⁴⁴ Between 7 and 9 May there were several troop movements, reconnaissances and camp relocations in the vicinity of the Sunday's River drift, in preparation for the long-deferred advance of 11 May on the Biggarsberg.¹⁴⁵ There was an apparent effort here at 'deception' for the benefit of the Boers on the Helpmekaar Heights, who remained confident, until it was too late, that the British thrust would be by way of the Van Tondersnek Pass which they had heavily reinforced. Lord Dundonald's 3rd Mounted Brigade, along with Sir Francis Clery's 2nd Division, comprised the turning force for this operation.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁰(...continued)
April 1900.

¹⁴¹ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p87; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, VI, pp82-4; and see Natal Advertiser, 11 April 1900; Standard and Digger's News, quoted in Times of Natal, 28 April 1900.

¹⁴² A Carbineer trooper, Sunday's River, 10 May 1900, quoted in Natal Witness, 23 May 1900.

¹⁴³ NAR, FK 1776, 3rd Mounted Brigade Staff Diary, May 1900, 1 May 1900.

¹⁴⁴ NAR, FK 1792, file 3156, Buller to Roberts, 3 May 1900.

¹⁴⁵ NAR, FK 1776, Mounted Brigade Diary, May 1900, 6-10 May 1900; Bizley diary, 7 and 9 May 1900; and see Gillings, 'After the Siege', p89; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p163; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, VI, p87; Riall, Boer War, pp74-7.

¹⁴⁶ Amery (ed), The Times History, III, p170; and see Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, VI, p86.

The advance in May meant an end to the long period of what Dacre Shaw termed the 'vegetation' of the colonial troops.¹⁴⁷ On 11 May mounted troops flanked the advance that was largely uneventful except for isolated pockets of Boers.¹⁴⁸ On 12 May the pattern was repeated, with the mounted screen keeping the few scattered Boers at arm's length, until the next bivouac point was reached.¹⁴⁹ According to Cassell's History of the Boer War, on the 12th Carbineers on the Pomeroy road also came under artillery and 'pom-pom' fire from the Boers.¹⁵⁰ During the night of the 12th-13th the Boers evacuated their Biggarsberg positions to avoid being outflanked and surrounded.¹⁵¹ This was an unexpected coup for Buller, who had described the position around the Helpmekaar heights as 'the Gibraltar of South Africa'.¹⁵² On the morning of the 13th itself two squadrons of the Carbineers deployed on the right flank of the British advance, making contact with the Umvoti Mounted Rifles, advancing towards Helpmekaar along the Greytown-Dundee road.¹⁵³ This mention of the Umvoti Mounted Rifles is significant in that it marks this regiment's return to the main stage of Natal Volunteer operations, albeit briefly, after its effective banishment to guard duties at the Tugela Ferry in October 1899. (See page 34.)

Uithoek Hill and the pass of the same name were the key to the Boer defences at Helpmekaar, and the cover that the Volunteers provided was essential to the success of Buller's plan to deceive the

¹⁴⁷ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p88; and see Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, VI, pp86-7.

¹⁴⁸ NAR, FK 1776, Natal Army Staff Diary, 11 May 1900; PAR, CSO 2609, translated telegrams, 20 May 1900; NAR, FK 1776, 3rd Mounted Brigade Diary, 11 May 1900; Natal Witness, 18,23 and 25 May 1900; Natal Mercury, 17,18 and 25 May 1900; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p163.

¹⁴⁹ NAR, FK 1776, Natal Staff Diary, 12 May 1900.

¹⁵⁰ Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, pp1218-20; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, VI, p88.

¹⁵¹ Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, VI, p94.

¹⁵² Natal Witness, 25 August 1900.

¹⁵³ NAR, FK 1776, Natal Staff Diary, 13 May 1900; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p93; Times of Natal, 25 May 1900; Gillings, 'The Helpmekaar Duel', p212; Gillings, 'After the Siege', p90; McKenzie, Delayed Action, p194; Du Plessis, The Umvoti Mounted Rifles, pp61 and 64.

Boers with this axis of advance.¹⁵⁴ According to Stalker, the Mounted Brigade

'then skirted the semicircle of the hill of Helpmekaar from the Uithoek valley to the first line of the enemy's trenches on the Biggarsberg and, joined by Bethune's Mounted Infantry, charged the first entrenchment and drove its occupants, including German volunteers, to their second line of defence on the farther side of Helpmekaar Nek'.¹⁵⁵

Taken by surprise by such novel British tactics from the 'new' Buller, by sundown the Boers found their situation untenable. However, they put up a stout resistance for much of the day.¹⁵⁶ At dawn on the 14th the 3rd Mounted Brigade, including the Natal Carbineers and Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry, departed the brigade bivouac in the Uithoek valley to reconnoitre the Helpmekaar-Pomeroy road and Helpmekaar Nek.¹⁵⁷ Meeting no opposition, and finding Boer positions abandoned, the Volunteers joined the advance on Dundee. The veld had been torched by the Boers to provide themselves with cover, and to hinder British movements, but this did not deter the pursuing Volunteer horsemen, and isolated stands by the burghers were brushed aside.¹⁵⁸ Roland Shikkerling, a noted burgher adventurer and diarist, was part of the Boer retirement that day:

¹⁵⁴ NAR, FK 1776, Natal Staff Diary, 13 May 1900; Gillings, 'The Helpmekaar Duel', p213; Amery (ed), The Times History, IV, p173; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, VI, p90.

¹⁵⁵ Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p145; and see NAR, FK 1776, Natal Staff Diary, 13 May 1900; Volkstem, 16 May 1900; Amery (ed), The Times History, III, p173; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, VI, p90.

¹⁵⁶ NAR, FK 1776, Natal Staff Diary, 13 and 14 May 1900; Natal Witness, 25 May 1900; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, VI, p90.

¹⁵⁷ Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD 233/158, Report on Operations of 3rd Mounted Brigade on 14 May 1900, Newcastle, 22 May 1900, p19; NAR, FK 1776, Natal Staff Diary, 14 May 1900; Times of Natal, 25 May 1900; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, VI, p96.

¹⁵⁸ NAR, FK 1776, Natal Staff Diary, 14 May 1900; PAR, CSO 2609, transcript telegrams, Buller to General of Communications, Pietermaritzburg, 14 May 1900; Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD 233/158, 3rd Mounted Brigade Report, 14 May 1900, p20; NAR, FK 1776, Mounted Brigade Diary, May 1900, 14 May 1900; Bizley diary, 14 May 1900; Natal Mercury, 17 May 1900; The Times, 14 November 1900; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, III, p263; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p145; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, VI, pp96-7.

'I saw my weary beast passed by almost everyone, and I was only able to gain the main road about three hundred yards ahead of the pursuing Natal Carbineers. Had it not been for the smoke and dust raised, we of the tail-end would have fared badly indeed.'¹⁵⁹

The recollection of one participant in the day's ride suggests that on this occasion the colonial horsemen finally felt 'in their element':

'I shall never forget that mad ride - for mad it was with the exhilaration of pursuit and straining of horses to over-ride the fleeing enemy. Twice did the latter endeavour to check us, but the mounted men never gave them pause.'¹⁶⁰

The action was also the first time that Buller followed up a Boer retirement, and he reserved specific praise for Dundonald's troops.¹⁶¹ However, Buller's caution re-asserted itself when the day's pursuit was suspended following a temporarily successful rearguard action by the Boers immediately south of Dundee. That in turn drew praise from Dundonald for the Carbineers who played an important part in reducing this knot of resistance.¹⁶² The Times History was critical of this halt:

'Cheated of any tangible fruits of the pursuit, Dundonald withdrew his tired and smoke-begrimed men to camp a few miles back within the infantry outposts in accordance with a bad habit of the Natal Army. Touch was thereby lost with the enemy, and was not regained by Dundonald until he came into contact with them nearly a week later at Laing's Nek.'¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ RW Schikkerling, Commando Courageous, Johannesburg, Hugh Keartland, pp14-5.

¹⁶⁰ Natal Witness, 25 August 1900; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, III, p263.

¹⁶¹ PAR, CSO 2609, transcript telegrams, Buller to General of Communications, 15 May 1900; Gillings, 'The Helpmekaar Duel', p213.

¹⁶² Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GDD 233/158, Report 3rd Mounted Brigade, 14 May 1900, pp20-1; Natal Mercury, 18 May 1900; The Times, 14 November 1900; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, VI, p99; and see Nicholson diary, 15 May 1900; Torlage, 'The British Advance and Boer Retreat', p81; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, III, p264; Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p1223.

¹⁶³ Amery (ed), The Times History, IV, p176.

Several Natal Volunteers had been sent forward on the night of the 14-15 May to sabotage the NGR railway-line north of Glencoe before the Boers could evacuate their artillery. They were too late. According to Breytenbach, the Carbineers detachment was, in fact, withdrawn in accordance with Buller's instruction to hold positions. This decision, together with the rearguard action south of Dundee, meant that the Boers were able to evacuate many of their men, and a considerable quantity of artillery and stores, to Charlestown.¹⁶⁴

However, Buller's successful penetration of the Biggarsberg by means of his turning operation, relying mainly on mounted infantry and artillery, was a significant strategic and tactical achievement, effectively deceiving the Boers into thinking that it must be a feint.¹⁶⁵ The Natal Volunteers had formed part of a successful offensive, at negligible cost, against what could have been an almost impenetrable barrier on the Biggarsberg.¹⁶⁶ Fortunately for Buller, too, the Boers had failed to take effective advantage of their own offensive possibilities offered by occupation of the range.¹⁶⁷

Dundee was re-occupied on 15 May, with the Natal Carbineers once again leading the relief vanguard into a town in the northern Natal war-zone.¹⁶⁸ The column was greeted by the Anglican

¹⁶⁴ PAR, Journal of Principal Events, Part 4, p25, 16 May 1900; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p95; Times of Natal, 18 May 1900; Natal Advertiser, 23 May 1900; Natal Witness, 25 August 1900; Torlage, 'The British Advance and Boer Retreat', p78; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, VI, p99. The British advance was also hampered by the thorough Boer demolition of bridges and culverts along the NGR line (Amery (ed), The Times History, IV, p178).

¹⁶⁵ Powell, Buller: A Scapegoat?, p182.

¹⁶⁶ NAR, FK 1776, Natal Staff Diary, 18 May 1900; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, VI, pp111-4; and see Natal Advertiser, 23 May 1900.

¹⁶⁷ Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, VI, pp112-3 and 117-124.

¹⁶⁸ Natal Witness, 16 May 1900; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, III, p264. Judging by contemporary accounts of the advance to Dundee, the Carbineers dominated Volunteer operations, although there is also passing reference to the Border Mounted Rifles (Natal Mercury, 17 May 1900). According to the Times of Natal, Buller himself made his entry on the 14th (Times of Natal, 16 May 1900; and see Natal Advertiser, 18 May 1900; The Times, 16 and 18 May 1900).

Vicar of Dundee, the Reverend Mr Chilton Bailey, the minister who had buried General Penn Symons following the battle of Talana the previous October. He had remained in the town throughout the Boer occupation, while his brother served in the Carbineers.¹⁶⁹ The entry into Dundee was in general a more subdued affair than the relief of Ladysmith had been: 'No banners flying, no drums beating, but a ragged mob of men; some were bearded, and begrimed with the dust of a weary journey'.¹⁷⁰

The Natal Witness of 25 May 1900 carried the routine litany of looting and depredation in Dundee, that, according to the colonial press, had become the hallmark of Boer occupation.¹⁷¹ Those residents of Dundee and district in 'absolute need of assistance' subsequently received funds from the Volunteer and War Relief Fund to re-establish themselves.¹⁷² It was soon after this, on 20 May, that a sizeable detachment of Bethune's Mounted Infantry was mauled by Boers near Blood River, a reminder that poorly deployed mounted infantry were not immune to disaster.¹⁷³ British caution in pursuit may also have been encouraged by the story of a vaguely-defined incident concerning the narrow escape from a Boer ambush for a Volunteer patrol in the vicinity of Lang's Nek on 18 May. Dartnell was reportedly personally responsible for averting the ambush.¹⁷⁴

The Natal Volunteers were nevertheless able to fulfill something of their potential for the provision of intelligence, suggested by the familiarity of many Carbineers with the theatre of operations in northern Natal. It was asserted that 'there was not a road, bye-road, footpath, or even a wire fence in the whole of the northern part of Natal but several members of the regiment

¹⁶⁹ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p95.

¹⁷⁰ AG Garrish, The Records of 'I' Company: A Brief History of the East Surrey Volunteers Service in the South African War, London, Walbrook & Co, 1901, p34.

¹⁷¹ Natal Witness, 25 May 1900.

¹⁷² Times of Natal, 6 June 1900.

¹⁷³ NAR, Roberts Papers, volume 5 (WO 8/8/5), Natal Field Force, Vryheid Affair, Bethune Report, 21 May 1900.

¹⁷⁴ Times of Natal, 11 June 1900.

knew'.¹⁷⁵

Northwards from Dundee

'Devoid of stock, almost every Dutch farmhouse empty, and on every hand to be seen the desolation of what was, only nine months ago, the premier stock country of Natal.'¹⁷⁶

Pressing on from Dundee on 17 May, the 3rd Mounted Brigade passed through a desolate Dannhauser. Newcastle, the third major northern Natal town to be recaptured, was entered on the 18th, only a day behind the retreating Boers.¹⁷⁷ There was a low-key but spirited welcome.¹⁷⁸ A general sense of euphoria was also evident in a report written for The Times from Newcastle on 19 May.¹⁷⁹ There were further observations from several independent sources, and not only from the colonial newspapers, regarding looting in 'liberated' towns, this time with respect to Newcastle.¹⁸⁰ The Volunteer mounted infantry continued scouting patrols for the British columns. They were joined in this task by the South African Light Horse and Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁵ Natal Carbineers History Centre, anonymous Natal Carbineers manuscript, p4; Natal Volunteer Record, p155; Amery (ed), The Times History, IV, p179.

¹⁷⁶ Natal Advertiser, 3 August 1900.

¹⁷⁷ NAR, FK 1776, Natal Staff Diary, 17 May 1900; NAR, FK 1776, 3rd Mounted Brigade Diary, 16 May 1900; Bizley diary, 17-18 May 1900; The Times, 19 May 1900; Times of Natal, 22 May 1900; Amery (ed), The Times History, IV, p178.

¹⁷⁸ Natal Mercury, 21 and 22 May 1900; Times of Natal, 25 May 1900. For Buller's report on the Biggarsberg campaign from 3 March to 18 May 1900, see PRO, WO 32/7985, 079/3156, Buller to Roberts, 24 May 1900, enclosure in Roberts to Secretary of State for War, 3 July 1900.

¹⁷⁹ The Times, 24 May 1900.

¹⁸⁰ NAM, 8307/121, Greening diary, 25 May 1900; Natal Advertiser, 31 May 1900; and see Natal Diocesan Magazine, 5/8, pp156-8.

¹⁸¹ Nicholson diary, 19 and 29 May 1900.

Almost immediately, on 19 May, the Natal Carbineers found themselves reconnoitring the Lang's Nek area to the north of Newcastle. The pass was strongly occupied and entrenched by the Boers.¹⁸² On the 21st Dartnell proceeded to Mount Prospect with the Volunteer Brigade and established a permanent post there.¹⁸³ The Carbineers and the Natal Mounted Rifles vied for the distinction of being the first Natal Volunteer regiments to cross into Transvaal territory, albeit briefly, across the Mzinyathi (Buffalo) River.¹⁸⁴

The unfortunate Durban Light Infantry, still seeking a more active role in military operations, found that their attachment to the Natal Field Army backfired when they were detached on 14 May, with a squadron of the Natal Mounted Rifles, to garrison Dundee.¹⁸⁵ The Natal Royal Rifles, who had also been relegated to this duty throughout the war, were despatched to Glencoe on the 30th for the same purpose.¹⁸⁶ On 21 May Natal Volunteer components established posts on Mount Prospect and Inkwelo Hill, commanding Lang's Nek and Botha's Pass, but these were once again static operations unsuited to the Volunteers. This unrewarding task was exacerbated by windswept winter conditions.¹⁸⁷ An outpost line furnished by the 3rd Mounted Brigade at Lang's Nek extended from the Mzinyathi to Majuba, and was manned until the end of the month.¹⁸⁸ The

¹⁸² NAR, FK 1776, 3rd Mounted Brigade Diary, 19 and 20 May 1900; NAR, FK, 1776, Natal Staff Diary, 19 May 1900; Natal Mercury, 29 June 1900.

¹⁸³ NAR, FK 1776, Natal Staff Diary, 21 May 1900.

¹⁸⁴ NAR, FK 1776, Natal Staff Diary, 31 May 1900; Times of Natal, 12 June 1900. For a claim that the Richmond Troop of the Carbineers also crossed into the Free State at this point, see the Natal Witness, 14 November 1900.

¹⁸⁵ NAR, FK 1776, Natal Staff Diary, 18 May 1900; Times of Natal, 19 May 1900.

¹⁸⁶ NAR, FK 1776, Natal Staff Diary, 30 May 1900.

¹⁸⁷ NAR, Roberts Papers, volume 6 (WO T8/?/5), Buller to Secretary of State for War, 4 June 1900; Natal Advertiser, 5 June 1900; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p164. The freezing nocturnal temperatures were thought to contribute to incidences of jaundice and other ailments in the ranks of the volunteers, especially those 'born and reared in the sub-tropical climate of the coast' (NAR, Roberts Papers, volume 7, Buller Report, 19 June 1900, p5; Times of Natal, 12 June 1900). This was put forward as one of the less tenable reasons for the repatriation of the Volunteers.

¹⁸⁸ NAR, FK 1776, Natal Staff Diary, 23 May 1900; NAR, FK 1776, 3rd Mounted Brigade
(continued...)

Times of Natal carried this account of the 21 May operation:

'On Monday morning the Volunteer Brigade again left Ingogo to go forward with the UMR leading the van, forming the advance guard, with one squadron of Natal Carbineers. We advanced feeling our way, at 6am, and finally arrived at the foot of the Inkwelo Mountain, which we climbed, and the UMR took possession of it, the squadron of Natal Carbineers being on the left, and the remainder of the UMR holding the right down to the road. We remained in possession the whole night, and such a cold night I have never experienced, as a wind was blowing which seemed to penetrate to the marrow.'¹⁸⁹

There was an armistice on the 1880-1881 battlefields from 2 to 5 June, while the Boers considered, and rejected, surrender terms.¹⁹⁰ This pause was followed by the final set-piece battles of the Natal campaign, at Botha's Pass (8 June) and Alleman's Nek (11 June), and the final expulsion of Boer forces from the Colony. These were primarily infantry assaults conducted by British regular troops, and the Volunteers were little more than spectators.¹⁹¹ On 7 June the Natal Volunteers, under the command of Dartnell, joined Lieutenant-General Sir Francis Clery's 2nd Division in preparation for the attack on Botha's Pass.¹⁹² On the 8th, while elements of the 3rd Mounted Brigade furnished a flank guard to the 2nd Infantry Brigade, Dartnell's Volunteers remained on outpost duty.¹⁹³ On the 12th, relieved of picquet duty, the Carbineers passed through the extensively damaged 'tin village' of Charlestown, and encamped on a farm near the border

¹⁸⁸(...continued)

Diary, 23-31 May 1900.

¹⁸⁹ Times of Natal, 23 May 1900.

¹⁹⁰ NAR, Roberts Papers, volume 6, (WO T8/?/5), Buller to Secretary of State for War, 4 June 1900, pp2-3; NAR, Roberts Papers, volume 7, Buller Report to Secretary of State for War, Laing's Nek, 19 June 1900, p1; Natal Mercury, 9 June 1900; Gillings, 'After the Siege', pp91-2; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, VI, pp132-5.

¹⁹¹ See for example, Gillings, 'After the Siege', pp92-9; Amery (ed), The Times History, IV, chapter 5; Torlage, 'The British Advance and Boer Retreat', chapters 6 and 7; Breytenbach, Geskiedenis, VI, pp136-140.

¹⁹² Gillings, 'After the Siege', p92.

¹⁹³ Talana Museum, Dundonald Papers, volume 3, GD 233/124/2, Report, 3rd Mounted Brigade Operations, 6-13 June 1900; NAR, Roberts Papers, volume 7, Buller Report, 19 June 1900, p4; Amery (ed), The Times History, IV, pp186-7.

town of Volksrust.¹⁹⁴

Several over-enthusiastic sources credit the Volunteers with the uncontested occupation of Lang's Nek following the above two engagements, and the turning of the Boer positions.¹⁹⁵ This claim has been disputed in the context of the role of African auxiliaries and scouts in the war.¹⁹⁶ It has been suggested that the contribution of African scouts to this event was deliberately downplayed in contemporary records in favour of the 'white' Volunteers, and that it had, in fact, been the African scouts who had first occupied the Nek and, on finding it abandoned, had waved the Carbineers on.¹⁹⁷ However, Trooper John Nicholson comments that all that was accomplished on that day, by a routine patrol, was to rustle up the Boers, who were then shelled by British artillery.¹⁹⁸

This minor matter of dispute does nevertheless draw attention to the role of Africans as auxiliaries in operations and not simply as labourers, and the little-known support by African communities in Natal to the war effort.¹⁹⁹ The dispute's importance here is not in any military significance of

¹⁹⁴ Bizley diary, 12 June 1900; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p103.

¹⁹⁵ Natal Mercury, 20 and 25 June 1900; Natal Witness, 21 June 1900; Natal Volunteer Record, p155; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p146.

¹⁹⁶ John Lambert, 'Loyalty its own Reward: the South African War Experience of Natal's "Loyal" Africans', unpublished conference paper, UNISA, 1998, pp14-15.

¹⁹⁷ Natal Witness, 2 July 1900; Lambert, 'Loyalty its own Reward', p14.

¹⁹⁸ Nicholson diary, 9 June 1900.

¹⁹⁹ See PAR, NCP 8/1/13/2/9, Blue Book on Native Affairs, 1901, report of the Magistrates of the Weenen Division, CG Jackson, 31 December 1901, and Mapumulo Division, Victoria County, JJ Field, 8 January 1902. Machin, in 'The Levying of Forced African Labour', pp293-296, makes only brief mention of British and Natal employment of Africans in the war, and does not refer to this incident. The Colony of Natal was reluctant to give permission to its African inhabitants to arm themselves with firearms, and preferred them to seek the protection of the British Army, if necessary (See PAR, PM 20, minute paper 9142/1900, Prime Minister to magistrates, 9 September 1899; PAR, MJPW 71, minute paper L&W 4462/1899, Kumalo to Magistrate, Ladysmith, 13 October 1899, and minute paper L&W 4464/1899, Secretary of Native Affairs to Magistrate, Ladysmith, 13 October 1899; John Laband, 'Zulus and the War', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, p112).

the operation itself, but rather the possibility that the allegations of unfounded assertions of Volunteer participation may be part of the circumstantial evidence, considered further in chapter XIII, that the Natal settler community inflated the role of its military forces in the war. It was not an exclusively white settler affair.

Indeed, one contribution to war funds, of £140, was received from the amaNgwe, under their chief, Sibhamu, from the Estcourt district.²⁰⁰ In his report for 1899, the Magistrate for the Estcourt Division, RH Addison, recorded the contribution of scouts and guides by a Chief Ncwadi, and reported that previous 'native doubts' about the success of British arms had been restored with the relief of Ladysmith and the subsequent retirement of the Boers. Also, despite the hardships caused by the war, there was also 'a small token [£219, from Ncwadi] of the gratitude of myself and people'.²⁰¹ His donation was, in fact, only one of 40 made by African chiefdoms in Natal, amounting to a total of over £900, mostly for sick and wounded soldiers.²⁰²

By mid-June overall victory was apparently in sight. The Boers appeared to have capitulated without much resistance, and while the Volunteers froze in this northernmost extremity of the Colony, thoughts once more started to turn to home, as was the case after the relief of Ladysmith.²⁰³ Military theorist Julian Lider contends that military victory is a relative concept. Whether such victory is tied to the achievement of absolute military domination or major strategic losses on the part of the vanquished, the British Army in South Africa thought it had the war won by June 1900.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁰ PAR, CO (microfilm), 1/1/1/1/208, [PRO 179/214], enclosure in Despatch 299, 6 and 29 October 1900; PAR, CO (microfilm), 1/1/1/1/205, [PRO 179/212], enclosure in despatch 170, 28 May 1900, Secretary of Native Affairs to Colonial Secretary, 23 and 28 May 1900.

²⁰¹ PAR, NCP, 7/4/6, Departmental Reports, Magistrate, Estcourt Division, pB47; Natal Witness, 9 and 21 June 1900.

²⁰² PAR, NCP 8/1/13/2/9, Blue Book on Native Affairs, 1901, ppA81-2.

²⁰³ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archive, Lyttelton Papers, NGL/fam/393a, Lyttelton to DD, 26 June 1900; Himeville Museum, Gordon letters, Gordon to father, 3 June 1900; Natal Advertiser, 5 June 1900.

²⁰⁴ Lider, On the Nature of War, p66.

Conclusion

In the month following the relief of Ladysmith, during which time both the siege garrison and the relief force required much-needed recuperation, the first major fissures started emerging in the Natal commitment to the war. Colonists anticipated the demobilization of the Volunteer regiments, and there was considerable agitation towards this end. Such agitation took place against the background of the debate between Buller and Lord Roberts over the future campaign strategy in Natal, revelations about poor relations between the Volunteers and British officers, speculation regarding the introduction of English Yeomanry troops to the Natal theatre, the strong impact on Natal society of the death of Colonel William Royston, Ladysmith's materialistic approach towards the legacy of the siege, the operation of the remount system which was important to the operation of the Volunteer mounted infantry component, and a period of frustrating idleness in the vicinity of Elandslaagte in late April and early May 1900 that seemed to confirm to the Colony that the Volunteers were perhaps no longer needed.

The cracks in the Natal war effort were then to a large extent obscured by the success of Buller's renewed offensive in mid-May to clear the fortified Boer positions on the Biggarsberg range. The Natal Volunteers played a commendable part in these operations, a positive role which was crowned by their participation in the re-occupation of two major northern Natal towns, Dundee and Newcastle, the fate of both of which had been central to Natal settler interests in October 1899. Overall, two further pieces of circumstantial evidence emerged concerning the inflation by Natal of its contribution to the war effort. These were, firstly, the plethora of ritual congratulatory messages following the relief of Ladysmith, the first major success of the Natal campaign, and one closely affecting the Volunteers and the Colony. Then there was the disputed occupation of Lang's Nek in June 1900 to the detriment of the record of the contribution of African scouts and the support of African communities in Natal for the British-colonial war effort.

CHAPTER X

THE WINDING DOWN OF THE WAR IN NORTHERN NATAL AND THE PROSPECT OF DEMOBILIZATION

Natal Clear of the Enemy?

'They have done well for their country,
They're a credit to our race,
They have done their share of duty
At the front, and at the base.
Though their uniforms are tarnished,
Though their cheeks are coloured chrome,
We will give them three times three, lads,
When the Volunteers come home.'¹

On 13 June 1900 the Governor of Natal, Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson, telegraphed to the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, that 'Natal [was] clear of [the] enemy after 242 days'.² Buller also received the congratulations of the Queen for driving the Boers from Natal.³ This landmark point in the war in Natal (though deceptively so) also signified the beginning of the end of the continuous service of the Natal Volunteers in the Anglo-Boer War. As was the case when the Imperial Light Horse left Natal for the northern Cape front in April 1900, the service of the Volunteers was restricted to the Colony. The machinery for the eventual demobilization of the Volunteers by the year's end was consequently set in motion. When Major-General Lord Kitchener, Chief-of-Staff to Lord Roberts, spoke of his intention to top up and replace troops in South Africa with colonials because they were 'the best men for the work in hand which entails long and hard riding', presumably he was referring to the ILH and the Dominion mounted infantry who were also not

¹ Natal Witness, 14 July 1900.

² PAR, CO (microfilm), 1/1/1/206 [PRO 179/212], Hely-Hutchinson to Chamberlain, 13 June 1900.

³ Natal Witness, 16 June 1900; The Times, 18 June 1900.



restricted as were the Natal Volunteers.⁴

On 15 June the demobilization process appeared to get under way when the Natal Carbineers were informed that Dartnell had consulted Buller, and it had been decided that the Volunteers should return to Dundee for a short period and then be demobilized.⁵ On 16 June the Natal Witness commented:

'Now that General Buller has swept the invader out of Natal...it should not be long before the Natal Volunteers are released from military duty, and permitted to return to their homes. They have had eight months active service, and it is generally admitted, have done well.'⁶

At Charlestown Colonel Greene, the Commanding Officer of the Natal Carbineers, congratulated his regiment on their work throughout the campaign, and reiterated the widespread conviction that the war would soon be at an end, and the Volunteer regiments would be demobilized.⁷ On 15 June Buller issued a Special Natal Army Order complimenting the Volunteers, and hinting strongly at an early general release:

'As the Natal Field Force is now leaving Natal, it loses the services of the Natal Volunteers.

The General (GOC) desires to place on record his high appreciation of the services rendered by Brigadier-General Dartnell and the Natal Volunteers in the arduous operations which have resulted in the expulsion of the enemy from Natal territory...

The GOC fully realises the sacrifices they have cheerfully made to remain in the field, and he feels that the time has come, when he ought to release as many as possible from the duties they have so patriotically undertaken. He has therefore asked General Dartnell to undertake the defence of the Dundee Section of the Eastern Frontier, and to allow those

⁴ PRO, 30/57/22, Kitchener Papers, Y22, Kitchener to Broderick, 8 February 1901.

⁵ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p105; Bizley diary, 18 June 1900; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, pp148 and 166; McKenzie, Delayed Action, p195. According to the Natal Witness, 25 June 1900, the date was the 16th.

⁶ Natal Witness, 16 June 1900.

⁷ Natal Witness, 18 June 1900.

Volunteers not required for this duty to return to their avocations.⁸

The Natal press responded enthusiastically to this news:

'The "Special Army Order" which was issued by General Buller on Friday last...will be welcomed by many...A number, we believe, desire to cross the border and see the war out, but there are very many who, having fulfilled their duty to the Colony by assisting to expel the invaders, have duties at home that forbid them, as good citizens, from remaining in the field for longer than necessity requires.'⁹

Optimism and expectation of early release marked the departure of the Volunteers for Dundee on 18 June.¹⁰ At the sprawling Dundee camp the recreational side of Volunteer service again came to the fore, almost in anticipation of release. A concert was held in the town on the 14th, followed by a camp sports on the 21st.¹¹ Pietermaritzburg was also gearing up for the long-awaited, and apparently imminent, return of its menfolk:

'The time has arrived when the Colonists should be considering what steps should be taken to give the Volunteers a fitting welcome...they will, it is hoped, have a fitting reception'.¹²

Volunteer War-Weariness

Expectations of release for the Volunteers accompanied considerable public (and financial) pressure on the Natal government to disband the force, especially if they were not gainfully

⁸ Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, pp148 and 165-6. Stalker cites both dates. The Order was also printed in the Natal Witness and the Times of Natal, 18 June 1900, and in the report of the Commandant of Volunteers for 1900 (PAR, NCP, 7/4/7, pF2), where it is dated the 15th, which would seem to confirm that date.

⁹ Natal Mercury, 19 June 1900.

¹⁰ Himeville Museum, Gordon letters, Jim Gordon to Mary, 26 June 1900; Natal Witness, 25 June 1900.

¹¹ Natal Mercury, 21 and 25 July 1900; 'War in the Biggarsberg', p27.

¹² Natal Witness, 16 June 1900.

employed.¹³

The colonial exchequer was feeling the strain of maintaining the force in the field.¹⁴ This was despite a brave face presented to the public in the budget statements for 1900, published in the press: 'We all know how good an account our men have given of themselves...and well have our Volunteers justified the expenditure incurred'.¹⁵ Such evidence of financial strain experienced by Natal did not elicit any sympathy from Kitchener, who criticised the management of the war effort by the local colonies:

'I am doing my best to keep down expenditure but it is no easy task and I do not see my way to doing much more in any large way - Pay of South African irregulars worries me a good deal as it is difficult to get it properly checked and they are all robbers.'¹⁶

In the Natal government's minute on 'expenditure on the South African crisis' to 31 December 1900, the Volunteer Department incurred a variety of expenses, including: rations - £1 904; native scouts and messengers - £3 393; uniforms - £1 648; medical attendance and medicines - £1 532; commandeered horses - £1 227; field allowance to permanent staff - £1 953; and allowance to recruits and special service men for horses - £8 060.¹⁷ These are, it must be noted, relatively minor expenses. Even the pensions of local forces raised in South Africa, which under local law were the

¹³ PAR, MJPW 76, minute paper 5237/1900, *passim*.

¹⁴ PAR, MJPW 76, minute paper 5237/1900, Natal Government to Buller, draft letter, not dated but estimated to be 5 July 1900.

¹⁵ Natal Witness, 10 May 1900.

¹⁶ PRO, 30/57/22, Kitchener Papers, Y60, Kitchener to Broderick, 7 June 1901; and see PRO, 30/57/22, Kitchener Papers, Y62, Kitchener to Broderick, 21 June 1901. Kitchener thought almost as poorly of the Boers: 'The Boers are uncivil Afrikaner savages with only a thin white veneer' (PRO, 30/57/22, Kitchener Papers, Y62, Kitchener to Broderick, 21 June 1901).

¹⁷ PAR, CSO 1673, minute paper 2782/1901, Expenditure on South African crisis to 31 December 1900.

responsibility of the colonies in South Africa, were claimable from London.¹⁸ Even so, the budget presented to the Natal Parliament on 8 May 1900 showed a deficit of £478 000 - due to the war.¹⁹

Colonial 'war-weariness' presaged a declining support for the war in the metropole as well, evident by mid-1901.²⁰ It was becoming apparent to the British public that this colonial military campaign was costing far more than anticipated. Expenditure on the army rose from £20 million to £43.6 million during the first year of the war alone.²¹ The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, was uncertain what portion of the war liability would be claimable from the Transvaal, and this included compensation claims likely to be lodged by 'loyalists of Natal'.²²

By mid-1900, the viability of relief funds in Natal suggested that the financial burden of war service was becoming an acute one for the Colony. The Natal Volunteer and War Relief Fund, for example, was soon exhausted. In February 1900 alone there were 200 new applications for assistance, and in July 1900 it was announced that the payments for August that year were to be the last. As far as the Carbineers specifically were concerned, dependants had received £412 during the period December 1899 to February 1900, with £198 for February alone. If a mobilization enrolment strength of 508 is used as a base, the 28 wives, 112 children and 20 other dependents receiving this assistance by February 1900, represented a substantial burden on this fund.²³

The alleged plight of the Colony's civil servants provides a window on an aspect of Volunteer war service that reflected the waning of military fervour. As early as January 1900, questions were

¹⁸ PRO, WO 108/358, Colonial and Irregular Corps: Pensions and Gratuities 1900-02, Report 079/10/1576, 25 April 1900.

¹⁹ The Times, 10 May 1900.

²⁰ Thompson, 'Pressure groups, propaganda and the state', p21.

²¹ Thompson, 'Pressure groups, propaganda and the state', p2.

²² Natal Advertiser, 7 March 1900.

²³ Natal Witness, 23 March, 31 May and 26 July 1900. The statistics in December 1899 had been 11 wives, 28 children, and 3 dependents (£56), and in January 1900, 26 wives, 86 children, and 13 dependents (£158).

being raised in the Colony as to whether Volunteers in the civil service were effectively being penalised in this regard - a sentiment familiar to generations of Volunteer soldiers.²⁴ On the whole this was not a valid concern, and associated requests for exemption from service, such as that from Carbineer officer, Captain FE Foxon, were not entertained. On 22 March 1900 Foxon, Magistrate for the Ixopo division, enquired of the Natal government about the possibility of resuming his official duties. His motivation was characteristic of the eternal dilemma facing the Volunteer soldier: domestic stress and financial difficulties once leave pay was exhausted. However, his plea fell on deaf ears, and he was ordered to remain with the Carbineers until he was released from active service.²⁵ When on 24 April the Natal Colonial Secretary, Charles Smythe, lobbied for Foxon's release to assist with hut-tax collection at Richmond, Colonel Greene bluntly refused to consider it, strongly suggesting that the Colonial Secretary's letter had been written at Foxon's instigation.²⁶

Two major concessions were, however, made for civil servants. In April it was resolved, firstly, that upon expiration of leave the difference between Volunteer pay and official salaries could be claimed, but this only applied to those Volunteers with existing military obligations at the outbreak of war, and not to Special Service recruits.²⁷ Secondly, allowance was made for fresh periods of full-pay leave allowance as the war threatened to extend beyond a single calendar year.²⁸

In April 1900 the Times of Natal suggested that only 25 per cent of civil servants at the front were financially disadvantaged, and that of the entire Volunteer force 'it is safe to say 75 per cent are

²⁴ PAR, CSO 1637, minute paper 66/1900, correspondence, FA Laughton, Principal Under-Secretary, and Colonial Secretary, 9,10 and 24 January 1900.

²⁵ PAR, CSO 1643, minute paper 2103/1900, Foxon to Principal Under-Secretary, 22 March 1900.

²⁶ PAR, CSO 1646, minute paper 3226/1900, Colonial Secretary to Hime, 24 April 1900, and Greene to Commandant of Volunteers, 30 April 1900.

²⁷ PAR, CSO 1646, Circular 28, Principal Under-Secretary, 28 April 1900.

²⁸ PAR, CSO 1646, Circular 19, Principal Under-Secretary, 6 April 1900; and see PAR, CSO 1646, minute paper 3059/1900, 27 April 1900, Civil Servants at Front with Volunteers, lists A and B, Pay of Government Officers on Volunteer Duty.

earning as much, if not more, than they would earn were they at home'.²⁹ In April 1900 the position of elected officials was also addressed. At that juncture Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), for example, were required to vacate their seats after a continuous absence of a year in accordance with Sections 32 and 33 of the Natal Constitution Act of 1893. One proposal was to furnish the affected officers (including Colonel Greene of the Carbineers) opportunity to attend at least one sitting during the period of their active service.³⁰ However, in April 1900 a bill was introduced in the Natal Parliament, seeking to enable members of the Legislature serving in the field with the Volunteer forces to continue doing so without vacating their seats. The sanction of the Colonial Secretary, Chamberlain, was sought, because such a change necessitated a change to the constitution.³¹

The specific financial concerns of farmers and businessmen were also relevant. The interests of the farming community were focussed on seasonal agricultural demands. Volunteer military service had, for example, already interfered with one summer planting season (1899-1900), and further service now threatened continued neglect of farming operations. Farmers in the Volunteer ranks therefore joined the agitation for a release from service.³² According to a letter from a 'farmer Volunteer' to the Times of Natal in May 1900, those with farms or businesses to return to ought to be given the option of doing so, subject to recall on 48 hours notice. Within Volunteer ranks this suggestion generated some dissension between the farmers and 'non-farmers' when troops learnt of a secret vote conducted by officers, with three (farmers) wishing to go home, and four voting against.³³

²⁹ Times of Natal, 23 April 1900.

³⁰ PAR, CSO 1644, minute paper 2413/1900, 2 and 6 April 1900; PAR, CSO 1648, minute paper 3820/1900, Principal Under-Secretary to Minister of Lands and Works, 23 May 1900.

³¹ PAR, CO (microfilm), 1/1/1/205 [PRO 179/211], telegram, Natal Government to Chamberlain, 26 April 1900, and enclosure 1 in despatch 133, 26 April 1900; PAR, Natal Civil Service List, 1899, p15; PAR, NCP 6/1/1/153, Natal Government Gazette, LII, No.3096, 24 April 1900, p352-3, 'Bill to amend Sections 32 and 33 of the Constitution Act, 1893'.

³² Natal Witness, 4 July 1900.

³³ Times of Natal, 11 May 1900.

On 5 April Thomas Groom MLA, of Rosetta in the Natal midlands, proposed the granting of extended furlough to deserving categories of men such as farmers, whose livelihoods were under threat as a result of their extended absence, and because of financial setbacks such as the commandeering of oxen and wagons.³⁴ The matter was referred by the Commandant of Volunteers to the various Volunteer Commanding Officers. Although the Natal Mounted Rifles favoured the consideration of exceptional cases, it is the hardline response of the Carbineer Commanding Officer, Colonel Greene, that deserves quoting:

'A large number of Volunteers imagine that no forward move will be made in Natal and would therefore be only too pleased to have an opportunity of returning to their farms and businesses.

Unquestionably in very many cases Volunteers are suffering very heavy pecuniary loss by remaining in the field, but I strongly deprecate any leave whatever being granted until the services of the whole force are no longer required.

The Volunteers from Australia, Canada and elsewhere must of necessity be making considerable sacrifices in coming to and remaining in South Africa and I consider it would not be to Natal's credit if her Volunteers were not content to make similar sacrifices.³⁵

It soon became apparent that Buller's Special Army Order of 15 June concerning imminent demobilization had been premature. It consequently became a cause for Volunteer resentment and

³⁴ Times of Natal, 11 May 1900.

³⁵ PAR, CSO 1644, minute paper 2519/1900, Colonel Greene to Commandant of Volunteers, 25 April 1900; and Acting CO, NMR, to Commandant of Volunteers, 25 April 1900. Green proposed a more restrained recognition of the Natal Volunteer war effort than that of jubilee and ceremony, and on 29 June 1900 this sentiment was reflected in this comment by a correspondent to the Natal Witness:

'Although I have been through the whole of the campaign so far, including the siege of Ladysmith, I cannot see that Natal Volunteers have achieved anything extraordinary. We have only been defending our own homes and interests, while representatives from sister colonies have travelled in many cases thousands of miles to assist us in this struggle. Surely they are more deserving of praise than we are'

(Natal Witness, 29 June 1900).

therefore of concern to Dartnell, as well as a potential embarrassment for the Natal government.³⁶

On 4 July Hime, the Prime Minister of Natal, articulated these concerns to Buller:

'There is, I fear, a considerable and growing amount of discontent amongst the Volunteers in consequence of their being kept on the Lines of Communication at Dundee. They would, I feel sure, have gladly gone on with you, had they considered it desirable that they should do so.

But when you issued your Special Natal Army Order of the 15th June, complimenting the Volunteers and stating that you felt that the time had come when you ought to release as many as possible from duty, there was a general impression amongst them that the whole force would not be required much longer, and would shortly be altogether recalled from active service.

There was also a feeling amongst them that they are now performing duty at Dundee which could equally well be performed by a less expensive force...it may perhaps be possible for you to replace the Volunteers there by militia or other troops, of which there are, I believe, some now at Durban'.³⁷

On 5 July Dartnell published a Special Order to his troops regarding the publication in the press of 'complaining and querulous letters on this topic, and therefore bringing the force's 'high reputation for cheerful obedience to duty' into disrepute'.³⁸ But at the same time Hime felt compelled to backtrack on his letter to Buller of the previous day. He now begged to

'assure you that we have no wish whatsoever that anything should be done which would, in the slightest degree, embarrass or hamper you in connection with your military operations, either offensive or defensive. Therefore, if the disbandment of the Volunteers or their removal from Dundee would place you in the slightest difficulty, we would

³⁶ PAR, MJPW 76, minute paper 5237/1900, Dartnell to Hime, 2 July 1900; and see PAR, MJPW 76, 5237/1900, F Farmer to Hime, Dundee, 2 July 1900; Times of Natal, 25 June 1900; Jim O'Brien, 'Mounted Infantry in the Boer War: The Story Continued', Soldiers of the Queen, 106/September 2001, pp20-1.

³⁷ PAR, MJPW 76, minute paper 5237/1900, Hime to Buller, 4 July 1900; and see PRO, WO 132/2, Hime to Buller, 23 July 1900; The Times, 8 February 1900; Natal Mercury, 17 November 1900; AH Page, 'The Supply Services of the British Army during the South African War', D Phil, Oxford, 1977, passim.

³⁸ PAR, MJPW 76, minute paper 5237/1900, v1289/00, Special Order, Dartnell, Dundee, 5 July 1900; PAR, MJPW 76, minute paper 5237/1900, Dartnell to Hime, Dundee, 5 July 1900; Natal Witness, 5 July 1900.

certainly not urge you to take any action in the matter.³⁹

Much of this uncertainty and confusion seems to have arisen from ignorance, or misunderstanding, of two important clauses (numbers 2 and 3) of Section 199 of the Army Act of 1881. These provisions enabled the governor of a colony in which British forces were serving (or the GOC of any expeditionary force beyond Imperial dominions), to recall forces to active service for renewable periods of three months duration.⁴⁰ The British Yeomanry regiments that joined Roberts's forces in April 1900 enrolled under similar contracts of service, in their case of one year or the duration of the war. Harboursing similar expectations as the Natal Volunteers, they likewise did not anticipate service of longer than a year.⁴¹ In the event, the colonial political and military authorities and the Natal press accepted that the Volunteers must remain in the field. Hime wrote to Buller, at great length, on 23 July, beginning as follows:

I am greatly obliged to you for the frank manner in which you have written to me about the Volunteers, and I fully realise that it would be difficult, indeed I may say impossible, for you to dispense with their services at present'.⁴²

Dartnell, the Commandant of Volunteers, made the important point that Buller's Special Army Order of 15 June had been issued on the confident assumption that the war would be concluded within about two weeks.⁴³ However, as he was forced to concede, this had been optimistic, and the order had not fixed the duration of remaining service.

³⁹ PAR, MJPW 76, minute paper 5237/1900, Hime to Buller, 5 July 1900.

⁴⁰ PAR, CSO 2609, in-telegrams, 12 July 1900; Natal Advertiser, 13 July 1900.

⁴¹ Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, IV, p95; Amery (ed), The Times History, V, p71; and see PAR, CO (microfilm), 1/1/1/208 [PRO 179/2,14], Despatch 151, 7 October 1899, Hely-Hutchinson to Chamberlain, 2 November 1900, and Despatch 35509, 26 November 1900.

⁴² PRO, WO 132/2, Hime to Buller, 23 July 1900. This exchange of correspondence with Buller marked the conclusion of the service of the Natal Volunteers under his command. See anonymous newspaper report, in PAR, CSO 2609, telegrams, Colonial Secretary's Office, Pietermaritzburg, 12 July 1900; and the Natal Mercury, 11 July 1900, for press comment.

⁴³ PAR, MJPW 76, minute paper 5237/1900, Natal Volunteer Brigade, Memorandum, Dartnell, 2 July 1900.

The editorial comment of the Natal Advertiser on 18 June 1900, while disappointed at the turn of events, was one of the more even-handed among local newspapers concerning the further service:

'It will be seen that, although the Volunteers are no longer attached to the Natal Field Force, they are not all to return home at once. General Buller has asked General Dartnell to undertake the defence of the Dundee section of the eastern frontier of the Colony, and it is only those who are not required for this duty that will be allowed to return home.

We doubt not that this duty, although perhaps less attractive than that of accompanying the Field Force, will be undertaken as cheerfully as the other duties performed, and we hope that at no distant date it will be possible, by the restoration of peace, to welcome back all the Volunteers who have been so long absent from their homes.'⁴⁴

The promise of early release was further dashed when it was decided to retain the Volunteers at Dundee for at least another two or three months, nominally to secure the essential lines of communication for Buller's advance into the Transvaal.⁴⁵ From December 1900 onwards, when he assumed overall command in South Africa, Kitchener determined to crush the Boer guerrilla forces by attrition, which required high troop numbers, but he was under pressure from the War Office to do so as economically as possible.⁴⁶ Kitchener's general concern about Boer military operations was reflected on a local level in northern Natal where it was apparent that the Boers remained active, necessitating a constant state of alert.⁴⁷ There were several indications of Boer activity. On 21 August they dynamited the railway in the vicinity of Dannhauser in an attempt to retard the British advance, and on the same day the following report was despatched from Newcastle:

'Yesterday a body of Boers, estimated at between 500 and 700, crossed the Buffalo River

⁴⁴ Natal Advertiser, 18 June 1900.

⁴⁵ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p105; Natal Volunteer Record, p156.

⁴⁶ PRO, 30/57/22, Kitchener Papers, Y4, Broderick to Kitchener, 24 November 1900, Y6, Broderick to Kitchener, 8 December 1900; Surridge, 'More than a Great Poster', p305; Surridge, Managing the South African War, p177.

⁴⁷ See PRO, 30/57/22, Kitchener Papers, Y15, Kitchener to Broderick, 11 January 1901; PAR, PM 18, minute paper 1690/1900, FR Bloy to Hime, 16 June 1900; Natal Advertiser, 2 August 1900; and see PRO, WO 105/9, Commander-in-Chief/126/136, Buller on protection of the Natal-Heidelberg railway, 18 July 1900.

near the junction with the Ingagane, and made an attempt to surround the British fort on the Ingagane Heights... The HQ here was immediately communicated with, and the troops here, assisted by those from the garrisons stationed in the outlying district, made an attempt to cut off the retreat of the invading body, but without success, the enemy making good their escape across the Buffalo.⁴⁸

In the context of the extended duration of the war, such activity reflected a renewed Boer spirit of resistance that had replaced the loss of resolve following the relief of Ladysmith, the defeat at Paardeberg, and the occupation of the capitals of the Republics.⁴⁹ On 18 January 1901 Kitchener complained to Broderick:

'I fear I cannot report any signs of the Boers having the least intention of giving in. I have done my best to point out to them the hopelessness of their struggle, but any attempt at peace are considered by them as signs of weakness and I fear will have no effect.'⁵⁰

Also, as the conduct of war became a more protracted affair, its logistical dimension (and therefore the lines of communication) assumed greater importance than before.⁵¹ Kitchener complained plaintively on 20 December 1900:

'The difficulties of the present situation out here are that we have to protect very long lines of railway and road and supply garrisons and the many towns and villages that have been occupied all over the country whilst the mobile columns we have in the field are principally taken up in escorting supplies.'⁵²

⁴⁸ Times of Natal, 23 August 1900.

⁴⁹ See PAR, Volunteer Brigade Memorandum, 2 July 1900; Davenport and Saunders, South Africa: A Modern History, pp225-7; Haswell, Citizen Armies, pp130 and 135; Powell, Buller: A Scapegoat?, p186.

⁵⁰ PRO, 30/57/22, Kitchener Papers, Y16, Kitchener to Broderick, 18 January 1901; and see Headlam (ed), The Milner Papers 1899-1905, chapter 6, especially for correspondence between Milner and Chamberlain on the guerrilla phase of the war. For discussion of the Spanish guerrilla war in the Napoleonic period, see Alan Forrest, 'The Nation in Arms I: The French Wars', in Townshend (ed), The Oxford History of Modern War, p72.

⁵¹ Bond, The Pursuit of Victory, pp5-6.

⁵² PRO, 30/57/22, Kitchener Papers, Y9, Kitchener to Broderick, 20 December 1900.

(continued...)

The situation on the lines of communications was one that had not been adequately planned, to the detriment of relations within the British military hierarchy, and between it and the colonial administrations.⁵³ The point was made, for example, that at the outset of war the local general commanding should be given command of the lines of communications. The reasoning was that this officer should be the most familiar with local conditions, and best suited to interact with the local colonial authorities.⁵⁴ Such had not been the case in Natal where this command was given to Colonel (local Major-General) J Wolfe Murray within a week of his arrival in the country.⁵⁵ The security situation in northern Natal, and the position of the Natal Volunteers, was not helped by the poaching by Lord Roberts of units for his campaign in the western Transvaal. For example, he instructed Buller, then headquartered at Paardekop in the Transvaal, to transfer the 4th Derbyshire Regiment at Ladysmith, and replace it with 'some of Colonel Dartnell's men from Dundee'.⁵⁶

Resurgent Boer operations also led to the formation of a number of mounted infantry regiments from the settler dominions, and the despatch from England of the City of London Imperial Volunteers (CIV) and two further contingents of the Yeomanry Cavalry.⁵⁷ From mid-1900 mounted infantry were more effectively deployed when British-colonial operations evolved from brigade and divisional strength operations into that of mobile columns in pursuit of the elusive commandos. Typical of British operations was that against Free State commandos in the

⁵²(...continued)

Kitchener's immediate concern to end the guerrilla war took precedence over Milner's long-term political plans for a postwar settlement (SurrIDGE, Managing the South African War, pp178-9).

⁵³ PRO, WO 108/268, 'Lines of Communications, Natal, December 1900', p1.

⁵⁴ PRO, WO 108/268, 'Lines of Communication, Natal, December 1900', p2.

⁵⁵ PRO, WO 108/268, , 'Lines of Communication, Natal, December 1900', p2; and see WO 108/296, 'Lines of Communication', passim.

⁵⁶ NAR, Roberts Papers, volume 22, Roberts to Buller, 5 August 1900.

⁵⁷ Royal Commission on the War in South Africa, I, Report, pp72-5; Barthorp, 'The Mounted Infantry', p10; Haythornwaite, The Colonial Wars Source Book, p201. The Yeomanry had initially been considered for service in the wake of the Black Week defeats (Haythornwaite, The Colonial Wars Source Book, p198).

Brandwater Basin in July 1900.⁵⁸ Sixsmith comments on the task facing the British in the implementation of this strategy: 'Now that the Boers were not tied to any geographical defence the British had to embark on a war against space and Kitchener had to learn...that you cannot make war against a map'.⁵⁹ In these circumstances, Dartnell urged one final effort from his men:

'The Volunteer Brigade is placed at Dundee not only to guard the lines of communication, and prevent if possible any raiding force of Boers from cutting our railway-line, as they have done in the Orange River Colony, but they are also protecting the colony, which is the first duty of volunteers: and, until the Boers have been completely cleared out of the Vryheid-Utrecht district, as well as along the Berg to the west, it is of the utmost importance that there should be a strong mobile force at Dundee to check raiding and inroads by any small parties of Boers from either side, and there is no force so well suited for this work as the Volunteers...both on account of their mobility, and of their knowledge of the country, and the Dutch and native languages'.⁶⁰

Instead of a relaxation of service conditions, therefore, leave was curtailed to a maximum of 3 per cent of any one regiment at any one time, and Dartnell requested all ranks to 'refrain from grumbling', suggesting that it was a signal honour that Buller was entrusting the defence of the Dundee district to them.⁶¹

The Dundee sojourn endured for several months, with the Carbineers occupying several outposts in the vicinity of the town.⁶² In one sense this was for the Volunteers a frustrating period of pre-demobilization inertia, or 'vegetating', as Dacre Shaw put it. The limited military operations, suggested by the absence of any mention of the Volunteers in an operations report for the Newcastle region on 21 and 22 August 1900, and despite the upsurge in Boer activity, fed the

⁵⁸ EKG Sixsmith, 'Kitchener and the Guerrillas in the Boer War', Army Quarterly, 104/2, January 1974, pp203-6.

⁵⁹ Sixsmith, 'Kitchener and the Guerrillas', p207.

⁶⁰ PAR, MJPW 76, minute paper 5237/1900, Memorandum, Dartnell, Natal Volunteer Brigade, 2 July 1900; PAR, MJPW 76, minute paper 5237/1900, FE Foxon to Hime, 13 July 1900; PAR, NCP 7/4/7, Departmental Reports, 1900, pB19.

⁶¹ PAR, MJPW 76, minute paper 5237/1900, Memorandum, Dartnell, Natal Volunteer Brigade, 2 July 1900; Natal Witness, 20 August 1900.

⁶² Natal Mercury, 18 August 1900; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p166.

frustration and resentment in the Volunteer ranks during these months.⁶³ In a letter to Hime on 2 July, Dartnell reminded Hime of a central tenet of citizen-soldiers, that they be effectively utilised or released from service, and stated that he intended to write to Buller, a consummate professional soldier, in the same vein.⁶⁴ The diminishing Volunteer commitment is evident in the following realistic comment in the Natal Advertiser:

'The honour of wearing khaki is bound to lose some of its glamour after nine or ten months roughing. The fact that those who have come safely through the war so far are not over-anxious to run the risk of a stray bullet or a fatal bout of enteric fever at the fag end of it, is not much to be wondered at.'⁶⁵

'Life at the Dundee camp was unpleasant,' reported Dacre Shaw, with 'afternoons spent in humping bales of lucerne and sacks of crushed mealies, followed by nights of main guard, with no real excitement in compensation'.⁶⁶ On 24 June Hely-Hutchinson relieved the dull routine and minor crises like the above with a courtesy visit, and there was time for sport again.⁶⁷ Saturday 11 August 1900 stood out as being particularly memorable. A correspondent recalled that 'it was a terrible day in camp, as the wind was blowing a hurricane. Tents were scattered in all directions, and marquees torn and poles smashed.'⁶⁸

The part played by the Natal Volunteers from June 1900 until their demobilization in October, in

⁶³ NAR, Roberts Papers, volume 10, Operational Report, Newcastle, Wolfe-Murray, 29 October 1900; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p112. For an assessment of counter-guerrilla operations in the far eastern Transvaal and Swaziland regions, see Don Diespecker, 'Some British Countermeasures in Mozambique and the Border Areas during the Anglo-Boer War', Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research, 76/1998, pp261-271.

⁶⁴ PAR, MJPW 76, minute paper 5237/1900, Dartnell to Hime, 2 July 1900, draft letter, Hime to Buller, 4 July 1900; and see Natal Mercury, 11 September 1900.

⁶⁵ Natal Advertiser, 3 September 1900. It is not surprising to learn that in this climate of war-weariness there were large numbers of Volunteer discharges in Pietermaritzburg (Natal Advertiser, 3 September 1900).

⁶⁶ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p106; and see Natal Mercury, 18 August 1900.

⁶⁷ Times of Natal, 11 September 1900; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p166.

⁶⁸ Natal Mercury, 18 August 1900.

the widespread operations against the elusive Boers, was characterised by patrol work.⁶⁹ There were numerous minor patrol incidents from scattered bases such as De Waal's Farm. The troops at these bases monitored Boer incursions over the Mzinyathi (Buffalo) River, from the direction of Vryheid. One eight-man Carbineer patrol under Captain FE Foxon, operating on 28 July from De Jager's Drift, was confronted by 30 burghers. The Dundee correspondent of the Natal Witness reported the clash in dashing style:

'The fact is, the Carbineers ought not to have attempted a fight at all, seeing the strength of the Boers, and the distance they were from their outpost; but the desire to have a 'look-in' was too strong for both officer (Captain Foxon) and men, so they dismounted and gave the enemy a taste of Colonial mettle.'⁷⁰

In fact, according to a participant, Foxon erred by ordering his men to dismount prematurely.⁷¹ Foxon himself and a trooper were wounded, and three men taken prisoner.⁷² Little wonder that the Natal Advertiser carried mixed reports on the incident, commenting that it 'was an affair of conspicuous bravery on the part of our men', while also dubbing it 'The Carbineer Mishap'.⁷³

During July, 24 Carbineers under Lieutenant William Tanner, a future general, were detached to Fort Travers overlooking Dannhauser Station to perform scouting and patrol-work for British regular troops.⁷⁴ The routine patrols during this 'side-show' were almost therapeutic in the sense of the mild demands placed on those Volunteers involved.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Sixsmith, 'Kitchener and the Guerrillas', p203; and see O'Brien, 'Mounted Infantry in the Boer War', pp20-22.

⁷⁰ Natal Witness, 2 August 1900.

⁷¹ Times of Natal, 14 August 1900; and see Natal Mercury, 31 July 1900.

⁷² Bizley diary, 28 July 1900; Natal Witness, 30 July 1900; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, pp166-7.

⁷³ Natal Advertiser, 2 August 1900.

⁷⁴ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p106.

⁷⁵ For evidence of this period of uneventful patrol work see Siege Museum, Ladysmith, David Sparks diary, entries for 22 August to 2 September 1900.

The Natal Volunteers and the Initial British Measures for the Pacification of Northern Natal

As the formal military campaign against the Boers in Natal drew to a close in the wintry heights of Botha's Pass and Lang's Nek, Buller's thoughts turned ominously to the Natal Afrikaner, and seemed to presage a 'sow the wind, reap the whirlwind' policy in northern Natal:

'Now that Natal is clear of the enemy [he wrote from Lang's Nek on 15 June], I desire to call attention to the disgraceful way in which private property has been treated in the part of the colony occupied by them. Wilful and needless damage is visible everywhere, and houses, when not completely wrecked, have been desecrated with filthy ingenuity.'⁷⁶

One important effect of the Anglo-Boer War in Natal was to pit English and Afrikaner colonist against each other. This has already been considered in the context of the Boer incursion into the Natal midlands in October-December 1899, but the British-Natal colonial forces had now entered the home territory of the Afrikaner settlers of the Colony. How would the Volunteers respond to the British measures for the pacification of this region?

The refusal of the Boers to surrender after their defeat in the formal phase of the war that had ended with the British occupation of Pretoria in June 1900, caused frustration that extended to the highest level of the army command.⁷⁷ The new phase of the war saw a possible dichotomy between the concepts of limited and absolute warfare as examined by Clausewitz. The British government, for example, sought a definite military victory to end Boer political independence, while the commandos sought favourable terms for peace.⁷⁸ Rather than defending towns or territory, the Boer leaders were relying more than ever on their conviction that if they fought on long enough they could secure a favourable peace along the lines of that granted them by the Gladstone

⁷⁶ Journal of Principal Events Connected with South Africa, Part IV, p81, 15 June 1900; and see NAM, 8107/18, Gutland diary, pp67-8, 13 June 1900.

⁷⁷ Surridge, 'Lord Kitchener and the South African War', p19; Steele, 'Salisbury and the Soldiers', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, pp15-16.

⁷⁸ Howard, Clausewitz, p47.

administration in 1881.⁷⁹

The mobile partisan tactics that typified this Boer resistance between the winter of 1900 and the conclusion of hostilities in May 1902 eroded the morale of British troops,⁸⁰ and placed additional demands on intelligence gathering. Suddenly there was no 'distinguishable trend' to Boer activity to assist the interpretation of intelligence and the assessment and prediction of enemy activities.⁸¹ Ominously for Boer civilians, farms were considered by the British to be important sources of intelligence for the commandos.⁸²

There was also an important distinction between the response to civil emergency in the metropole and in the colonies, where there was little standing between the political authority and the populace except soldiers and military options.⁸³ In Natal the vagueness of the principle of martial law hampered its application by the military, and soured the relationship between civil and military authorities.⁸⁴ Random retribution by Natal forces for prior Boer misdeeds were implicitly proscribed by a confidential circular on the application of martial law, issued over Kitchener's signature in January 1900. This circular restricted the application of military measures to those directly resisting British authority or assisting the Boers.⁸⁵ The 'civil rights of peaceful inhabitants

⁷⁹ Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, IV, pp214-5.

⁸⁰ Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, I, p73; Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, IV, pp214-5.

⁸¹ Fergusson, British Military Intelligence, pp157-8.

⁸² PRO, 30/57/22, Kitchener Papers, Y9, Kitchener to Broderick, 20 December 1900; and see Pakenham, The Scramble for Africa, p577. The American Civil War experience also suggested that the marking of enemy resources for destruction was not an historical aberration (Dwyer, 'Raiding Strategy', p277).

⁸³ Charles Townshend, 'Martial Law: Legal and Administrative Problems of Civil Emergency in Britain and the Empire, 1800-1940', The Historical Journal, 25/1, 1982, p168.

⁸⁴ Townshend, 'Martial Law', pp175-7, 191 and 193.

⁸⁵ PAR, ZA 33, Confidential Notice, 'Martial law', Kitchener, 30 January 1900; PAR, ZA 33, CR 234/1900, Circular Memorandum No.7, Kitchener, 3 February 1900; and see Townshend, 'Martial Law', pp178-9.

and their freedom to pursue their ordinary avocations' were to be respected.⁸⁶

This, then, was the strategic military context that prompted the incarceration of Boer civilians, the scorched-earth policy and the blockhouse system.⁸⁷ It is not the intention here to debate the overall military merits of the pacification policy, but it should be mentioned that there was considerable doubt over its viability.⁸⁸

The issue that has an immediate bearing on the Volunteers and the enmity between English and Afrikaner colonists was that of the moral justification and social implications of the policy, especially in the light of the assertion by Powell that the Volunteers welcomed the opportunity to exact revenge, while the British troops were revolted by the practice.⁸⁹ Keegan, however,

⁸⁶ PAR, ZA 33, Confidential Notice, 'Martial Law', Kitchener, 30 January 1900; Smurthwaite, *The Boer War 1899-1902*, p145; and see PRO, WO 32/8149, 079/9141 for details of the relatively modest impositions of martial law in the Colony during 1902; as well as PRO, 30/57/22, Kitchener Papers, Y38, Kitchener to Broderick, 29 March 1901; PRO, 30/40/19, Ardagh Papers, Memorandum, Ardagh, c December 1900; and PRO, 30/40/19, 079/5746, Foreign Office Memorandum, Ardagh, 18 July 1901; PRO, 30/40/19, Ardagh Papers, 079/5746, Memorandum, Ardagh, 14 April 1901; Townshend, 'Martial Law', pp176-8 and 185.

⁸⁷ Scholtz, 'Die Betrekkings tussen die Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek en die Oranje Vrystaat', chapter 8; Fergusson, *British Military Intelligence*, pp160-1. For a concise summary of the principles of campaigning against guerrillas aided and abetted by a sympathetic population, see Strachan, *European Armies and the Conduct of War*, p80.

⁸⁸ PRO, 30/57/22, Kitchener Papers, Y4, Broderick to Kitchener, 24 November 1900; PRO, WO 132/2, Buller Papers, semi-official correspondence, unidentified writer to Buller, 12 March 1901; Nasson, *The South African War 1899-1902*, p192; and see Helen Bradford, 'Gentleman and Boers: Afrikaner Nationalism, Gender and Colonial Warfare in the South African War', unpublished conference paper, UNISA, 1998, *passim*.

⁸⁹ Surridge, 'All you soldiers are what we call pro-Boers', pp590-1; Lynn, 'The Embattled Future of Academic Military History', p788; Anglesey, *A History of the British Cavalry*, IV, pp217-8; Powell, *Buller: A Scapegoat?*, p187. John MacKenzie comments that the popular image of the British soldier changed between 1800 and 1900 from one associated with the suppression of internal dissent to one of the heroic defender (John M MacKenzie, 'Popular Imperialism and the Military', in MacKenzie (ed), *Popular Imperialism and the Military*, p1). For a related study on the exercising of military violence against nominally civilian targets in wartime, see Mark Mazower, 'Military Violence and Nationalist Socialist Values: The Wehrmacht in Greece 1941-1944', *Past and Present*, 134/February 1992, pp129-158.

emphasises the British Army's ability to desensitize such operations through its famed adherence to procedure and professional detachment.⁹⁰ The Times of Natal of 15 June 1900 carried comment which, while referring specifically to the Boer vandalism of English settler farms, was a reminder of the general destruction wrought on both English and Afrikaner Natal settlers in the course of the war:

'The sight of so many desolate ruined homes was sad in the extreme, and endless suffering and pain has been caused, not so much by looting as by wanton and mischievous destruction.'⁹¹

However, the Natal press was also replete with coverage of retributive operations and the fines imposed on Natal Afrikaners for treason and armed collusion with the Boers.⁹² On 25 May 1900 the Natal Witness carried a story of the specific involvement of the Natal Carbineers in guerrilla 'war' police operations against their Natal Afrikaner fellow-colonists.⁹³ To be fair, the Natal press also emphasised the reported plight of 'loyal' Natal Afrikaners 'persecuted' by the Boers.⁹⁴ There is, nevertheless, evidence of a harsh tone to Natal sentiment concerning the Afrikaners. One Carbineer remarked: 'this country teems with rebels, and we have collared a lot. I only hope they get all they richly deserve.'⁹⁵ Ladysmith resident, GW Willis, was also unsympathetic:

⁹⁰ John Keegan, The Face of Battle, London, Penguin Books, 1978, p18, and see pp47-50.

⁹¹ Times of Natal, 25 May 1900. The matter of compensation to settlers for losses rested with the Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission, which in July 1901 submitted to the British government an estimate of the financial cost to Natal of the Boer destruction of farms (PRO, WO 32/8084, 079/6720, Maurice Evans, Chairman Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission, 3 June 1901, enclosure in Natal Government to Chamberlain, enclosure in Secretary of State for War to Under-Secretary of State for War, 27 July 1901).

⁹² KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Museum Service, Registrar of the Supreme Court, May 1956, Regina vs Bosman, 25 September and 15 October 1900; Natal Witness, 14 June 1900; McKenzie, Delayed Action, p195.

⁹³ Natal Witness, 25 May 1900.

⁹⁴ Natal Witness, 30 October 1900.

⁹⁵ Natal Advertiser, 23 May 1900.

'The invasion of Natal and parts of the Cape Colony and other districts of British territory by the Boers, and the wholesale looting and destruction of property they have everywhere perpetrated, deprives them of all sympathy and consideration when the day of reckoning up comes around.'⁹⁶

Natal colonial troops were reportedly angered by the increasingly prevalent Boer practice of stripping the dead, wounded and prisoners, although this was often a necessity as the scorched-earth policy cut the commandos off from supplies. Nicholson wrote in July 1901: 'These sort of things make any one feel terribly against any mercy for such creatures and I only wish some extreme measures were begun to be taken.'⁹⁷ Because of their colonial background Natal Volunteers encountered local pressures that probably did not affect British troops. Carbineer Dacre Shaw, for example, commented on the hostility of the womenfolk of the men on commando towards colonial troops, whom they considered 'should have fought with the enemy seeing that we were colonials'.⁹⁸ Through such contact the Natal Volunteers encountered the single most important cog in the Boer support structure - the domestic domain of the farm household.⁹⁹ The irony was that this domestic farm base was equally important to the Volunteers themselves.

On the political front in Natal there were several developments that contributed to tensions facing the Volunteers in the field. On 26 March 1900, while the Boers were still on Natal soil, a public meeting in Pietermaritzburg was reported in the Natal Witness under such headings as 'Root out the Republics' and 'Retribution for Rebels'.¹⁰⁰ To inflame matters further, in September 1900 GF Tatham of the Natal Carbineers forwarded to Hime copies of addresses of welcome to the Boers

⁹⁶ A Diary of the Siege, No.4, GW Willis to brother, William, 29 March 1900, p18.

⁹⁷ Nicholson letters, Nicholson to mother, 29 July 1901; and see Nicholson diary, 29 July 1901.

⁹⁸ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p110.

⁹⁹ Nasson, The South African War 1899-1902, pp62-3. For comment on 'gender boundaries' in war see Taithe and Thornton, 'Identifying War', in Taithe and Thornton, War, pp8-10.

¹⁰⁰ Natal Witness, 27 March 1900; Times of Natal, 27 March 1900.

from 'Natal rebels', dated 13 February 1900.¹⁰¹ For their part, when confronted with the disintegration of the formal Boer presence in northern Natal, many Dutch-speaking inhabitants claimed that they were commandeered to fight under the martial law of the Transvaal, and were offered no inducements in the form of pay or land.¹⁰²

In the Dundee district the embers of civil war were stoked when treason trials opened in the Masonic Hall in November 1900. One of the most curious cases was that of a Transvaal burgher who was apparently captured by the very squadron of the Natal Carbineers in which his brother was serving!¹⁰³

Natal settler interests were also represented in so-called 'vigilance committees', established in centres such as Newcastle, Dundee and Charlestown to promote Imperial-Natal colonial interests.¹⁰⁴ These committees actively sought compensation for losses incurred by colonists during the Boer invasion.¹⁰⁵ On 18 October 1900 a deputation from the Pietermaritzburg Vigilance Committee met with Hime. It sought clarity on such issues as the territorial expansion of Natal as compensation for the war, at the cost of the ex-Boer Republics.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ PAR, PM 19, minute paper 1949/1900, Tatham to Hime, 25 September 1900.

¹⁰² Times of Natal, 25 May 1900; Natal Witness, 5 September 1901. On 25 May 1900 the text of a Treason Trial bill was published in the press (Times of Natal, 24 May 1900).

¹⁰³ 'War in the Biggarsberg', pp25-6. The Archives of the Attorney-General (AGO) in the Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository, holds proceedings of treason trials from 1900 to 1902 (PAR, AGO 1/7/1 to 1/7/38).

¹⁰⁴ These political lobbying groups were a local manifestation of British-based organisations such as the Imperial South Africa Association (Thompson, 'Pressure groups, propaganda and the state', pp4-21). On 30 August 1900 JL Hulett, a prominent Natal settler and sugar-farming magnate, opened a South African Vigilance Conference in Cape Town (Natal Witness, 31 August 1900).

¹⁰⁵ PAR, PM 17, minute paper 4098/1900, James Hastie, (Newcastle, Dundee and Charlestown Vigilance Committee), May 1900; PM 19, minute paper 1514/1900, J Farquhar (President, Ladysmith Vigilance Committee) and James Anderson (Dundee Vigilance Committee), to Hime, 3 September 1900.

¹⁰⁶ PAR, PM 19, minute paper 8240/1900, 19 October 1899, Minutes of a deputation of
(continued...)

The continued tensions reflected in the phenomenon of vigilance committees in the Colony was contradicted by the conciliatory tone of a proclamation issued by Buller in May 1900, concerning the Afrikaners 'rebels':

'It has been brought to the notice of the GOC that there are a considerable number of Dutch inhabitants in Natal who have been induced to take up arms against HM troops, and who, having seen the error of their ways, are now anxious to do all in their power to regain their former position...

The GOC, therefore, notifies that he will receive all inhabitants of Natal, who now wish to leave the ranks of the enemy, and will lay before the civil authorities the cases of all those who surrender voluntarily, as deserving of more leniency than those who remain fighting'.¹⁰⁷

It is also evident from the conduct of the Natal Afrikaner colonists in this heated environment that they were not passive victims. This is apparent in the situation of the Klip River Afrikaner community in northern Natal, caught in the dilemma of active collaboration, and driven by a cocktail of blood-ties, nationalism, and sympathy for the Boer Republics.¹⁰⁸ On 18 June 1901 the Natal Afrikaner published an English translation of their grievances. This was one of them:

'We who remained loyal since the outbreak of war, and are still most heartily loyal, we who always contended that our Afrikaners may safely rely upon the sense of fair play of the better class of English Colonists as a guarantee for good treatment in the future, we are now compelled to admit that we were sadly mistaken in our belief'.¹⁰⁹

The Natal Afrikaner proposed a suspension of the Natal constitution, and a period of three to four years of direct (and, it was suggested, fair and impartial) rule from Whitehall. During this time it

¹⁰⁶(...continued)
the Pietermaritzburg Vigilance Committee to Hime on 18 October 1900.

¹⁰⁷ Times of Natal, 10 May 1900.

¹⁰⁸ Harris, 'The Reluctant Rebels', pp3,4,16 and 22-3; Guest, 'It was the Best of Times, it was the Worst of Times', pp36-7.

¹⁰⁹ Natal Afrikaner, 18 June 1901, quoted in PAR, CSO 1678, minute paper 5123/1901.

was hoped that 'the [white] races would become reconciled to each other'.¹¹⁰

From August to October 1900 the Volunteers (the Natal Carbineers and the Border Mounted Rifles) operated principally out of Dundee. There was no evidence yet of any participation in operations associated with the emerging scorched-earth strategy, but the generally peripheral nature of Volunteer active service throughout the war must be considered here. Flying columns did venture forth in the direction of De Waal's Drift and the Doornberg.¹¹¹ Picquets and patrols were also thrown out at night, with continued concern about Boer activity in the area.¹¹² On 16 September the Volunteers joined an advance on Vryheid, but were not involved in the occupation of the town on the 19th. On the 18th several Carbineer scouts engaged Boers in a skirmish at Scheeper's Nek.¹¹³ The clearing of the Vryheid district was perceived in Volunteer circles as further justification for the release of the force from active service.¹¹⁴

Conclusion

Once Buller's army reached the Natal border with the Transvaal in June 1900, the Colony and the Volunteers were once again convinced that demobilization was at hand. This optimism was premature, and continued Boer activity in northern Natal meant that the Volunteers who, according to Natal law, were not permitted to serve in the ranks of regiments such as the Natal Carbineers beyond the borders of Natal, were instead tasked with guarding the essential line of communication from a base at Dundee, from where outpost and patrol duty was also conducted.

¹¹⁰ Natal Afrikaner, 18 June 1901, quoted in PAR, CSO 1678, minute paper 5123/1901. During the war there also existed a 'conciliation movement' active in the Dutch community, but it was greeted with scepticism by the Colonial authorities (PAR, CO (microfilm), 1/1/1/205, [PRO 179/211], C Tatham to Principal Under-Secretary, 24 April 1900; Natal Witness, 24 April 1900).

¹¹¹ Nicholson diary, 17 and 24 August 1900.

¹¹² Nicholson diary, 27 August and 11 October 1900; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p167.

¹¹³ Natal Carbineers History Centre, 'Natal Carbineers, a summary of service in the Anglo-Boer War', anonymous, p5; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p168.

¹¹⁴ PAR, MJPW 76, minute paper 5237/1900, Telegram, Dartnell to Hime, 19 September 1900; Natal Mercury, 1 October 1900.

The resurrection of the issue of demobilization, briefly dormant during the British advance from Ladysmith, further sapped Natal support for the war. This time increased emphasis was placed on the financial strain placed on the Colony and the individual Volunteer, although this burden was, in fact, comparatively light. When demobilization had to be deferred, Hime and Dartnell had to smooth ruffled feathers among both the Volunteers and the British military authorities.

The Volunteer sojourn in the Dundee district also coincided with the conception of the British strategy for the pacification of northern Natal in response to Boer guerrilla operations. This pacification also re-opened another simmering conflict, that between the English settlers, represented in the field by the Volunteers, and the Natal Afrikaner, this time in the Natal Dutch home districts. In military terms there was no action more significant than a minor patrol skirmish, but a political, social and moral context emerged for more extensive operations from October 1900 to the end of the war in May 1902.

CHAPTER XI

THE DEMOBILIZATION OF THE NATAL VOLUNTEER REGIMENTS AND THE GENESIS OF THE VOLUNTEER COMPOSITE REGIMENT

Volunteer Demobilization becomes a Reality and the Volunteer Composite Regiment takes to the Stage

**'It is no reflection on the retiring Volunteers,
who had already been a year in the field, to
say that the VCR represents the cream of
Natal's fighting element.'**¹

From the beginning of July 1900, after a gestation period of several months, the role of the Natal Volunteers was gradually assumed by the (Natal) Volunteer Composite Regiment (VCR). On 20 September Hime renewed his appeal to the Governor, Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson, for demobilization.² During September Buller and Dartnell were instrumental in arrangements for a composite regiment of 300 mounted Natal Volunteers to assume the duties hitherto performed by the Volunteer Brigade.³ It was apparently not a new idea, and probably had its origins in the siege of Ladysmith.⁴

Buller wrote to Lord Roberts on 21 September to confirm the arrangements:

'In July I arranged with General Dartnell that he should embody 300 of his Volunteers who would remain till end of [the] war, and I practically promised the rest of them should be replaced by [the] end of September barring accidents. I think that the time has come

¹ Natal Witness, 28 June 1901.

² PAR, MJPW 76, minute paper 5237/1900, Hime to Governor, 20 September 1900, Dartnell to Hime, 2 July 1900.

³ PAR, NCP 8/2/1, Departmental Reports 1901, Captain PA Silburn, in Report Commandant of Volunteers, p7; Bizley diary, 23 September 1900; Nicholson diary, 23 September 1900; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', pp112-13; Natal Witness, 26 September 1900; Stirling, The Colonials in Africa, p43.

⁴ Watkins-Pitchford, Besieged in Ladysmith, p26.

when the Natal Volunteers ought to be disbanded and ~~that~~ you can safely allow Dartnell to do this on condition that out of them he provides 300 men to serve till [the] end of [the] war.⁵

This correspondence was followed on the 24th by an instruction from Buller that the Natal Volunteers be released from service, and this time it was not a 'hoax'.⁶ Roberts, in turn, confirmed the release of the Volunteers in a telegram to Hely-Hutchinson:

I have sanctioned the discharge from the 1st October of the Natal Volunteers, with the exception of 300 men whom General Dartnell undertook to retain till the end of the war. Please convey to the Prime Minister and Government of Natal my high appreciation of the conduct of the Volunteers, and of the spirit of the Colony in maintaining them so long.⁷

The 1 October 1900 can reliably be regarded as the 'birthday' of the Volunteer Composite Regiment.⁸ On 30 September Dartnell took his leave of those Volunteers who were to return home, and commended them for their patriotism and their service with British regulars and other colonial Volunteers, which had 'weld[ed] in the fire of sympathetic enthusiasm, the different peoples subject to Her Majesty, into one indivisible Empire'.⁹ The Commanding Officer of the Volunteer Composite Regiment, Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Winter Evans of the Natal Mounted Rifles, doubled as Commandant of Dundee, and was personally restricted to the town, leaving Major Duncan McKenzie of the Natal Carbineers in de facto command in the field.¹⁰ The Natal Carbineers contributed the largest unit numbers to the new regiment. The component regimental

⁵ NAR, A1643, Roberts Papers, volume 23, Buller to Roberts, 21 September 1900.

⁶ Natal Witness, 2 October 1900.

⁷ PAR, MJPW 78, minute paper 7894/1900, Special Order, Dartnell, Dundee, 30 September 1900; Natal Witness, 24 September 1900.

⁸ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Natal Carbineers Service Register; PAR, NDR 2/6, Muster Roll VCR, 1 April 1902; and see PAR, MJPW 89, minute paper L&W 6330/1901, enclosure V4505/1901, Evans to Commandant of Volunteers, 4 December 1901; Natal Witness, 28 June 1901.

⁹ PAR, MJPW 78, minute paper 7894/1900, Special Order, Dartnell, Dundee, 30 September 1900.

¹⁰ McKenzie, Delayed Action, p196.

roll of the Volunteer Composite Regiment comprised the Natal Carbineers, the Natal Mounted Rifles, the Umvoti Mounted Rifles, the Border Mounted Rifles, the Natal Field Artillery, the Natal Royal Rifles, the Durban Light Infantry, a Hotchkiss Gun Detachment, and the Volunteer Medical Corps.¹¹

One of the larger minority components of the Volunteer Composite Regiment was made up of infantrymen from the Durban Light Infantry, who had long been denied effective participation in operations, and were at last successful in their desire to become mounted infantrymen.¹² These men, and those from the Natal Royal Rifles, also an infantry regiment, had to be hastily mounted.¹³ The Volunteer Composite Regiment uniform was the universal khaki with turned-up brim smasher hat. The adopted badge consisted of a scroll with the motto 'Ad Finem', around the initials of the regiment (NVCR), and on their shoulder-straps members wore unit initials above those of their parent units such as the Natal Carbineers or the Natal Mounted Rifles.¹⁴

The position of Natal civil servants was also raised again at this point. There was an apparent understanding that no civil servants would be permitted to join the Volunteer Composite Regiment, and in a communication to the Minister of Lands and Works on 11 October 1900, the Colonial Secretary, Charles Smythe, queried the enrolment of two men on the grounds of their positions in government service.¹⁵ The episode represented another effort by individual civil

¹¹ Stirling, The Colonials in Africa, p43; and see PAR, CSO 1660, minute paper 8171/1900, V2025/1900, passim; PAR, NDR 2/6, Muster Roll VCR, 1 April 1902.

¹² Stirling, The Colonials in Africa, p45; and see chapter 2; McKenzie, Delayed Action, p196.

¹³ Nicholson diary, 27 September 1900.

¹⁴ Hurst, Short History of the Volunteer Regiments of Natal and East Griqualand, p122. Despite its technical designation as the Natal Volunteer-Composite Regiment (NCVR), the new regiment was commonly known, even in Natal official correspondence, as the Volunteer Composite Regiment or simply the Composite Regiment (see, for example, PAR, CSO 1660, minute paper 8171/1900, Nominal Roll of the Composite Regiment). It is likely that the prefix 'Natal' was used to avoid confusion with other composite regiments that had either previously existed in the theatre or continued to do so.

¹⁵ According to the Commandant of Volunteers, Brigadier-General Dartnell, the two men,
(continued...)

servants and their employer, the Natal government, to secure minimum commitment together with the maximum possible financial compensation.¹⁶ The implied materialism belies the projection by the Colony of a spirit among the settler population of selfless dedication to the war effort.

By late 1900 the Boers were generally 'on the run', evading British sweeps and garrisoned towns, but still striking at targets of opportunity. For the British, infantry were of less use than ever before.¹⁷ There was, however, a dearth of skilled and experienced mounted infantry for this task. On top of this the regular cavalry, by dint of their training and equipment, had been rendered 'incapable of competing tactically with the Boers'.¹⁸

Yet, ironically, this was exactly when men to fit the bill, such as the mounted Natal Volunteer regiments, were being demobilized, partially as a consequence of public and political pressure in the Colony. The formation of the Volunteer Composite Regiment at least ensured some continuity of Natal commitment, albeit reduced, and in the process minimised political friction, and enabled the British military authorities in northern Natal to pursue operations reasonably efficiently.

The Natal Volunteers Come Home

'Maritzburg this morning turned out a distinctly

¹⁵(...continued)

EW Barter and B Nicholson of the Natal Carbineers, were regarded as essential personnel, and could not be released unless they were replaced by other Volunteers (PAR, CSO 1660, minute paper 8171/1900, Colonial Secretary to Minister of Lands and Works, 11 October 1900, Commandant of Volunteers to Minister of Lands and Works, 23 October 1900).

¹⁶ The Prime Minister, Hime, in dismissing preferential treatment for civil servants, repeated the opinion of Colonel JG Dartnell, the Commandant of Volunteers, that it was 'hardly fair of the Government to insist on the return of the whole of their employees, when private employers were expected to keep open situations for their employees' (PAR, CSO 1660, minute paper 8171/1900, Hime to Colonial Secretary, 12 October, and see Dartnell to Minister of Lands and Works, 23 October 1900).

¹⁷ Amery (ed), The Times History, V, p69.

¹⁸ Amery (ed), The Times History, V, p69.

composite mass of humanity, mostly feminine'.¹⁹

On 8 October Government Notice No.497 of 1900 effectively lowered the curtain on a memorable year of eventful campaigning for the Natal Volunteers.²⁰

The Natal colonial press welcomed the news: 'The return of the Natal Volunteers marks an important epoch in the history of the Colony...dispensing with the services of this force is a clear proof that the war as a war is over'.²¹ On 29 September 1900 a relieved, if hyperbolic, editor of the Natal Advertiser was in no doubt that the Volunteers had borne a heroic burden: 'Probably in no other country in the world has a Volunteer force been so long continuously on active service'.²² On 8 October the same newspaper trumpeted: 'Since then [mobilization] their life in the field has been fraught with little else but danger and hardship'.²³ Such a statement was, as the evidence of Volunteer service has demonstrated, far from accurate, and is a reminder of the often exaggerated support for the Volunteers from the Natal press. Even the initially resented support duty on the lines of communications in support of the British Army was now appreciated in a more positive spirit.²⁴

The return to Pietermaritzburg of the Natal Carbineers, the Natal Royal Rifles, and elements of the Border Mounted Rifles and the Umvoti Mounted Rifles, scheduled for 3 October, was postponed by a week, following a Boer attack on a convoy at De Jager's Drift at the end of

¹⁹ Times of Natal, 9 October 1900.

²⁰ PAR, MJPW 88, minute paper L&W 5049/1901, 18 September 1901, enclosure, Government Notice 497/1900, 8 October 1900; and see CSO 1659, minute paper 7743/1900, Hely-Hutchinson to Minister of Lands and Works, 9 October 1900.

²¹ Natal Witness, 13 October 1900.

²² Natal Advertiser, 29 September 1900.

²³ Natal Advertiser, 9 October 1900.

²⁴ Natal Witness, 13 October 1900.

September.²⁵ This incident prompted the temporary recall of those Volunteers released from service shortly before, with several men even pulled off the train that was taking them home. A telegram from Dartnell to the Prime Minister, Hime, on 1 October, confirms the suspension of the Volunteer entraining.²⁶ The danger appears to have quickly abated.²⁷ This time the press was subdued in its reaction, as if chastened by the outbursts on the same issue in June, when the initial arrangements for demobilization were also put on hold.²⁸

The Natal press reported that on 8 October Pietermaritzburg gave an enthusiastic welcome to the Durban and district regiments of the Natal Volunteer force (the Durban Light Infantry, the Natal Mounted Rifles, and the Natal Field Artillery), followed on 9 October by the Pietermaritzburg and midlands regiments (the Natal Carbineers, the Border Mounted Rifles, the Natal Royal Rifles, and the Umvoti Mounted Rifles).²⁹

Pietermaritzburg Station was brightly decorated with red, white and blue bunting and giant portraits of Queen Victoria, Roberts, Buller and Baden-Powell hung from the verandah.³⁰ The horses of the Pietermaritzburg and midlands Volunteer contingent were detrained from the coal-

²⁵ Natal Mercury, 2 October 1900; Natal Advertiser, 1 and 4 October 1900; and see Himeville Museum, Gordon letters, Gordon to father, 3 October 1900.

²⁶ PAR, CSO 2609, transcript telegrams, Dartnell to Hime, 1 October 1900; NAR, Roberts Papers, volume 58, telegram, GOC Line of Communication to Roberts, 2 October 1900; Nicholson diary, 30 September and 7 October 1900; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', pp113-117.

²⁷ NAR, Roberts Papers, volume 58, telegram, GOC Line of Communication to Chief-of-Staff, Pretoria, 3 October 1900.

²⁸ Natal Mercury, 3 October 1900.

²⁹ Natal Witness, 8 and 9 October 1900; Natal Advertiser, 8 and 9 October 1900; and see the Natal Mercury, 9 October 1900, for the 'regular furore of pleasurable excitement' at Estcourt too. A similar welcome had been given to the returning Volunteers of July 1879 (Laband and Knight, The War Correspondents: The Anglo-Zulu War, p153).

³⁰ Times of Natal, 8 October 1900; Natal Witness, 10 October 1900.

trucks, already saddled, to parade through the streets of the city on the morning of the 9th.³¹

The parade, escorted by the Town Band, the (Maritzburg) College Band and the Model School Band, concluded with speeches by the Commanding Officer of the Carbineers, Colonel Greene, and the Mayor of Pietermaritzburg, Major GJ Macfarlane, also of the Carbineers.³² Macfarlane's glowing address on behalf of the city was almost a parody of the more ordinary reality (the gripes and groans) of the Volunteer effort to that date:

'We have watched with feelings of pride your every movement since the day you went forth from among us to repel the invader - your whole career has been one unbroken record of bravery and good behaviour. You have faced danger unflinchingly; you have borne hardship and sickness, without murmur or complaint.

I hope and trust it will have the effect of binding you together more closely than ever, and that now the whole young manhood of this fair colony will esteem it a privilege and an honour to join the ranks of Natal's Volunteer forces.³³

Bear in mind, though, the similar spirit evident in the message of congratulation from the Town Clerk of Pietermaritzburg following the relief of Ladysmith. In mitigation of the high-flown sentiment on this particular occasion was the point that Macfarlane was himself a serving Volunteer.³⁴

³¹ PAR, MJPW 78, minute paper 7894/1900, Special Order, Dartnell, Dundee, 30 September 1900; Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p118; Times of Natal, 1 and 9 October 1900; Natal Witness, 9 and 10 October 1900; Natal Mercury, 11 October 1900; Natal Volunteer Record, p15; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p168.

³² Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p118; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p168.

³³ Times of Natal, 9 October 1900.

³⁴ Macfarlane's dual roles of soldier and first citizen attracted the admiration of many, and in August 1900 he was elected to a further term of office as Mayor of Pietermaritzburg. In March 1900, still ill from the privations of the siege of Ladysmith, he had received an appreciative deputation from the Pietermaritzburg Corporation, and in August 1901 he was made a CMG (PAR, NCP, 6/1/1/54, Natal Government Gazette, LIII, No.3195, 7 August 1901; Natal Advertiser, 31 March 1900; Natal Mercury, 8 August 1901; Natal Witness, 24 March 1903).

However, despite the evidence of an enthusiastic welcome, and the suitably impressive march to the Market Square, opinion was, in fact, divided on the reception accorded to the Volunteers.³⁵ Despite the buntings and speeches, the Natal Mercury was scathing in its criticism of the reception in the colonial capital:

'The anticipated excitement, pleasure, and wild unrestrained joy, were altogether missing from today's celebrations; and the spectacle of a community trying to work up a tired enthusiasm was about as weird an exhibition as might be expected on the arrival of a lot of foreign soldiers...

In spite of the assumed enthusiasm preceding their return, contrary to the spirit evidenced by word of mouth and song, the Volunteers are received with a tub of coffee, some bread and bully-beef sandwiches, in an atmosphere of depressing apathy, savouring more of funereal ceremony than that of welcome.³⁶

The newspaper does not venture a direct explanation for its opinion, but the most apparent reason for a dampened reception must lie in the several episodes of agitation for the return home of the Volunteers. These stretched back to April of 1900, and by October the war, in the eyes of most colonists, must have appeared remote. The lack of enthusiasm could also be related to the very low-key nature of Volunteer service since the siege of Ladysmith, with no major battles such as that at Colenso.

The Natal Mercury did endeavour to put its 'print where its mouth was' by issuing a Volunteer souvenir, intended as a 'well done and welcome'.³⁷ The newspaper also published nominal rolls of officers and other ranks, casualty lists, and summaries of service for the Natal regiments.³⁸ It was the Natal Mercury, too, that published the Natal Volunteer Record, which on its opening page did not allow the actual situation to dampen its praise of the Volunteer effort on the return of the force to Pietermaritzburg and Durban. It stated that on 8 October 'their welcome back by kinsfolk and friends was as hearty and enthusiastic as are the thanks of the community for the

³⁵ Natal Advertiser, 10 and 11 October 1900.

³⁶ Natal Mercury, 10 October 1900.

³⁷ Natal Mercury, 8 October 1900.

³⁸ Natal Mercury, 20 and 27 October 1900.

splendid service they have given to the Colony and the Empire'.³⁹

The officers and men of the Carbineers and the Natal Royal Rifles were treated to lavish luncheons in the Market Hall, Pietermaritzburg, by the Mayor and corporation of the city.⁴⁰ On Sunday 14 October the Dean of Pietermaritzburg welcomed the Volunteers home in a sermon steeped in the fortitude of the colonial warriors protected by God from harm.⁴¹ A successful dance, hosted by ladies of the city and attended by over 200 people, was also held in the Forester's Hall on the 16th.⁴² According to the Natal Volunteer Record, the Durban regiments of the Natal Volunteer force were also accorded an auspicious welcome, complete with lavish speeches, receptions and thanksgiving services.⁴³

Receptions were also held in most Natal midlands towns and villages. No.3 Squadron of the Carbineers, for example, was treated to a homecoming dinner at Nottingham Road on 19 October, where they were addressed by the Colonial Secretary, CJ Smythe.⁴⁴ En route to Richmond on 9 October the Border Mounted Rifles and the Richmond-district Carbineers were

³⁹ Natal Volunteer Record, p1.

⁴⁰ Times of Natal, 1 October 1900; Natal Witness, 16 and 17 October 1900.

⁴¹ Natal Witness, 15 October 1900; Times of Natal, 15 October 1900.

⁴² Times of Natal, 11 and 18 October 1900; Natal Witness, 17 October 1900. A notable Carbineer absentee on this occasion, for an unspecified reason, was Colonel Greene himself, and this social lapse did not go unnoticed. The Natal Advertiser declared that the 'action of the Colonel was scarcely one of grace or worthy of a man in his position' (Natal Advertiser, 19 October 1900). Greene compounded his error when on Saturday 3 November he opted to pass up the reception for the Ladysmith Carbineers in favour of Lord Roberts's visit to Pietermaritzburg (Natal Advertiser, 6 November 1900). While there is no concrete evidence that he intended to snub his regiment or the Volunteers, it is reasonable to speculate that, if Greene considered his attendance at the low-key regional receptions for the Carbineers to be less important than a more high profile event such as a visit by Roberts, this cast doubt on the esteem in which the Volunteer service was regarded by a senior officer in the force.

⁴³ Natal Volunteer Record, pp3-13.

⁴⁴ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Peter Francis Papers, Natal Carbineers Chronicle, p7; Natal Witness, 27 October 1900; Natal Volunteer Record, pp19-23. A similar reception was accorded the Durban Volunteers (Goetzsche, Rough But Ready: An Official History of the Natal Mounted Rifles, p85).

welcomed at Nel's Rust (now Baynesfield Estate) by one of the colony's premier agriculturalists, Joseph Baynes MLA.⁴⁵ At Richmond itself on the same day they appear to have been welcomed more enthusiastically than had been the case in Pietermaritzburg, undoubtedly because this was their home:

'There was a large gathering of villagers at the station, who gave the men ~~most~~ hearty cheers as the trains steamed in. The ladies had a magnificent spread for the Volunteers, which was done full justice to and highly appreciated by the men.'⁴⁶

On 13 November it was the turn of this 'usually quiet little town' to be *en fête*, when a thanksgiving service, luncheon and dance was held in the Agricultural Hall. This was one of the districts to have sustained considerable losses by colonial standards: Captain E Lucas, Lieutenant A Wylde-Browne, Sergeant FG Mapstone, and Trooper WJ Harcourt, all of the Carbineers. Hime was once again among the guests.⁴⁷ On 23 October the Carbineers of the Upper Tugela region were welcomed at the home of local farmer, Mr Fred Zunckel,⁴⁸ while on 3 November 1900 the Ladysmith town-troop of the Carbineers was hosted to a civic home-coming dinner in the shell-battered Town Hall, Ladysmith, hosted by the Mayor, Joseph Farquhar JP, and attended by Sir Albert Hime.⁴⁹ However, in the country districts distance, the weather, and farming, interfered with the best-laid plans for social functions: 'Only 22 of the local troop of Carbineers...turned out [in Ladysmith], but this was doubtless due to the distance at which some of them reside, and the state of the weather being peculiarly favourable to ploughing'.⁵⁰ Possibly the most elaborate homecoming welcome for the Natal Carbineers was reserved for the Weenen County men at

⁴⁵ Natal Mercury, 12 October 1900; Natal Volunteer Record, p17.

⁴⁶ Natal Mercury, 12 October 1900.

⁴⁷ Times of Natal, 14 November 1900; Natal Witness, 14 November 1900; Natal Mercury, 15 November 1900.

⁴⁸ Times of Natal, 23 October 1900; Natal Witness, 29 October 1900.

⁴⁹ Christison Rare Books, Catalogue 16, number 218, 1998; Times of Natal, 5 November 1900; Natal Mercury, 5 November 1900.

⁵⁰ Times of Natal, 5 and 6 November 1900. Volunteers were also fêted at the Camperdown Hotel on 1 November, and at the Railway Hotel in Howick on the 5th.

Estcourt on 10 November. Day-long celebrations included sports, horse-racing and a banquet, at which the principal guest was Major Duncan McKenzie.⁵¹ McKenzie commented that although the various parts of the Empire had sent quotas of Volunteers, he could 'congratulate Weenen County on having put forth a body of men second to none in the field'.⁵²

By the close of 1900 a reduced Natal Volunteer force was quiescent. Special Service Volunteers had also been released, and there was no general encampment scheduled for 1901.⁵³ It had been a long and demanding campaign, on man, horse and matériel. The Natal Carbineers, for example, was faced with the task of refitting. Limited refitting had taken place at Highlands in March-April 1900. In June 1901 Colonel Greene, wearing his political hat as an MLA in the Legislative Assembly, requested of the government whether it intended to 'replace to the Volunteer Forces the uniform and saddlery worn out and destroyed during the recent campaign?' Dartnell, the Commandant of Volunteers, replied that a commission was to be appointed to comply with this request.⁵⁴

Some of the military support infrastructure in the colonial capital was also dispensed with at this point. In September 1900, for example, it was proposed that the military hospital in the Legislative Assembly Building be closed after the demobilization of the Volunteers on 1 October.⁵⁵ A number of wounded Volunteers had passed through the hospital.⁵⁶ By the end of November 1900 only a scratch force remained on the Natal Volunteer payroll.⁵⁷

⁵¹ Natal Witness, 7 November 1900; Natal Mercury, 12 November 1900.

⁵² Times of Natal, 12 October 1900.

⁵³ PAR, NCP 7/4/7, Departmental Reports 1900, Commandant of Volunteers, pF8; Natal Witness, 29 March 1901.

⁵⁴ PAR, MJPW 85, minute paper L&W 3056/1901, Dartnell to Minister of Lands and Works, 9 June 1901, 7-10 June 1901.

⁵⁵ PAR, PM 19, minute paper 1590/1900, 22 September 1900, Closure of Military Hospital.

⁵⁶ Natal Witness, 1 February 1900; Bizley, 'Maritzburg during the Siege of Natal', p86.

⁵⁷ PAR, MJPW 79, minute paper V2803/1900, Lieutenant Owen, Paymaster Volunteers, to
(continued...)

Another indication of a return to normality and routine for the Natal Carbineers was the publication in December 1900 of the first monthly regimental orders since the outbreak of war.⁵⁸ The Volunteer country district troop structure also appears to have returned to normal. In orders for March 1901, for example, a tour of inspection of Pietermaritzburg and the midlands by the District Adjutant of the Volunteer force was announced.⁵⁹ On the domestic front the Natal Advertiser suggested, presumably tongue-in-cheek, that 'there are signs that the return of the Volunteers is about to produce a boom in the marriage market, and that dressmakers, confectioners and parsons are soon to have a busy time'.⁶⁰ Throughout the years of the Anglo-Boer War a cure-all tonic (Dr Williams' Pink Pills) had been vigorously marketed in colonial newspaper, and now, almost anticipating some form of post-traumatic stress, it was offered for 'the after-effects of war now being felt in many homes, sickness prevails, and men and women alike are suffering from the evil consequences of exposure, fever, anxiety, and nervous breakdown'.⁶¹

Some Volunteers returned to the war beyond the ranks of the Volunteer Composite Regiment. One was Major FS Tatham MLA, of the Carbineers, who joined General Elliot's intelligence staff in the Free State, by then known as the Orange River Colony.⁶²

It was also an opportunity for colonial businesses to exhibit their patriotism, and relieve the returning Volunteers of their hard-earned pay. Photographs were always a popular campaigning memento, and as early as 13 August 1900 J Wallace Bradley, a studio in Aliwal Street, Durban,

⁵⁷(...continued)

Commandant of Volunteers, 30 November 1900, and Dartnell to Minister of Lands and Works, 1 December 1900.

⁵⁸ Natal Witness, 12 December 1900.

⁵⁹ Natal Witness, 8 March 1901.

⁶⁰ Natal Advertiser, 20 October 1900.

⁶¹ Natal Advertiser, 17 November 1900.

⁶² Natal Witness, 26 March 1901; Times of Natal, 1 April 1901.

was advertising special offers for 'Volunteers returning from the war'.⁶³ For the Volunteer cyclist, Shimwell Bros of Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Ladysmith offered a discount of £2 on every cycle purchased within nine months of return from the war.⁶⁴

By December 1900 there was mounting discontent over the continued application of censorship and martial law in the Colony. It was felt that, in both these matters, Natal had been unfairly treated compared to the Cape Colony, where the westernmost regions, including Cape Town, had not been subject to restrictive measures at all.⁶⁵ Hely-Hutchinson was sympathetic on the issue of censorship, as Natal was no longer a theatre of war, but martial law was still considered necessary in the northern districts on account of continued Boer operations, and the presence of so-called Natal Afrikaner rebels. Further south, in Durban and Pietermaritzburg, martial law was regarded as an essential contingency in the control of Boer refugees, prisoners, and 'undesirable arrivals'.⁶⁶ The caution appears to have been justified by the reported presence of a Boer raiding party in the Acton Homes-Dewdrop area of the Upper Tugela in July 1901.⁶⁷

A potentially volatile issue that remained unresolved for some time was that of war gratuities due to members of the Volunteer force and their dependents. There is evidence of speculation and discontent concerning rewards for military service in the war, which calls into question the motives of patriotism and Imperial solidarity among Volunteers. In May 1900 Trooper CEJ Miller of the Carbineers, who had been wounded in the End Hill action on 3 November 1899, losing the

⁶³ Natal Mercury, 13 August 1900. In October 'The Bower' studio in Smith Street, Durban, was also offering 'very special terms' to Volunteers (Natal Mercury, 9 October 1900).

⁶⁴ Natal Mercury, 13 October 1900.

⁶⁵ PAR, PM 20, minute paper 309/1901, 3 December 1900, Hime to Governor.

⁶⁶ PAR, PM 20, minute paper 309/1901, Hime to Hely-Hutchinson, 3 December 1900, and Hely-Hutchinson to Roberts, 3 December 1900.

⁶⁷ PAR, PM 22, minute paper 5757/1901, telegrams, 'Magte', Upper Tugela, to Hime, 5 July 1901, and Inspector Dorehill, Natal Police, to Chief Commissioner, Natal Police, 5 July 1901.

use of a hand, applied for the grant due to a disabled Volunteer veteran.⁶⁸ In August 1900 a Mr PH Lefebvre requested employment in the civil service for his son, 'late of the Natal Carbineers', and invalided out of the regiment on account of dysentery. He was given a temporary position in the Pietermaritzburg post-office.⁶⁹ Lefebvre was probably taking advantage of the funds of the Natal Volunteer and War Relief Fund which in August called for applications for assistance. The deadline for applications was 31 August 1900.⁷⁰

The payment of these gratuities had been authorised on 8 December 1900, in terms of a Special Army Order.⁷¹ However, the statement of accounts for the Natal Volunteer and War Relief Fund for the period 1 October 1900 to 30 March 1901 reveals that only one Carbineer wife and child received £3 10s from the Volunteer Relief and Sufferers Fund, while £152 was received from the General Widows and Orphans Fund, and £26 from Lloyd's Natal Patriotic Fund.⁷² However, by mid- to late-1901 there was considerable debate in the Natal press as to whether these allowances were ever actually paid.⁷³

In late December 1900, for example, one John Davidson, a sergeant in the Imperial Light Infantry, approached the Natal Colonial Lands Commission about a supposed offer of small farms to

⁶⁸ PAR, CSO 1651, minute paper 4698/1900, Grants to disabled Volunteers and Irregulars, correspondence between Adjutant, Natal Carbineers, Lieutenant Owen, Paymaster Volunteers, Agent-General, London, and Colonial Secretary, 25 May to 20 July 1900; and see minute paper 5545/1900, 17 July 1900. It is difficult to ascertain from the official correspondence on this matter whether Miller received compensation, apart from back-pay (£50) for the period November 1899 to May 1900, in the way of a disability grant. He was sent to England at Government expense for a proposed operation on the injured limb, but it was not considered necessary.

⁶⁹ PAR, CSO 1657, minute paper 7037/1900, 10 September 1900, enclosure, PH Lefebvre to Colonial Secretary, 27 August 1900.

⁷⁰ Times of Natal, 7 August 1900.

⁷¹ PAR, NDR 1/8, Natal Royal Regiment, Letterbook, 1897-1904, p286.

⁷² Times of Natal, 17 May 1901.

⁷³ Times of Natal, 10 May 1901; Natal Mercury, 25 October 1901.

Volunteers. The government firmly denied any knowledge of the offer.⁷⁴ In December 1901 Trooper WB Sutherland sought confirmation from the Natal government of rumoured grants of land to Volunteer veterans which reputedly included land in the so-called 'new colonies' (the Transvaal and Orange River Colony). The existence of these grants was firmly denied.⁷⁵ There was even a hint of the possibility of assisted emigration to the 'mother country', England.⁷⁶ These apparent expectations of rewards above and beyond pay-of-rank and a campaign medal drew sharp criticism from Volunteers veterans of the Anglo-Zulu War.⁷⁷ As late as 24 February 1902 the Commandant of Volunteers directed an inquiry to the Minister of Lands and Works in regard to unpaid gratuities.⁷⁸

**The Volunteer Composite Regiment and Field Service
during Late 1900 in Northern Natal**

**'A troop of the VCR has again been stationed at
Langberg, and it is rumoured that the other
troop of the squadron is to be sent out to
Brandon's Pass, where blockhouses are to be built.
If this is so...it will...prove an
effectual way of barring the door against the
invasion of this part of the Colony again'.⁷⁹**

The final official indication that the formal phase of the war in the Colony was at an end was the formal dissolution of the Natal Field Force, in accordance with Natal Army Orders dated 19

⁷⁴ PAR, CSO 1666, minute paper 31/1901, John AG Davidson to Colonial Secretary's Office, 28 December 1900. In June 1900 it had also been proposed to give each Volunteer a captured Mauser (Natal Witness, 16 June 1900).

⁷⁵ PAR, CSO 1694, minute paper 10812/1901, Sutherland to Colonial Secretary, 21 December 1901, and acknowledgement, 23 December 1901.

⁷⁶ Natal Witness, 9 April 1902.

⁷⁷ Natal Witness, 23 August 1900.

⁷⁸ PAR, MJPW 91, minute paper V553/1902, Commandant of Volunteers to Minister of Lands and Works, 24 February 1902.

⁷⁹ Times of Natal, 30 January 1902.

October 1900, and effective from that date.⁸⁰ Lieutenant-General HJT Hildyard assumed command of troops in Natal and the Transvaal, and of the lines of communication, from Major-General JS Wolfe-Murray.⁸¹

The Volunteer Composite Regiment was to see service under various field commands in northern Natal, Zululand, the Orange River Colony, and in the southern and eastern Transvaal, although its Natal Volunteer components remained in Natal.⁸² The latter formed a component of the Dundee-Ladysmith-Newcastle sub-district Imperial Command.⁸³ For possibly the first time, too, operational demands showed signs of coinciding with the capabilities and role of the (mounted) Volunteers as reflected in the Volunteer Composite Regiment. Hurst summarises the regiment's activities as: 'patrolling the Natal borders, holding isolated key points, escorting convoys, patrolling blockhouse lines, cleaning up the district of rebels, chasing raiding parties and the like'.⁸⁴ They were also required to check the passes that the Afrikaner inhabitants of the northern Natal districts were now required to carry.⁸⁵

The Volunteer Composite Regiment was inspected by its inaugural Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel RW Evans, on 16 October.⁸⁶ No.1 Squadron of the regiment comprised Natal Carbineer and Border Mounted Rifles members, and No.2 Squadron men from the Durban Light Infantry, the Natal Mounted Rifles and the Natal Royal Rifles.⁸⁷

⁸⁰ Natal Advertiser, 2 November 1900; Amery (ed), The Times History, V, p53.

⁸¹ Natal Advertiser, 2 November 1900.

⁸² Tylden, The Armed Forces of South Africa, p129; Hurst, Short History of the Volunteer Regiments of Natal and East Griqualand, pp121-2.

⁸³ Hurst, Short History of the Volunteer Regiments of Natal and East Griqualand, p121.

⁸⁴ Hurst, Short History of the Volunteer Regiments of Natal and East Griqualand, p121; and see O'Brien, 'Mounted Infantry in the Boer War', p21.

⁸⁵ Nicholson diary, 9 November 1900.

⁸⁶ Bizley diary, 16 October 1900.

⁸⁷ Nicholson diary, 28 and 29 September 1900.

Supply, in the form of wagon convoys, was long the bane of British commanders in colonial campaigns, and convoy protection absorbed a high proportion of fighting forces. This was especially the case in the latter phases of the Anglo-Boer War.⁸⁸ The Vryheid-Dundee convoy route was an important one in the wake of the establishment and maintenance of British garrisons of occupation in such towns as Utrecht, Wakkerstroom and Vryheid itself.⁸⁹ Some of the convoys were up to 230 wagons in length, and one was accompanied by no less than 7 000-8 000 cattle.⁹⁰ The regular escort routine was for half-sections to deploy in extended order ahead and on the flanks.⁹¹ Trooper Nicholson commented to his diary: 'This convoy work is very trying work and very little is made of it in civil life but at the same time it is one of the most trying duties of a soldier.'⁹²

One of the most important of duties of the Volunteer Composite Regiment was therefore convoy protection, and it was in the execution of this task that the new regiment enjoyed a rather inauspicious baptism of fire when, on 1 October 1900, a convoy escorted by one of its squadrons was ambushed and destroyed by a force of 140 Boers six miles (9.6 kilometres) east of De Jager's Drift with the loss of 24 wagons, on the Ncome (Blood) River, outside Vryheid.⁹³ Volunteer Composite Regiment casualties were small, with only one trooper from the Natal Mounted Rifles killed and five men altogether were wounded.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Strachan, European Armies and the Conduct of War, pp81-2; and see Van Creveld, Supplying War, p18.

⁸⁹ Amery (ed), The Times History, V, p53.

⁹⁰ Bizley diary, 21 February and 1 March 1901.

⁹¹ Nicholson diary, 19 December 1900, 18 August 1901, and 10 March 1902.

⁹² Nicholson diary, 14 July 1901.

⁹³ PAR, CSO 2609, confidential minute papers, transcript telegrams, Dartnell to Hime, 1 October 1900, and Roberts to Governor, 2 October 1900; Nicholson diary, 1 October 1900; Natal Witness, 3 October 1900; Amery (ed), The Times History, V, p53; McKenzie, Delayed Action, p196.

⁹⁴ Nicholson diary, 1 October 1900; Natal Witness, 3 October 1900; Goetzsche, Rough But Ready: An Official History of the Natal Mounted Rifles, p72.



11. On picquet duty near Dundee.



12. Christmas dinner on the northern Natal veld.



13. Volunteer Composite Regiment officers' mess in the field.



14. A Boer farmstead being stripped of materials.

The apparently shambolic transition period that accompanied Volunteer demobilization and the formation of the Volunteer Composite Regiment probably contributed to the circumstances surrounding this ambush. Trooper Nicholson records a particularly chaotic period from 4 to 6 October, during which time orders to return in the direction of De Jager's were repeatedly countermanded or cancelled, and in which the control of officers appears to have been minimal.⁹⁵

Another incident, this time of arson in the Newcastle district in October 1900, involving the Volunteer Composite Regiment, raised a furore in the office of the Colonial Secretary in Pietermaritzburg.⁹⁶ When the regiment denied being responsible, the farmer affected commented acidly to the Colonial Secretary: 'The Boers occupied the buildings, indeed all my buildings, for months, and spared them. Our would-be protectors burn the loyal and spare the rebels.'⁹⁷ Ironically, a son of Urquhart, the farmer in question, had served twelve months with the Carbineers.

Lessons regarding the effective conduct of convoys were soon learnt. After the Vryheid convoy ambush, for example, escorts were considerably strengthened.⁹⁸ Dacre Shaw also advocated the provision of regular fortified posts (the blockhouse system) on routes such as this.⁹⁹

One of the major Boer incursions into northern Natal took place in late October 1900, when a large force destroyed the Wasbank railway bridge, station and goods shed on the 26th.¹⁰⁰ A

⁹⁵ Nicholson diary, 4 to 6 October 1900.

⁹⁶ PAR, CSO 1661, minute paper 8844/1900, Urquhart to Commandant, Dundee, 1 November 1900, Urquhart to Colonial Secretary, 1 November 1900, 23 January and 20 February 1901, Colonial Secretary to Urquhart, 16 January 1901, Statement, Sergeant Household, 7 December 1900, Major McKenzie to OC VCR, 17 November 1900.

⁹⁷ PAR, CSO 1661, minute paper 8844/1900, Urquhart to Colonial Secretary, 29 November 1900.

⁹⁸ Bizley diary, 25 October 1900; McKenzie, Delayed Action, p197.

⁹⁹ Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers', p115.

¹⁰⁰ Nicholson diary, 26 October 1900; and see Natal Witness, 29 and 30 October, 3 and 16 (continued...)

Volunteer Composite Regiment patrol set out in pursuit from De Jager's on the 25th, heading for Vant's Drift on the Mzinyathi, where the Boers had crossed.¹⁰¹ The patrol penetrated as far as Pomeroy, via Helpmekaar, returning to Dundee on 17 November.¹⁰² The Boer raid prompted concern among 'loyalist' Biggarsberg farmers, who demanded protection,¹⁰³ and construction was begun on a blockhouse line between Dundee and Vryheid, and in the Mzinyathi and Ncome River vicinity. At least one of these blockhouses, guarding Brandon's Pass, was built by a squadron of the Natal Carbineers.¹⁰⁴

In general, during November 1900 the Volunteer Composite Regiment was condemned to another period of largely static inactivity at De Jager's Drift.¹⁰⁵ The regiment was widely scattered, with squadrons at One Tree Hill, Vant's Drift and De Jager's, with troops at Dundee and Helpmekaar, on the line of communication.¹⁰⁶ At De Jager's Drift Major McKenzie took command from the Imperial officer on the scene, a Major Gunner, and set about improving the poor position and defences of this camp. It was, according to McKenzie, 'the first occasion on which I had known of a Volunteer officer taking command over an Imperial officer of the same rank'.¹⁰⁷

There was considerable dissatisfaction in the regiment at this time with these duties, with many

¹⁰⁰(...continued)

November 1900; Times of Natal, 30 October 1900.

¹⁰¹ Nicholson diary, 25 and 27 October 1900; Bizley diary, 27 October to 2 November 1900.

¹⁰² Bizley diary, 7 and 17 November 1900.

¹⁰³ Natal Advertiser, 7 November 1900.

¹⁰⁴ 'War in the Biggarsberg 1899-1902', p29; Nasson, The South African War 1899-1902, pp211-2.

¹⁰⁵ McKenzie, Delayed Action, p196.

¹⁰⁶ Nicholson diary, 17 November 1900.

¹⁰⁷ McKenzie, Delayed Action, p196.

members 'resigning and some being fined or discharged for good'.¹⁰⁸ Constant bad weather did not ease the general discomfort, endured without tents.¹⁰⁹

The Scheeper's Nek Action, December 1900

**'The last prolonged agony of guerrilla warfare
has moreover only taken those by surprise
who had made up their minds...that a lack of
discipline would prevent the Boer combination from
hanging together after a few defeats'.¹¹⁰**

There was some adventure for the Volunteer Composite Regiment in late 1900 when on 14 December they engaged Boers near Scheeper's Nek,¹¹¹ which was on the main convoy arterial route from De Jager's Drift (also the railhead beyond Dundee) to Vryheid. The Boers inflicted several casualties, one being Corporal Peter Comrie of the Natal Carbineers, and forced a British-colonial force to retire under intense pressure:

'A heavy fire then commenced on us [recorded Trooper Nicholson of the Natal Carbineers] which we replied to as hard as we could. On the right flank, which was held by Corporal Comrie and myself, and the two Lewis's, also Lieutenant Household, the firing was terrible. In a few minutes, just after Corporal Comrie said, 'I have hit one of their horses', he received a bullet while he was in the act of aiming. It struck in the high region of the stomach, just under the heart, and came out in his left ribs.'¹¹²

Comrie was only a corporal in rank, but the emotional response to his death among the Volunteers and in the Colony illustrates the deep impact that casualties from the more modest strata of settler society exercised on regiments that drew their manpower from communities that

¹⁰⁸ Nicholson diary, 20 November 1900.

¹⁰⁹ Nicholson diary, 18 and 23 February 1901, and 1 March 1901.

¹¹⁰ May, A Retrospect on the South African War, p60.

¹¹¹ Nicholson diary, 14 December 1900; Natal Witness, 17 December 1900.

¹¹² Nicholson diary, 14 December 1900; and see Maritzburg College Museum and Archive, Nicholson letters, Nicholson to mother, 16 December 1900.

were often small in number and close-knit.¹¹³ In October 1901 Nicholson received a letter of thanks from one H Smith of Harding, in response to the support he (Nicholson) had shown after the death in action of an un-named trooper, presumably Smith's son, of the Volunteer Composite Regiment. The letter included the following moving sentence: 'Oh Jack, it was such a comfort to know that you were with our laddie when he was struck.'¹¹⁴

An account in the Natal Witness presented a rosier picture of the élan of the regiment at Scheeper's Nek: 'galloping in line, they raced for a position on the Nek, not knowing what was on the other side, and, reaching it, met the Boers face to face on the crest of the hill, but forced them to retire after a sharp fight'.¹¹⁵

Several casualties were inflicted on the Boers in a see-saw engagement that was arguably the most hotly contested of the Volunteer Composite Regiment's Natal campaign.¹¹⁶ Nicholson concluded that 'it was the warmest corner I have ever been in. Had we given it all we should have been massacred'.¹¹⁷ In the initial official report on the incident, telegraphed to the Governor from Newcastle on the 15th, the Natal Volunteers and the Natal Police were singled out for praise.¹¹⁸

¹¹³ See Bizley diary, 16 December 1900; Maritzburg College Museum and Archive, Nicholson letters, JB Nicholson to mother, 16 December 1900; Natal Witness, 17 and 18 December 1900; Times of Natal, 28 December 1900; 'The Vryheid Christmas Convoy', in Agnes Cunningham, Poetry about the Boer War 1899-1902, Dundee, nd, for comment on the incident and Comrie's military career. Another trooper from the Carbineers, George McKellar of Nottingham Road, was also killed (Nicholson letters, JB Nicholson to mother, 16 December 1900; and see Times of Natal, 24 December 1900). Six months later, on 1 June 1901, elements of the VCR returned to Scheeper's Nek, where they erected a simple cement memorial to Comrie and McKellar (Nicholson diary, 1 June 1901).

¹¹⁴ Maritzburg College Museum and Archive, Nicholson letters, H Smith to JB Nicholson, 6 October 1901.

¹¹⁵ Natal Witness, 28 June 1901; and see the letter of a VCR trooper published in the Natal Mercury, 25 December 1900.

¹¹⁶ Natal Witness, 24 December 1900.

¹¹⁷ Nicholson diary, 14 December 1900.

¹¹⁸ PAR, CSO 2609, transcript telegrams, GOC Newcastle to Governor, 15 December
(continued...)

From 19 December 1900 until 6 February 1901 the Volunteer Composite Regiment was again based at De Jager's Drift, from which patrol activity extended up and down the Mzinyathi River.¹¹⁹ During this period another skirmish with casualties was reported from Dundee.¹²⁰

In December 1900 Major Duncan McKenzie of the Natal Carbineers was invited by Kitchener to raise and command a second regiment of the Imperial Light Horse (ILH), and he took several highly regarded officers, such as Captain Mackay, with him. Others from the ranks also transferred to the new regiment.¹²¹ Many members of this new regiment, mostly from Johannesburg, were woefully inadequate at the mounted infantry skills of riding and shooting, and training them, McKenzie discovered, 'was a disheartening job, especially after coming from the Natal Carbineers, where every man could ride and shoot well'.¹²² The 2nd Imperial Light Horse mobilized at Volksrust during January 1901.¹²³ McKenzie continued to build his military reputation with this new command.¹²⁴ As was the case with its parent regiment, the 2nd ILH was still actively recruiting as late as April 1902. In the Natal Witness the attention of potential recruits was drawn to the fact that this was 'Colonel McKenzie's regiment'.¹²⁵

Conclusion

¹¹⁸(...continued)
1900.

¹¹⁹ Nicholson diary, 19 December 1900 to 6 February 1901.

¹²⁰ Natal Witness, 24 December 1900; Natal Mercury, 29 December 1900.

¹²¹ Maritzburg College Museum and Archive, Nicholson letters, JB Nicholson to Miss Claire, 31 December 1900; McKenzie, Delayed Action, p200. According to Napier Devitt, the biographer of JR Royston of the Border Mounted Rifles, it was McKenzie and Royston, frustrated with the VCRs escort duties, who approached Kitchener for permission to form the regiment (Devitt, Galloping Jack, p45).

¹²² McKenzie, Delayed Action, p200.

¹²³ Natal Witness, 7 and 30 January 1901, and 11 May 1901; Devitt, Galloping Jack, pp46-7.

¹²⁴ Natal Witness, 16 May 1901.

¹²⁵ Natal Witness, 2 April 1902.

During September and October 1900 longstanding Natalian demands for the demobilization of the Volunteer force finally became a reality. In keeping with the ambivalence towards the war effort evident in the Colony's lobbying for the release of the force, the technical and ceremonial details of this process revealed a mixed response to the Volunteers' war service.

Immediate agitation for the relaxation of censorship restrictions and martial law followed, and motives of patriotism and Imperial solidarity appeared to be forgotten in demands for gratuities for war service. The Volunteer force was rapidly reduced in size, and a declining official support is evident in the resistance to the further service of public servants.

As far as the return home of the Volunteers is concerned, there were the routine receptions by colonial and civic dignitaries, and settler communities throughout Natal, complete with parades and bunting. Roberts, Buller, the Natal press, and even Volunteer officers such as Dartnell and Macfarlane, delivered the routine addresses of praise for endurance and fortitude. However, beneath this facade lies a suggestion that the colonists were more than a little relieved that the bulk of the Colony's commitment to the war, which they had long since ceased to consider an immediate threat, had mercifully come to an end.

Almost forgotten was the continued field service in late 1900 of the 300 die-hard Volunteers who enrolled in the Volunteer Composite Regiment. Natal settler interest in this regiment's fortunes was not encouraged by the routine nature of its patrol and convoy protection duties, marred as they were by the two setbacks in engagements at De Jager's Drift and Scheeper's Nek.

CHAPTER XII

THE GUERRILLA WAR IN NORTHERN NATAL

'I wish to heaven we could finish this present war.'¹

Total War? The Volunteer Composite Regiment and the Scorched-Earth Policy

Spies has commented that apart from the Mfecane (also known as the Difaqane), 'the Anglo-Boer War was the most sustained approximation to total war which South Africans have ever experienced'.² In the popular imagery of Victorian and Edwardian England the burning of farmhouses and confiscation of cattle were seen as just desserts for the Boers for their challenge to the Empire.³ Such a viewpoint contrasts to efforts by military theorists to define and codify the concept of restraints for limited war, especially as it affected civilians.⁴

The dispersed tactics of the commandos following the formal conquest of the Boer Republics in 1900 ushered in a new phase of resistance to the numerically and logistically dominant British

¹ PRO, 30/67/7, Middleton Papers, Milner to Broderick, 5 November 1900.

² The Mfecane was an extended period of upheaval in southern Africa in the early nineteenth century associated with the rise to power of the Zulu kingdom (Saunders and Southey, A Dictionary of South African History, pp111-12; Spies, Methods of Barbarism?, p297; Evans, The Boer War: South Africa 1899-1902, part 7, passim; and see John Higginson, 'Upending the century of wrong: agrarian elites, collective violence and the transformation of state power in the American south and South Africa, 1865-1914', in Zegeye, Social Identities in the New South Africa, chapter 2.

³ Wilkinson, 'The Blessings of War', pp105 and 111; and see Scholtz, 'Die Betrekkinge tussen die Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek en die Oranje Vrystaat', p28; Headlam (ed), The Milner Papers: South Africa 1899-1905, pp78-82; Best, War and Society in Revolutionary Europe, p59; Haswell, Citizen Armies, pp139-141.

⁴ See Best, 'How Right is Might?', in Best and Wheatcroft (eds), War, Economy and the Military Mind, pp121-2; Michael Howard, 'Temperamenta Belli: Can War be Controlled?', in Howard (ed) Restraints on War, pp1-2, 6-7 and 12; Best, 'Restraints on War by Land before 1945', in Howard (ed), Restraints on War, p17; Townshend, 'The Shape of Modern War', in Townshend (ed), The Oxford History of Modern War, p17.

forces. The British response was the blockhouse fortification system, internment of civilians, and the scorched earth strategy.⁵ It has often been interpreted as a classic military response to a guerrilla situation, and was not without precedent. Prussian forces in the Franco-Prussian War, for example, encountered persistent French guerrilla resistance that severely stretched the boundaries of what had previously been considered the accepted conduct of invading armies and occupied populations.⁶

However, the practice has been questioned. Helen Bradford, for example, refers to the situation in the Cape Colony during the same period, where a less draconian policy of martial law and confiscation of the horses, so essential to Boer guerrilla operations, was just as effective.⁷ The policy also called into question key elements of the relationship between the concept and practice of 'just war' and 'limited war'.⁸

By March 1901 the Volunteer Composite Regiment was increasingly called upon to carry out, in a more direct and concerted fashion than had been the case during the first six months of its existence, Kitchener's scorched earth policy which was implemented by Colonel GR Blomfield, the regional British military commander at Dundee. Indeed, the destruction of farmsteads, stock and crops, and the removal of women and children for internment, became a regular feature of Volunteer Composite Regiment operations throughout 1901 and 1902.⁹ The military authorities were influenced in the implementation of this strategy by continuing complaints about Boer raiding

⁵ Black, War and the World, p192; Porch, 'Imperial Wars: From the Seven Years War to the First World War', in Townshend (ed), The Oxford History of Modern War, pp102-114; Charles Townshend, 'People's War', in Townshend (ed), The Oxford History of Modern War, chapter 10, *passim*; Magnus, Kitchener: Portrait of an Imperialist, pp172-3; Wheeler, The Story of Lord Kitchener, pp202-6; Surridge, 'Lord Kitchener and the South African War 1899-1902', pp23-5; and see IWM, 'Leicestershire Militia in South Africa', pp41-2.

⁶ Best, 'How Right is Might?', in Best and Wheatcroft (eds), War, Economy and the Military Mind, pp122-7.

⁷ Bradford, 'Gentlemen and Boers', pp14-5.

⁸ Clark, Waging War, introduction and p12.

⁹ Bizley diary, 9 March 1901.

parties from farmers in the northern districts of the Colony.¹⁰

In April 1900 the Natal Parliament passed a bill to indemnify government and colonial forces for unspecified acts committed during the enforcement of martial law.¹¹ Despite the indemnity, this campaign of depredations does appear to have had financial repercussions for the Colony. By October 1900 civil claims against the military stood at an estimated £600 000.¹²

On 27 October 1900 the Volunteer Composite Regiment participated in the burning of farms of 'unsurrendered Natal rebels', one of many such operations during this 'pacification' period of the war.¹³ On 9 March 1901 all available men of the regiment were detailed to destroy farm equipment and 'Dutch crops' in far northern Natal. Trooper Nicholson describes the day's action: 'We managed to finish two big fields of good mealies during the day. The other fatigue had to destroy wood and burn a wagon.'¹⁴ At one farm, women

'pleaded with Captain Crompton [an officer of the Natal Carbineers] that their husbands would come in at once and surrender if we would save their wagon. Duty is inexorable however, and we had to burn the wagon. This war is indeed a terrible one, and will now get worse as it drags on and on.'¹⁵

¹⁰ Natal Witness, 11 April 1901.

¹¹ PAR, CO (microfilm), 1/1/1/205, [PRO 179/211], enclosure in despatch 132, 26 April 1900; PAR, NCP, 6/1/1/53, Natal Government Gazette, LII, 24 April 1900, p352, Bill to Indemnify Government and OC HM Forces etc for Martial Law Duties, and see 52, No.3118, 31 July 1900, Act; Verne Harris, 'The Reluctant Rebels', p43; and see Townshend, 'Martial Law', pp176-7 and 190.

¹² PAR, CO (microfilm), 1/1/1/208 [PRO 179/214], Government House, Natal, to Chamberlain, 18 October 1900; PAR, CSO 1659, minute paper 7928, Chairman, Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission, 27 September 1900; and see PAR, CSO 1654, minute paper 5903/1900, 7 July 1900, with regard to the restriction of eligibility for compensation to residents of Natal.

¹³ Nicholson diary, 27 October 1900; Bizley diary, 25 March 1901.

¹⁴ Nicholson diary, 9 March 1901.

¹⁵ Nicholson diary, 9 March 1901, and see 25 March and 28 July 1901.

Nicholson's meticulous war diary for the last two years of the war is littered with references to the almost routine destruction of all in his unit's path. Nicholson, a farmer himself, even ceases to question the ethics of this practice.¹⁶ The inexorable nature of these pacification operations is in contrast with the relatively subdued normal military activity of regiments such as the Volunteer Composite Regiment during this period.

On 13 February 1901 the Volunteer Composite Regiment was called into action north of Utrecht in the upper reaches of the Blood River (Ncome), where a strong Boer force was contesting a range of ridges near the Bivane River.¹⁷ Over the next few days of scouting and skirmishing the Boers were forced to retire.¹⁸ This particular action would have formed part of the Volunteer Composite Regiment's contribution, as a blocking force, during large-scale sweeps by British columns in the eastern Transvaal between February and April 1901.¹⁹ The performance of the regiment elicited the praise of the British commander, Brigadier-General JF Burn-Murdoch.²⁰

The late summer of 1900-1901 was an exceptionally wet one. The months of February-March 1901 were described by one disgruntled diarist as a period of 'mud and misery'.²¹ Equipment such as saddlery, boots, clothing were in very poor condition, with no change of uniform available to most.²²

It was a relatively quiet time in the Dundee district, and the martial ardour of the local residents

¹⁶ Nicholson diary, 22 and 29 August 1901, 11 and 29 October 1901, and 25 November 1901.

¹⁷ Nicholson diary, 13 February 1901; Natal Witness, 22 February 1901; and see Laband, 'Zulus and the War', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, pp119 and 121.

¹⁸ Natal Witness, 25 February 1901.

¹⁹ Stirling, The Colonials in Africa, p44.

²⁰ Natal Witness, 28 June 1901.

²¹ Nicholson diary, 12 March 1901.

²² Nicholson diary, 12 March 1901. These deficiencies were soon rectified when, on 24 March, there was an issue of khaki serge trousers, boots, tunics and putties. Old worn saddles were also exchanged (Nicholson diary, 24 March 1901).

also cooled, with social occasions abounding.²³ On 18 June 1901 a meeting was called in Dundee to remind residents of their continued obligations to the local Town Guard. The meeting was addressed by Colonel Blomfield, OC of the Dundee Sub-District, who emphasised the changed nature of the guerrilla war, that called for numerous mobile columns and therefore smaller garrisons. Citizens of towns and villages such as Dundee had therefore to be prepared to take a greater responsibility for their defence.²⁴ Lieutenant-Colonel RW Evans (the Commandant of Dundee), who also addressed the meeting, emphasised that voluntary participation in a town guard was better than the rigid enforcement of martial law.²⁵ On 27 April 1901 rumours of disbandment were refuted by Colonel Evans and, as if to emphasise that fact, the Volunteer Composite Regiment was in action soon thereafter.²⁶

On 28 July 1901 a predominantly Volunteer Composite Regiment column engaged in a rural cordon-and-search operation of Boer farmhouses was attacked by a Boer commando near Nqutu. The Volunteer Composite Regiment force included 40 men of the curiously named 'Dundee Local Farmer's Corps', also known as 'Symon's Horse'.²⁷ Nicholson, for one, dismissed them as 'Symon's Looters', and 'a useless lot of men'.²⁸ The day-long attack was beaten off with the loss of several men killed and wounded.²⁹ The engagement had been, commented the Natal Mercury, 'the most serious business we have had for some time'.³⁰

Recruiting Manpower for the Pacification of

²³ Nicholson diary, 25 April 1901.

²⁴ Times of Natal, 20 June 1901.

²⁵ Times of Natal, 20 June 1901.

²⁶ Nicholson diary, 27 April and 19 May 1901; Natal Witness, 28 May 1901.

²⁷ Natal Mercury, 5 August 1901.

²⁸ Nicholson diary, 28 July 1901.

²⁹ Maritzburg College Museum and Archive, Nicholson letters, Nicholson to mother, 29 July 1901; Nicholson diary, 28 July 1901; Times of Natal, 30 July 1901; Natal Mercury, 31 July 1901; Stirling, The Colonials in Africa, p44.

³⁰ Natal Mercury, 7 August 1901.

Northern Natal in 1901 and 1902

A call by the Commandant of Volunteers on 27 December 1900 for supplementary recruits to the Volunteer Composite Regiment was almost immediately countermanded in January 1901, causing confusion.³¹ The response, in any case, had been poor: two men from the Carbineers, three from the Natal Mounted Rifles, three from the Border Mounted Rifles, five from the Natal Naval Volunteers, two from the Natal Field Artillery, and one from the Natal Royal Rifles. The Durban Light Infantry, starved of meaningful deployment for most of the war, coughed up 14 men with the offer of 80 more if they were ordered out and remained intact as a unit, under their own officers. This was not possible, and the offer was withdrawn.³² It emerged that the intention of the 27 December 1900 circular had been to gauge the potential response in case of necessity.³³ The Natal response had been poor.

There was, however, a resurgence in Imperial Volunteer regiments, with no less than 40 irregular corps formed in Natal and the Cape at about this time.³⁴ In the 3 July 1901 issue of the Natal Mercury alone, there were recruiting notices for the South African Light Horse, Bethune's Mounted Infantry, Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry, Brabant's Horse, Rimington's Guides, the C-in-Cs Bodyguard, Kitchener's Fighting Scouts, the Johannesburg Mounted Rifles, Scottish Horse, Menne's Scouts, the Utrecht and Vryheid Mounted Police, the Railway Pioneer Regiment, and the Imperial Hospital Corps.³⁵

³¹ PAR, MJPW 82, minute paper L&W 186/1901, circular 29, Commandant of Volunteers to OCs Volunteer Corps, 27 December 1900; Natal Witness, 5 January 1901; Natal Mercury, 14 January 1901.

³² PAR, MJPW 82, minute paper L&W 186/1901, Volunteer Composite Regiment, 14-16 January 1901.

³³ PAR, MJPW 82, minute paper L&W 186/1901, Dartnell to Minister of Lands and Works, 16 January 1901.

³⁴ Natal Witness, 13 and 25 October 1900, 5 January and 10 April 1901, 18 January and 4 March 1902; Times of Natal, 15 January 1901.

³⁵ Natal Mercury, 3 July 1900. For comprehensive lists of all permanent and emergency corps serving and raised during the war, see The Hall Handbook of the Anglo-Boer War,
(continued...)

More than a year later, in March-April 1902, with the war almost over, the proposed expansion of the Volunteer Composite Regiment was renewed.³⁶ On 23 March 1902 the GOC Natal requested the Natal government to increase its military contribution in the field (which meant the Volunteer Composite Regiment) from 300 to 800. The recruiting notice in Natal newspapers called for '500 additional men'. Rates of pay were still attractive (troopers 6s per diem), with a bonus of 3s per diem after 60 days in the field. Horses, arms and equipment were to be provided free of charge, and duration of service was now for 'as long as required'.³⁷

At that late stage of the war (1902) one of the most enthusiastic contributions of recruits, 3 officers and 79 NCOs and other ranks, came from the longsuffering Durban Light Infantry, who had seen little action in the war.³⁸ In the files of the Natal Defence Records there is also a muster roll for a unit called the Natal Mounted Infantry, with many of the enrolments dating from April 1902.³⁹ Recruiting notices appeared daily during the final two weeks of the war, with the last on 31 May, the day peace was signed.⁴⁰

The Natal Volunteers Recalled: September 1901

'Their bronzed complexions and sturdy physiques

³⁵(...continued)
pp84-88, and the Natal Mercury, 29 November 1900.

³⁶ PAR, NDR 5/1, correspondence: Commandant of Volunteers and Natal Militia, minute paper, 25 March 1902; Paterson, 'The Military Organisation of the Colony of Natal', p98.

³⁷ PAR, NDR 5/1, minute paper V908/1902, Increase in strength of Volunteer Composite Regiment, correspondence, Commandant of Volunteers; Natal Witness, 2 April 1902; Times of Natal, 10 April 1902.

³⁸ PAR, NDR 5/1, minute paper V908/1902, Increase in strength of Volunteer Composite Regiment, correspondence, Commandant of Volunteers to Secretary of Lands and Works, 3 April 1902; Natal Mercury, 10 April 1902.

³⁹ PAR, NDR 2/11, nominal roll, Natal Mounted Infantry.

⁴⁰ Natal Advertiser, 3 and 21-31 May 1902.

tell of plenty of hard work.'⁴¹

In August 1901 the Natal Volunteers were temporarily recalled to the Colours for the Royal Visit of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York. (See pages 402-4.) This ceremonial duty was followed in September 1901 by mobilization for military service when the Governor, Sir Henry McCallum, recalled the Volunteers in response to Kitchener's warning on 6 September of a new threat from Boer raiders under the command of Commandant-General Louis Botha along the Zululand border.⁴² There was more to Botha's expedition than simply a show of force. The Boers realised that even partial victory would not be achieved through minor local successes, but that the British might be swayed towards peace terms favourable to the Boers if their immediate territorial interest in Natal and the Cape were threatened.⁴³

Apart from the perceived threat to Natal itself, this period is important because it marked one of the few occasions when Zululand (a province of Natal since 1897) became a theatre of war. Also, the involvement of Zulus in British operations fuelled African-Boer tensions in the region, a tension that was to be most dramatically manifested in the Holkrans incident in May 1902, but which can generally be dated to at least September 1900, when British forces occupied Vryheid following the expulsion of the Boer regular forces from Natal in June of that year.⁴⁴

The proposed mobilization was not, however, without complications, as McCallum intimated in

⁴¹ Times of Natal, 16 October 1901.

⁴² PRO, 30/57/22, Kitchener Papers, Y85, Kitchener to Broderick, 18 September 1901, Y90, Kitchener to Broderick, 27 September 1901 and Y95, Kitchener to Broderick, 18 October 1901; PAR, NCP, 6/1/1/54, Natal Government Gazette, LIII, No.3205, 18 September 1901, Government Notice 525 and 526/1901; Nicholson diary, 3 and 4 September 1901; Dermott Michael Moore, General Louis Botha's Second Expedition to Natal September-October 1901, Cape Town, Historical Publication Society, 1979, p16.

⁴³ Sixsmith, 'Kitchener and the Guerrillas', p212.

⁴⁴ See Laband, 'Zulus and the War', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, pp107 and 117; Warwick, Black People and the South African War, pp90-93. Laband, pp110-11, traces the evolution of the Vryheid district of the Transvaal as the location of intermittent conflict dating from its origins as the New Republic (1884-1888), and creating conditions conducive to Boer-Zulu conflict in 1899-1902.

a telegram to Chamberlain on the 9th:

'In consequence of telegraphic correspondence with Commander-in-Chief relative to movements of Botha, I have caused Mounted Volunteers and Rifle Associations to be held in readiness to mobilize immediately on receipt of orders. Considering that large numbers of Volunteers are on service with Imperial forces in the composite regiment and irregular corps and that military details at Pietermaritzburg are convalescents quite useless as mobile column I have requested reinforcements from regular forces for protection of Natal against the raid which is expected shortly to be made.'⁴⁵

The first major incident during the Boer incursion was the annihilation on 17 September at Blood River Poort, south-west of Vryheid, of a mounted infantry column under command of Major Hubert Gough, the highly regarded former commander of the Composite Regiment, with which a squadron of the Natal Carbineers had served during the British campaign to relieve Ladysmith.⁴⁶ In an inexplicable lapse in judgement and neglect of adequate scouting, Gough attacked an apparently unsuspecting enemy, and was clinically ambushed by 500 burghers.⁴⁷

The action at Blood River Poort alerted Lieutenant-General NG Lyttelton, the GOC British military forces in Natal, to the Boer threat to Dundee and the northern districts of the Colony. British reinforcements were rushed to Stael's Drift (Steildrif) on the Mzinyathi (Buffalo) River frontier. The river was full at this time, and this measure effectively sealed off the threatened region, diverting Botha towards Babanango in central Zululand.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ NAR, FK 1818, files 7147-7437, McCallum to Chamberlain, 9 September 1901; and see McCallum to Chamberlain, 14 September 1901; and Lyttelton to Governor, 8 September 1901.

⁴⁶ PRO, 30/57/22, Kitchener Papers, Y88, Kitchener to Broderick, 20 September 1901; Natal Mercury, 23 September 1901; Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, IV, pp263-5. For a contemporary newspaper account of the action see the Natal Witness, 23 September 1901.

⁴⁷ Amery (ed), The Times History, V, pp338-341; Maurice, History of the War in South Africa, IV, pp217-8.

⁴⁸ Amery (ed), The Times History, V, pp334-41; Moore, General Louis Botha's Second Expedition to Natal, end paper and chapter 4 passim; Laband, 'Zulus and the War', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, pp121-2.

A Gazette Extraordinary, in terms of Sections 19 and 20 of the Volunteer Act of 1895, gave effect on 18 September to the mobilization of the Volunteers.⁴⁹ The regiments affected were the Natal Field Artillery, the Natal Mounted Rifles, the Umvoti Mounted Rifles, the Border Mounted Rifles, and the Natal Carbineers.⁵⁰

On 12 September Lieutenant-Colonel HT Bru-de-Wold, commanding the Natal Volunteer Brigade, had received instructions from the government to prepare for active service.⁵¹ Once again the Volunteer force was to fall under the command of Lyttelton.⁵² However, the Natal government argued that in the interest of civilian morale it was reluctant to implement the mobilization unless 'the contemplated raid had started or was about to start'.⁵³ This official stance was very similar to that held at the outset of the war in September 1899. It was confidently stated that such brinkmanship was made possible by the ability of the Volunteer force to mobilize half its strength within 24 hours, and the remainder within 48 to 56 hours.

This time the Natal press was much more positive than it had been a year earlier:

'The mobilization of the mounted Volunteers and artillery of the Colony and their departure upcountry, will, we imagine, be heard of with surprise, not only in many parts of the Colony, but outside of it. There is, however, no occasion for any alarm at the fresh call to arms. The situation is totally different from what it was when the Volunteers took the field two years ago.

Then the Boers were much the stronger, and if they had any enterprise they might have been at Durban. There is no Boer army now. The commandos are merely raiders, capable of plundering a farmhouse or sniping a sentry, but incapable of doing any serious

⁴⁹ PAR, minute paper MJPW 88, L&W 5049/1901, Notice by HE the Governor ordering out certain portions of the Volunteers, 18 September 1901; NAR, FK 1818, files 7147-7437, McCallum to Chamberlain, 18 September 1901; Natal Advertiser, 19 September 1901; Natal Witness, 20 September 1901.

⁵⁰ Natal Witness, 20 September 1901.

⁵¹ PAR, NCP 8/2/1, departmental reports 1901, Commandant of Volunteers, p15, Bru-de-Wold Report.

⁵² PAR, MJPW 88, minute paper L&W 5049/1901, Notice Governor, 18 September 1901.

⁵³ NAR, FK 1818, files 7147-7437, McCallum to Chamberlain, 21 September 1901.

damage.⁵⁴

Some of the affected units, such as the Natal Mounted Rifles, struggled to raise sufficient numbers. Many Volunteers had left their regiments, and others were serving in the Volunteer Composite Regiment or the Imperial irregular units then in existence.⁵⁵ The official strength of the Volunteer force on the occasion of this mobilization was 69 officers and 684 men.⁵⁶

From 19 September Volunteers started arriving at the British military camp located at the Royal Showgrounds in Pietermaritzburg (the Volunteer Drill Hall from approximately 1903), but on account of heavy rain and mud, tents could not be pitched, and some troops were permitted to sleep at home. Others who arrived by train remained in their railway carriages owing to the condition of the camp.⁵⁷ As was the case in September 1899, some men had ridden up to 80 miles (128 kilometres) to the nearest railhead.⁵⁸ On the 24th McCallum received a telegram from Kitchener, expressing his appreciation of 'the excellent way they have turned out'.⁵⁹

The recalled Volunteers were called upon to watch the threatened Zululand frontier on the Thukela in the region of Kranskop as part of a mobile column, commanded by a Lieutenant-Colonel GA Mills of the 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers, dubbed 'Mills' Mobile Column'.⁶⁰

Farmers in the Kranskop district, on the southern bank of the Thukela, were one of the smaller

⁵⁴ Natal Mercury, 19 September 1901.

⁵⁵ Natal Advertiser, 19 September 1901.

⁵⁶ PAR, NCP 8/2/1, Departmental Report, 1901, Report Commandant of Volunteers, p3.

⁵⁷ PAR, NCP 8/2/1, Departmental Reports 1901, Commandant of Volunteers, Bru-de-Wold report, 7 February 1902, p15.

⁵⁸ PAR, NCP 8/2/1, Departmental Reports 1901, Commandant of Volunteers, Bru-de-Wold report, 7 February 1902, p15.

⁵⁹ PAR, MJPW 90, minute paper V551/1901, telegram, Kitchener to Governor, 24 September 1901.

⁶⁰ PAR, NCP 8/2/1, Departmental Reports 1901, Report, Commandant of Volunteers, p3.

settler communities which Botha's incursion had made increasingly nervous about their security. At a public meeting at Kranskop on 7 October 1899, the local gentry requested of the government such measures as the provision of rifles and reserve ammunition for the local magazine.⁶¹ The Natal government was anxious to avoid conflict in the region, which included the large Tugela and Umvoti locations, since it was feared the Africans could be drawn into the war, and threaten, from a white settler perspective, postwar regional security.⁶² At the same time, though, the ministry exhibited a hint of indifference concerning the farmers of neighbouring Umvoti County because many were Afrikaners and, by implication, unreliable and likely to assist the invaders.⁶³ Official suspicion of the Umvoti Afrikaners dated back to the outbreak of the war, and had arguably resulted in the almost complete marginalization of the district's Volunteer regiment, the Umvoti Mounted Rifles. This suspicion prevailed despite the demonstrated willingness of this regiment actively to participate in operations against the Boers and in defence of the Colony. (See pages 34 and 103-4.)

The major, if uneventful, patrol work the Volunteers with Mills' Mobile Column undertook from 1 to 13 October was based at Kranskop, with outposts over a front of 40 miles (64 kilometres).⁶⁴ According to Moore, the Natal Volunteer patrols were 'stiffened' by detachments of regular British infantry.⁶⁵ Field transport was still supplied largely by the Natal Department of Public Works, supplemented by the Imperial authorities, via the Volunteer Department.⁶⁶ The major military engagements of the incursion were fought, without Volunteer participation, at the Zululand

⁶¹ PAR, CSO 1628, minutes, Public Meeting, Kranskop, 7 October 1899.

⁶² Paterson, 'The Military Organisation of the Colony of Natal', p83.

⁶³ NAR, FK 1818, file 7147-7437, McCallum to Chamberlain, 14 September 1901.

⁶⁴ PAR, NCP 8/2/1, Departmental Reports 1901, Commandant of Volunteers, Bru-de-Wold report, 7 February 1902, p15; Gillings to National Monuments Council (NMC), 21 June 1994; Stalker, *The Natal Carbineers*, pp149 and 168. For detail on one these outposts, 'Wonderfontein', near Kranskop, see Gillings to NMC 21 June 1994, writer and Andrew Hall (NMC) field trip, 11 July 1994.

⁶⁵ Moore, *General Louis Botha's Second Expedition to Natal*, p77.

⁶⁶ PAR, NCP 8/2/1, Departmental Reports 1901, Bru-de-Wold report, 7 February 1902, p15.

frontier posts of Itala and Fort Prospect on 26 September. The Boers were repulsed in both attacks, and by 14 October, Botha had successfully withdrawn his commandos.⁶⁷

While in the Greytown-Kranskop border district, the Natal Volunteers encountered a familiar face from the siege days, RCA Samuelson, now a lieutenant in the Volunteer Reserve Force. Samuelson was requested to provide African scouts for the mobile columns intended for the area, and proposed using men of the Bomvu, under Chief Sibindi, for this purpose.⁶⁸ The 'Native' chiefs along the Mzinyathi and Thukela Rivers were once more drawn into the 'white man's war' when they were informed, through the magistrates of Msinga, Kranskop and Mapumulo, that they would be held responsible for failure to report Boer movements to Mills' Mobile Column.⁶⁹ Several town guards and rifle associations were also called out: the Newcastle Town Guard, the Nkandhla Rifle Association, the Melmoth Rifle Association, and the Upper Tugela Rifle Association.⁷⁰

Settler security concerns were also manifested elsewhere in the Colony. On 5 July 1901 the local Magistrate in the Upper Tugela District, D Giles, reported another incursion by approximately 60 burghers at Acton Homes and Middledale, originating at the Tintwa Pass on the border of the Orange River Colony. There appears no longer to have been standing British forces along the Drakensberg passes, and Giles urged the stationing of a sufficiently strong mobile force to meet such raids.⁷¹ A small contingent of the Ladysmith Squadron of the Carbineers was despatched to the western border (Upper Tugela) region in September 1901, and this may have been in response

⁶⁷ Amery (ed), The Times History, V, pp341-359; Moore, General Louis Botha's Second Expedition to Natal, chapters 5 to 9, passim; Laband, 'Zulus and the War', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, p122.

⁶⁸ Samuelson, Long, Long Ago, pp169-177; and see Machin, 'The Levying of Forced African Labour', p296.

⁶⁹ PAR, PM 23, minute paper SNA 2198/1901 and PM 1497/1901, 24 September 1901; PAR, minute paper, SNA 2208/1901, telegram, Mills Column to Hime, 25 September 1901.

⁷⁰ PAR, PM 25, PM 2534/1901, Natal District Orders, Newcastle, 28 December 1901.

⁷¹ PAR, PM 22, minute paper 5877/1901, Magistrate, Upper Tugela, to Hime, 5 July 1901.

to the alert which followed Botha's incursion.⁷² The Natal Volunteers would have been suited to this task.

On 3 October the same year a query from the President of the Mooi River Rifle Association, PD Simmons, regarding a Boer presence in the Kamberg district, elicited an illuminating response from the officer commanding the Pietermaritzburg Military Sub-District. Such incursions were clearly far lower on the British military's list of priorities than that of the colonists. An unspecified mounted detachment based at Mooi River, and a detachment of South African Constabulary, was considered sufficient to assist the Natal Police in this matter.⁷³

The government had never been keen to fragment its forces for the benefit of localised security concerns. In October 1899 Sir George White had summed up the existing official position: 'To attempt to cover every portion of the Colony from raids would mean a division of my available force into a large number of weak detachments incapable of offensive action anywhere.'⁷⁴ Buller had made the same assertion when pressed by the Natal colonists to provide blanket security in late 1899 during the Boer incursion into the Natal midlands. (See pages 144-5)

On 10 October 1901 the Governor received a telegram from Kitchener releasing the Natal Volunteers from service. No specific reason was given, but in a subsequent telegram on the 19th, McCallum suggested that the move was the consequence of the combination of the removal of the Boer threat and the spring farming obligations of many Volunteers.⁷⁵ Kitchener's permission was welcomed by the Natal press, who obliquely questioned the real need for the latest mobilization

⁷² PAR, NCP 8/2/1, Departmental Reports, Commandant of Volunteers, Bru-de-Wold; PAR, MJPW 90, minute paper V551/1901, marching-in state, Ladysmith Troop, Natal Carbineers, 22 September 1901; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p168.

⁷³ PAR, PM 24, minute paper 8598/1901, telegrams, Simmons to Hime, and OC Pietermaritzburg Military Sub-District to Hime, 4 October 1901.

⁷⁴ PAR, CSO 1629, minute paper 1224/1899, White to Hime, 25 October 1899.

⁷⁵ NAR, FK 1818, files 7147-7437, McCallum to Chamberlain, 10 October 1901, McCallum to Chamberlain, 19 October 1901; Times of Natal, 11 October 1901.

after the contribution and sacrifices of 1899-1900.⁷⁶ The return of the Volunteers to Pietermaritzburg was described in the Natal Witness:

'As the clock struck ten, the clatter of hoofs announced the coming of the Volunteers, and to the tune of 'The Soldiers of the Queen', played by the fife and drums, the returned warriors trotted on to the Square. Their arrival was the signal for loud and continuous cheering, which was led by the Cadets.

First came the Natal Carbineers, looking bronzed and dusty, under Lt-Col Greene, followed by the BMR, under Lt-Col Rethman, then the NMR, under Major Noble, the last being the Volunteer Medical Corps, the Volunteer Veterinary Corps, and the Transport Corps.⁷⁷

According to the Natal Witness,

'this second homecoming for the Volunteers differed in some respects from the first - not that the enthusiasm was less, but there was more cause for joy and less for sorrow. On the first occasion fathers, mothers, and wives mourned for sons and husbands lost in battle, whereas yesterday there were no tears, unless they were tears of joy.'⁷⁸

While the small expeditionary force had played no direct part in repelling the Boer incursion, it was felt that the response of the Natal Volunteers had been admirable.⁷⁹ McCallum waxed eloquent on the brief resurgence of Boer 'dogs of war', whom he downgraded to 'yelping, snarling curs', much to the pleasure of the gathered crowd.⁸⁰

The War Election, September 1901

The September 1901 mobilization coincided with a general election in the Colony, from 24 to 27

⁷⁶ Times of Natal, 11 October 1901.

⁷⁷ Natal Witness, 17 October 1901.

⁷⁸ Natal Witness, 17 October 1901; and see Natal Advertiser, 17 October 1901.

⁷⁹ Natal Witness, 29 October 1901.

⁸⁰ Natal Witness, 17 October 1901.

September. There was concern that troops on service could be effectively disenfranchised, an issue of particular concern to candidates in small (rural) constituencies with low settler populations.⁸¹ Some candidates threatened to boycott the poll if special arrangements could not be made for the Volunteers.⁸² Military pass regulations remained in force, suggesting that individuals needing to travel long distances to polling stations had to apply timeously for these documents.⁸³ Captain FE Foxon of the Natal Carbineers and the Magistrate at Ixopo, who had rejoined his regiment for the mobilization, suggested that the election be postponed altogether because of the concern in colonial circles that the Volunteer mobilization would compromise the participation of those troops involved. However, his request was not entertained.⁸⁴ It was not possible, according to law, for votes to be cast at military camps, but special provision was made for the men in camp in Pietermaritzburg to be allowed to travel to those voting districts accessible by rail.⁸⁵ The NGR was instructed to transport Volunteers free-of-charge for this purpose.⁸⁶

It would be expected that an election held during a major regional war would focus to a significant extent on the context and implications of that conflict, as well as on the role of the Colony's Volunteer force. However, the newspaper coverage of the elections in Natal, as well as the official

⁸¹ PAR, CSO 1686, telegram, Governor to GOC Newcastle, 20 September 1901, enclosure in minute paper 8193/1901, relative to voting of Volunteers; Times of Natal, 23 September 1901; Natal Mercury, 24 September 1901.

⁸² Natal Advertiser, 21 September 1901.

⁸³ PAR, CSO 1683, minute paper 7190/1901, Colonial Secretary, Natal, to Hime, 5 August 1901, and GOC Natal to Hime, 19 August 1901.

⁸⁴ PAR, CSO 1686, minute paper 8189/1901, Magistrate, Ixopo Division, to Colonial Secretary, Natal, 18 September 1901. This was, in fact, the second time that Foxon had expected that colonial affairs should be conducted at the convenience of the Volunteer force. See pages 296-7 of this thesis for his request in March 1900 to be released from service to attend to his magisterial duties.

⁸⁵ PAR, CSO 1686, minute paper 8241/1901, Assistant Under-Secretary to G Jackson, 23 September 1901; PAR, MJPW 88, minute paper L&W 5056/1901, Commandant of Volunteers to OC Volunteers, Showgrounds, Pietermaritzburg, 21 September 1901; Natal Mercury, 24 September 1901.

⁸⁶ PAR, MJPW 88, minute paper L&W 5056/1901, NGR Notice to staff, 23 September 1901.

record, reveals otherwise. Apart from some concern about the availability of Volunteer voters, it was almost as if the war was not there at all. Even Botha's incursion into Natal and Zululand, which had led to the mobilization of the Volunteers, was an election non-event.

There were numerous electoral candidates with Volunteer service or connections, for example, GR Richards, FR Stockil (Weenen County), George Tatham and G Coventry (Klip River), George Leuchars (Umvoti), Edward Greene and CJ Smythe (Lion's River), and Sir Albert Hime, FS Tatham and TK Murray (Pietermaritzburg). But only a few (Hime, Richards and Murray) placed any emphasis on the war and the Volunteers. The major concern for candidates was 'Native Affairs'.⁸⁷ Several Natal Volunteer officers were nevertheless returned to the Legislative Assembly. They were Greene (Lions River), Richards (Weenen County), George Tatham (Klip River) and Montgomery Archibald (Alexandra County).⁸⁸

The only constituency to generate some interest relevant to the war and the tensions it created in Natal society was Umvoti, where the result clearly reflected the prejudice in Natal against the Afrikaner colonists, which had been inflamed by the war. The three Afrikaner candidates (T Nel, TJ Nel and T van Rooyen) failed to gain election. This result reversed a position that had seen two Afrikaners (the two Nels) from the district in the previous parliament.⁸⁹

The overall indifference in Natal towards this war election, and the lack of any discernable effect of the conflict on the electoral campaign or result, was in contrast to the greater impact that it had on the British general election in October 1900, the so-called 'khaki election'. Although in Britain the war had also been widely regarded as effectively over by that date, and popular support for it had dimmed, it was still sufficiently relevant for the beleaguered Conservative government of Lord Salisbury successfully to invoke the need for a decisive victory over the Boers, in order to achieve

⁸⁷ Natal Witness, 4 to 24 September 1901. See Josh McCracken, 'The Political Scene in Wartime Durban', in Wassermann and Kearney (eds), A Warrior's Gateway, pp15-6

⁸⁸ PAR, CSO 1687, minute paper 8675/1901, Writs of Elections, 1901; Natal Witness, 28 and 30 September 1901. They were joined by leading settler notables such as Hime himself (Pietermaritzburg), JL Hulett (Victoria County), and Joseph Baynes (Ixopo).

⁸⁹ Natal Witness, 27 and 30 September 1901, and 1 October 1901; and see Natal Afrikaner, 8 October 1901 and 25 November 1902.

an election victory over a divided Liberal opposition.⁹⁰

**The Final Months of the War, the Blockhouse System
and Column Sweeps**

**'Dwindle, dwindle, little war,
How I wonder more and more,
As about the veldt you hop,
When you really mean to stop.'**⁹¹

During most of 1901 the Volunteer Composite Regiment had suffered the fate common to many irregular regiments in guerrilla wars of containment: scattered in numerous minor outposts, or attached to columns and larger commands. Such deployment occurred despite the reluctance of the British military command to split up the Volunteers in order to respond to specific Natal settler security concerns such as those raised by the residents of the Kranskop and Upper Tugela districts. In September, for example, a Volunteer Composite Regiment patrol was in action in this role, driving out Boers from the Nkhandla region in Zululand.⁹² On 26 September one of the regiment's posts in the Biggarsberg was involved in a skirmish that earned the regiment a commendation from General Lyttelton. In the Natal Advertiser the Boers were reported as being in 'pretty strong force',

⁹⁰ Eric A Walker, 'The Struggle for Supremacy, 1896-1902', in Walker, ed, The Cambridge History of the British Empire, VIII, p624; Pakenham, The Boer War, pp463-9; Nasson, The South African War 1899-1902, p237. The Times of 21 September 1900, during the election campaign, introduced its regular war report with the sentence: 'All signs now point to the complete collapse of any resistance in South Africa' (The Times, 21 September 1900). However, even in this 'khaki election' the result was probably not significantly influenced by the Boer platform. In fact, the Conservatives conceded nine seats (The Times, 21 to 28 September 1900, and 1 to 4 October 1900; JL Garvin, The Life of Joseph Chamberlain, III (1895-1900), London, MacMillan and Co, 1934, pp593-607; Michael Kinnear, The British Voter: An Atlas and Survey since 1885, London, Batsford Academic and Education, 1981, p26; Stephen J Lee, Aspects of British Political History, 1815-1914, London and New York, Routledge, 1994, pp210-16; and see AL Kennedy, Salisbury 1830-1903: Portrait of a Statesman, London, John Murray, 1953, pp326-7; Dennis Judd, Radical Joe: A Life of Joseph Chamberlain, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1977, pp223-5).

⁹¹ Quoted in Nasson, The South African War 1899-1902, introduction by Hew Strachan, xiii.

⁹² Natal Witness, 24 September 1901; Natal Mercury, 24 September 1901.

but of course, 'our men made a stiff stand'.⁹³

By the last quarter of 1901 it was seemingly apparent to all but the Boers that their cause was hopeless, and it was widely believed among the units serving in Natal that it was the leadership of the Republics, rather than the ordinary burgher, who was prolonging the war.⁹⁴

In mid-October 1901 the Volunteer Composite Regiment found itself in the Luneberg district in far northern Natal.⁹⁵ The operations that it participated in formed part of the British response to Botha's recent incursion. In November 1901 the 327-strong unit remained fragmented in numerous outposts.⁹⁶ It was only in December that the regiment was at last concentrated at Dundee. Here a Christmas concert was held on Friday the 13th, shortly before the regiment left for another spell of operations.⁹⁷

Hime communicated the regiment's frustration with this state of affairs in a minute to the Governor on 23 November.⁹⁸ There was further evidence of neglect of Volunteer Composite Regiment regimental interests. Commissariat facilities, for example, were crude. Troops were issued flour instead of bread, and had to experiment with improvised cowdung-fuelled ovens to produce loaves.⁹⁹

It was possibly this dissatisfaction that prompted the call in November by an anonymous member

⁹³ Natal Advertiser, 1 and 5 October 1901; and see Natal Mercury, 5 October 1901; Times of Natal, 5 October 1901.

⁹⁴ See PRO, WO 32/7880, 079/2610, W Stayt to Commandant, Durban, nd; PRO, 30/57:16, Queen Victoria to Kitchener, 11 January 1901; Natal Volunteer Record, p9.

⁹⁵ Nicholson diary, 17 and 20 October 1901.

⁹⁶ PAR, PM 25, minute paper PM 1989/1901, Disposition of VCR, Dundee, 21 November 1901, and Evans to Hime, 23 November 1901.

⁹⁷ Times of Natal, 19 December 1901; Natal Witness, 20 December 1901.

⁹⁸ PAR, PM 25, minute paper PM 1989/1901, Present Disposition of the Volunteer Composite Regiment, Hime to Governor, 23 November 1901.

⁹⁹ Nicholson diary, 17 and 22 June 1901.

of the regiment for a definite time period to be placed on Volunteer Composite Regiment service. At the time of the unit's formation in October 1900, it had not been considered that this additional service would be for more than six months at the outside. It was now a full year later.¹⁰⁰

From late November 1901 the Volunteer Composite Regiment appears to have been engaged in concerted drives in conjunction with the blockhouse lines in the far northern Natal-southern Transvaal region.¹⁰¹ The blockhouse system was a cornerstone of the British pacification strategy in South Africa during the guerrilla phase of the war. The principal blockhouse lines in northern Natal ran between Wakkerstroom, Piet Retief, Volksrust and the Swaziland border.¹⁰²

The procedure was for mounted columns to 'sweep' Boers up against the blockhouse lines, where individual blockhouses were situated between 875 yards and a mile (800 and 1600 metres) apart. JB Nicholson described one such operation in the vicinity of Amersfoort, on 29 December 1901:

¹⁰⁰ Natal Mercury, 9 November 1901. During 1901 the Natal Volunteers also lost their commander when Dartnell was given command of a column in the Free State. He was succeeded by an Imperial officer, Colonel HP Leader (PAR, Natal Civil Service List 1902, p77; Paterson, 'The Military Organisation of the Colony of Natal', p97. According to the Civil Service List, Leader was only appointed on 1 July 1902, but that may refer to the confirmation of this appointment).

¹⁰¹ Nicholson diary, 20 November and 11-12 December 1901; Sixsmith, 'Kitchener and the Guerrillas in the Boer War', p211; Magnus, Kitchener: Portrait of an Imperialist, p177; Trew, The Boer War Generals, pp116-7; Bateman, Generals of the Anglo-Boer War, pp120-122. See DW Aitken, 'Guerrilla Warfare, October 1900-May 1901: Boer Attacks on the Pretoria-Delagoa Bay Railway Line', Military History Journal, 11/6, December 2000, passim, for a general account of guerrilla warfare along the Pretoria to Delagoa Bay railway-line between October 1900 and May 1902.

¹⁰² Nicholson diary, 20-21 November and 24 December 1901; Johan Hattingh, 'The British Blockhouse System', in Fransjohan Pretorius, Scorched Earth, Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 2001, pp226-241; Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, IV, pp219-221; Surridge, 'Lord Kitchener and the South African War', p23; Smurthwaite, The Boer War 1899-1902, pp152-3; Evans, The Boer War: South Africa 1899-1902, p140. See A van Vollenhoven, 'n Eerste fase ondersoek na die Britse blokhuisstelsel van die Anglo-Boereoorlog (1899-1902) in die Transvaal (Zuid-Afrikaanse Republiek)', South African Journal of Cultural History, 14/2, November 2000, passim; and David Buttery, 'A Toff's Life in the Blockhouse', Soldiers of the Queen, 103, December 2000, passim, for details on the blockhouse system.

'As soon as we saw the move commence we at once moved off at full gallop across the spruit and made for a point a little to the left of the leading squadron of VMR [the Victoria Mounted Rifles, not one of the antecedent regiments of the NMR, but an Australian irregular unit] which had left us shortly before. This was to ensure against any Boers who might pass the VMR. An armoured-train was also working along the line near Paardekop and Kopje Alien. Meanwhile the Boers, seeing the leading squadron fast approaching and the supports coming up fast, made a double back and endeavoured to pass between Spens and the railway line beyond Platrand.

On the left we moved very fast and our support of Vics kept up very well. We soon got to the ridge next to the railway line, and here we halted awaiting developments. Some of the Vics nearer Kopje Alien had the big gun from that place fired at them as they were mistaken for Boers by the garrison.

Colonel Spens's men were too quick for the majority of the enemy and cut about thirty of them off, a few managed to pass between the railway and his men before the latter had got up to their place. The thirty, seeing their back door shut up by Pulteney's men and seeing no way out of it, gave up and surrendered to Colonel Spens and a few of them surrendered to the blockhouses, but we had no luck. Still we had the satisfaction of having been the means of getting about thirty of the enemy captured.¹⁰³

The country was too big and there were too few troops to spare from garrison and guard duties for the sweeps to be generally effective.¹⁰⁴ Also, thanks to the demobilization of regiments such as those of the Natal Volunteers, the quality of troops in the field was relatively poor.¹⁰⁵ In January 1902 Boer patrols, both sizeable and active, demonstrated that the depleted commandos were still capable of making life difficult for the Volunteer Composite Regiment and other 'occupation troops' in northern Natal. On 10 January, for example, a patrol in the Nqutu-St Augustine Mission-Rorke's Drift area of Zululand was ambushed. One man was wounded and five were taken prisoner.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Nicholson diary, 29 December 1901. See Evans, *The Boer War*, pp143-6; and Nasson, *The South African War 1899-1902*, pp211-12, for summaries of the blockhouse-and-column sweep system in operation.

¹⁰⁴ Surridge, 'Lord Kitchener and the South African War', p23.

¹⁰⁵ Anglesey, *A History of the British Cavalry*, IV, p223.

¹⁰⁶ Bizley diary, 10 January 1902; Nicholson diary, 10 January 1902; and see Ds EC Anderssen, *Die Verlede Herleef: Herinnerings uit die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog*, Johannesburg, Voortrekker Pers, 1943, p67.

The Death of Colonel Evans and Concluding Operations

'Regret to report Col Evans killed, Major Blunt wounded in the stomach, and Sergt Banwell wounded, in a night raid on the farm, Langellegen 704, near Vryheid, last night. This raid was made by the VCR, who captured three Boers.'¹⁰⁷

For the Natal Volunteer force the most prominent incident during the final months of the war occurred on the night of 19-20 February 1902, when the Commanding Officer of the Volunteer Composite Regiment, Lieutenant-Colonel Evans (Natal Mounted Rifles), was killed near Vryheid while accepting the surrender of a group of burghers. Also killed in the incident was Major RB Blunt, Lancashire Fusiliers, Chief Staff Officer, Dundee sub-district.¹⁰⁸

At about 3am on 20 February Colonel Evans's party of 90 men from the Volunteer Composite Regiment, and ten men of the South Lancashire Mounted Infantry, closed on a house sheltering several burghers. Picquets were dropped off along the road, until only a single troop was left with Colonel Evans and Blunt. They dismounted about a mile from the house, and the remaining 18 men moved in on foot.¹⁰⁹ According to a sergeant of the Volunteer Composite Regiment, the trapped Boers, once they had found themselves surrounded, indicated their wish to surrender:

'Believing and trusting this, he [Evans] went up to the door with Major Blunt to accept their surrender. Finding the door was closed, he knocked at it, and in response to his knock received a bullet through his head, and fell dead, a second bullet found its way through the stomach of Major Blunt, who fell mortally wounded.'¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Blomfield to Lyttelton, 20 February 1902, quoted in the Natal Witness, 22 February 1902.

¹⁰⁸ PAR, MJPW 92, minute paper L&W 1339/1902, The Late Colonel Evans, Smallie Report, 22 February 1902, and Adams Report, 23 February 1902; Nicholson diary, 20 February 1902.

¹⁰⁹ Nicholson diary, 20 February 1902; Natal Witness, 6 March 1902.

¹¹⁰ Natal Mercury, 10 March 1902.

Blunt died later of his wound in Dundee.¹¹¹

The Boers argued that Evans was killed in error, mistaken for a prowler.¹¹² The Volunteer Composite Regiment were not so charitable, and saw the killing of their Commanding Officer as a deliberate and murderous act. After the incident the burghers in the house were fortunate to survive to be taken prisoners-of-war.¹¹³ Nicholson suggests that the Boers could be thankful for the fact that the deaths of Evans and Blunt were only discovered after the shooting was over: 'Had our men known of their loss early they would no doubt have shot the prisoners off hand. But of course after the excitement is over there are few men who can shoot a man in cold blood.'¹¹⁴

A joint funeral service for Evans and Blunt was held in Dundee on the afternoon of the 21st, but Evans was buried in Durban.¹¹⁵ Evans was succeeded as Commanding Officer of the Volunteer Composite Regiment by Major Bede Crompton of the Natal Carbineers.¹¹⁶ In late April it was announced that Lieutenant-Colonel HT Bru-de-Wold had succeeded to the command of the Natal Volunteer Brigade which incorporated the Volunteer Composite Regiment.¹¹⁷

An inquiry was convened in Dundee on 24 February to investigate the conduct of a four-man

¹¹¹ PAR, MJPW 92, minute paper, The late Colonel Evans, Smallie Report, 22 February 1902; Lucas Meijer Museum, Vryheid, Martens Report (the death of Colonel Evans and Major Blunt, 20 February 1902), passim; Nicholson diary, 20 February 1902; Goetzsche, Rough But Ready: An Official History of the Natal Mounted Rifles, pp72-4.

¹¹² Anderssen, Die Verlede Herleef, pp73-4.

¹¹³ PAR, MJPW 92, L&W 1339/1902, minute paper, The late Colonel Evans, Smallie Report, 22 February 1902; Natal Mercury, 10 March 1902.

¹¹⁴ Nicholson diary, 20 February 1902.

¹¹⁵ PAR, MJPW 92, minute paper L&W 1339/1902, The Late Colonel Evans, Order of Funeral Proclamation, Evans and Blunt, 21 February 1902.

¹¹⁶ Natal Witness, 30 April 1902. Crompton was a member of another notable Natal pioneer settler family, and one of the founding families in the Pinetown district (See PAR, A1636, Crompton Papers, passim; Bob O'Keefe (ed), Pioneer's Progress: Early Natal, Hillcrest, Hilltop, 1988, p42; Spencer, British Settlers, 5, pp24-30).

¹¹⁷ Natal Witness, 30 April 1902.

picquet that had fled in panic from a post near the Boer house when the firing broke out which had claimed the life of Evans. The picquet had itself narrowly avoided being gunned down by a horse-guard. The result of the inquiry was inconclusive.¹¹⁸ Generally, in the Dundee and Vryheid districts the death of Evans unleashed strong reprisals by the British-colonial forces, and hardened the stance of both McKenzie and Blomfield towards the implementation of the scorched-earth policy.¹¹⁹

The Evans incident illustrated the lack of concerted activity and focus for the Volunteer Composite Regiment during these final months. This inertia prevailed despite the resurgent Boer activity which caused the blockhouse system to be steadily expanded during early 1902.¹²⁰ It was apparent, though, that this was not the glorious warfare that the culture of the British Army was built on:

'The operations of your columns appear to bring in a neat amount of stores and cattle [wrote Broderick, the Secretary of State for War, to Kitchener] and must surely quicken the wearing down process. It is very trying and I fear you must be heartily sick of it.'¹²¹

Kitchener agreed:

'There is no doubt these flying columns, on extended operations in this vast country, only in great measure beat the air, as the mobile Boers clear off the moment they hear of columns being sometimes 20 miles [32 kilometres] away.'¹²²

In the ranks of the Volunteer Composite Regiment the regiment's inactivity had a detrimental effect

¹¹⁸ Nicholson diary, 20 and 24 February 1902.

¹¹⁹ 'War in the Biggarsberg', pp33-4.

¹²⁰ PRO, 30/57/22, Kitchener Papers, Y80, Kitchener to Broderick, 23 August 1901; Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Fuller Papers, N/3, Fuller to father, 12 September 1901 and 24 January 1902; PRO, WO 108/130,295,347, Blockhouse Progress Reports; Nicholson diary, 3, 10 and 14 February, 20 and 22 April 1902; *The Times*, 24 January 1900 and 25 December 1901; and see Lee, *To the Bitter End*, pp155-160; Anthony Baker, *Battles and Battlefields of the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*, London, The Military Press, 1999, p240.

¹²¹ PRO, 30/57/22, Kitchener Papers, Y52a, Broderick to Kitchener, 4 May 1901.

¹²² PRO, 30/57/22, Kitchener Papers, Y69, Kitchener to Broderick, 5 July 1901.

on morale, manifested in the efforts of some members of the regiment to evade their service commitments. To this end there existed a recognised system of 'substitution'.¹²³ In the Natal Witness of 18 January 1902 one HR Simen placed an 'advert' for a substitute in the regiment, with pay of 9/-per day.¹²⁴ Those with a stronger sense of duty found novel ways of passing the time. Nicholson, for example, became an expert in tennis while stationed at Vant's Drift during late April and May, and also perfected his target-shooting.¹²⁵

It was possible that it was such evidence of a negative attitude towards military service, following the flood of discontent during 1900 and 1901 over the extension of Natal Volunteer active service, that prompted scathing criticism of Natal colonists from a wounded New Zealander laid up in a local hospital. On landing in Natal he had expected to be met by 'regiments of Natal farmers'. Instead, he commented:

'I began to believe that there were no able-bodied Natalians, or that they had all been killed, but I have seen such crowds of fit men, who, on enquiry, I find have never raised a finger during the war in defence of their country, but have used their brains in planning money-making and their hands in shovelling in their gains. The New Zealanders, Canadians, and Australians did not come out here as the mercenary, to fight for stay-at-home people.'¹²⁶

Of course, these adverse comments may be unfair, probably coming some time after the conclusion of the major local colonial effort. However, considering Volunteer service to that date, and the brittle Natal resolve concerning the war, the New Zealander's comment was uncomfortably close to the truth. The Natal press reacted angrily, and the Natal Witness countered that 'Natal needs no vindication of her loyalty'.¹²⁷ The newspaper stressed a point that could easily be overlooked in an assessment based purely on the numbers of Volunteers: in addition to men under arms, Natal contributed to various support services in such areas as transport, especially the Natal Government

¹²³ Nicholson diary, 19 November 1901.

¹²⁴ Natal Witness, 18 January 1902.

¹²⁵ Nicholson diary, 29 April, 11, 16 and 21 May 1902.

¹²⁶ Natal Witness, 12 March 1902.

¹²⁷ Natal Witness, 25 March 1902.

Railway and the colonial Public Works Department. (See pages 58-60.)¹²⁸

There was excitement at De Jager's Drift near Dundee during April 1902 when, during one of Kitchener's sporadic attempts to secure an armistice,¹²⁹ Commandant-General Botha came in from Vryheid District to take a train to attend peace negotiations being hosted at Klerksdorp by General Schalk Burger.¹³⁰ Botha was held in high regard in Natal, having been born at Greytown in Umvoti County on 27 September 1862 and, having lived in the district until 1867.¹³¹ It was apparent in 1902 that, despite the war, he was held in some awe in this corner of northern Natal.¹³² Botha returned to De Jager's Drift on the 19th to discuss the proposed peace terms with his burghers.¹³³ A month later, on about 23 May, with peace not far off, the Boers in the Vryheid district received instructions to cease aggressive operations.¹³⁴

¹²⁸ Natal Witness, 25 March 1902, and see Hamish Paterson and Mark Levin, Through Desert, Veld and Mud: 100 Years of 15 Maintenance Unit, Durban, 15 Maintenance Unit, 2002, pp7-9 and 21. The New Zealander's tirade was doubly unfair when it is considered that overseas dominion contingents were themselves only enlisted for a period of 12 months (Hall, The New Zealanders in South Africa, pp8-9).

¹²⁹ Magnus, Kitchener: Portrait of an Imperialist, pp183-5 and 188-9; Wheeler, The Story of Lord Kitchener, pp198-201.

¹³⁰ See Scholtz, 'Die Betrekkinge tussen die Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek en die Oranje Vrystaat', pp153-160; JD Kestall and DE van Velden, Die Vredesonderhandelinge, 1909: reprint, Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1982, pp27-8; Surridge, Managing the South African War, chapter 8, passim; Headlam (ed), The Milner Papers: South Africa 1899-1905, pp207-225 and chapter 9.

¹³¹ Buxton, Earl, General Botha, London, John Murray, 1924, p2; Johannes Meintjies, General Louis Botha: A Biography, London, Cassell, 1970, p2; Dictionary of South African Biography, IV, p41. In 1887 he moved to the Vryheid district in what was then the New Republic until absorbed by the Transvaal, where he built up an extensive farming enterprise, and in 1897 he was elected to the Transvaal Volksraad for Vryheid (FV Engelenburg, General Louis Botha, Pretoria, JL van Schaik, 1929, pp33-7; Meintjies, General Louis Botha, pp13 and 15).

¹³² Nicholson diary, 6 April 1902.

¹³³ Nicholson diary, 19 April 1902.

¹³⁴ Nicholson diary, 23 May 1902.

Disbandment

The Volunteer Composite Regiment was disbanded, from its base in Dundee, at the end of July 1902.¹³⁵ In the period between the conclusion of peace on 31 May and the end of June considerable agitation had arisen regarding the disbandment of the regiment. Although it was considered in some quarters to be ultra vires to retain the Volunteer Composite Regiment in the field beyond the duration of hostilities, as prescribed in the terms of its establishment, the Commanding Officer, Major Crompton, reminded Natal government officials that 'the members of the Force signed an undertaking to serve with the Military Authorities for as long as their services might be required'.¹³⁶ To this end, 200 Volunteer Composite Regiment troops, drawn from posts at Nqutu, Vant's Drift, De Jager's Drift, Laffnie's Drift, Malungeni and De Waal's Farm, were despatched to Vryheid on 15 June to join a column to police possible friction between Africans and Boers.¹³⁷ This measure was a precautionary reaction following the Holkrans incident on the night of 5-6 May 1902, when an impi of the abaQulusi attacked the encampment of Veldkornet JA Potgieter in retaliation for a Boer strategy of intimidation against Africans in the district.¹³⁸

The Volunteer Composite Regiment was replaced in the field by the Natal Border Police, which arrived in Dundee on 15 July.¹³⁹ The Natal Border Police, drawn from the Utrecht and Vryheid Mounted Police which policed the former Transvaal districts of Vryheid and Utrecht from November 1900 to September 1901, was intended to maintain the security of the Colony's still

¹³⁵ PAR, NCP 8/2/2, Departmental Reports 1902, Commandant of Volunteers, p18; also see Nicholson diary, 8 and 24 July 1902. Recruiting for the numerous 'temporary' irregular regiments had ceased by 4 June (Times of Natal, 4 June 1902).

¹³⁶ PAR, MJPW 94, Secretary for Native Affairs to Governor, 4 July 1902, enclosure in minute paper L&W 3422/1902.

¹³⁷ PAR, MJPW 94, telegram, OC VCR to CSO Volunteers, 16 June 1902, enclosure in minute paper L&W 3422/1902, 20 June 1902; PAR, MJPW 94, Captain FS Reeves to Staff Officer, Pietermaritzburg, p2, enclosure in minute paper L&W 3422/1902, 20 June 1902.

¹³⁸ For the context of the embittered relations between Africans and Boers in the Vryheid district, see Laband, 'Zulus and the War', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, pp122-4.

¹³⁹ Natal Witness, 18 July 1902.

unstable northern border until the formal annexation of the region to Natal in 1902.¹⁴⁰

On Monday evening, 21 July, a farewell concert for the Volunteer Composite regiment was held in the Masonic Hall, Dundee, and on the 25th a message of appreciation from the Governor, Sir Henry McCallum, was read out at a farewell regimental dinner in the town. Its content and tone followed similar official messages to the Natal Volunteers in March and October 1900.¹⁴¹

Another 'temporary' regiment raised during the latter stages of the war, in February and March 1902, was the Natal Mounted Infantry (NMI). Like the Volunteer Composite Regiment during this period, the new regiment had also performed the duties of an occupying force. Initially known as the 2nd Natal Volunteer Composite Regiment, and based in Newcastle, it was also disbanded towards the end of June 1902. Like the Volunteer Composite Regiment, it appears to have suffered a similar slow death through neglect as the war stuttered to a conclusion.¹⁴² On 18 June its Commanding Officer, Colonel Friend Addison, formerly of the Natal Mounted Rifles and the Colonial Scouts (see pages 132-3), complained to the Natal government of the frustrations of insufficient mounts for the training of recruits. He probably echoed the pleas of many an irregular commanding officer, who felt that logistical and staff inefficiency and indecision were causing the war to pass his unit by, when he asked to be either properly equipped or disbanded. He got his answer: his regiment was summarily dissolved.¹⁴³

The disbandment of the Volunteer Composite Regiment was largely completed by 9 August

¹⁴⁰ Tylden, The Armed Forces of South Africa, pp203-4 and 118.

¹⁴¹ PAR, CSO 1709, minute paper 5901/1902, memorandum, Governor McCallum, 25 July 1902; and see Natal Witness, 30 July 1902.

¹⁴² Paterson, 'The Military Organisation of the Colony of Natal', p98; Tylden, The Armed Forces of South Africa, p122.

¹⁴³ PAR, PM 29, Friend Addison to Moor, 18 June 1902; Moor to Addison, telegram, 21 June 1902; and see Nicholson diary, 20 April 1902; Hurst, Short History of the Volunteer Regiments of Natal and East Griqualand, p126.

1902.¹⁴⁴ Following the disbandment, one Volunteer, EW Barter, a civil servant with the Registrar of the Supreme Court, found it difficult to regain his position after an absence of nearly three years. In August 1902 he wrote to the Colonial Secretary:

'I have the honour to report that I returned to Maritzburg on the disbandment of my regiment, the Natal Volunteer Composite Regiment, after two years and ten months continuous active service with the Volunteer Force of this Colony...

I have been a member of the Natal Carbineers since July '87 and proceeded to the front with that Corps on 29th Sept '99, and at the time was a second-class clerk in the Registrar's Office, Supreme Court, and the senior clerk in that office.

It is reasonable to suppose that had I not been on active service for the defence of the Colony, I should have been almost the senior 2nd class clerk on the roll, not taking into account any promotion I may have had during the period I have been on active service.

Hostilities now having ceased I am desirous of resuming an occupation in the Civil Service, and if an opening be available in the Volunteer Department, would like to enter that branch as my experiences gained during the late war, raising from the rank of Squadron Sergeant-Major in the Natal Carbineers to that of Captain in the Natal Volunteer Composite Regiment, which latter rank I held on disbandment have given me a general insight into military work generally.¹⁴⁵

The Natal Civil Service Board supported Barter's application, and he duly secured a temporary position in the Volunteer Department, and a salary of £382.¹⁴⁶ Although Barter's case hints that the reintegration of the approximately 300 Volunteer Composite Regiment Volunteers into civilian life after extended absence may have presented difficulties for the Colony, there is no further evidence that this was the case.

The most significant indication that the long war was finally at an end was the lifting, on 4 October

¹⁴⁴ Natal Witness, 9 August 1902.

¹⁴⁵ PAR, CSO 1710, minute paper 6057/1902, Barter to Colonial Secretary, 22 August 1902.

¹⁴⁶ PAR, CSO 1710, minute paper 6057/1902, Civil Service Bill, 3 September 1902.

1902, after nearly three years, of martial law in the Colony, with certain reservations.¹⁴⁷ According to the Natal Witness,

'the people of this Colony have accepted the incubus in the right spirit, and have submitted themselves to the operations of military government as cheerfully as they took up the task of defending this outlying portion of the Empire against the enemy that had attacked it.'¹⁴⁸

Conclusion

During 1901 and 1902, a period of fragmented and diminishing military operations in northern Natal, the Natal Volunteers, mainly in the form of the Volunteer Composite Regiment, were maintained in the field at low force levels in the context of a greater overall need for irregular forces to counter the Boer guerrilla operations. Settler interest in security issues relating to the continued Boer activity in the region was dulled, typified by Colonel Evans's lecture to the Dundee community in June 1901 about the need for continued vigilance. Flagging settler commitment to the war was evident in the muted response in the Colony to the crisis posed by the incursion of Boer raiders in September-October 1901. The limited awareness by colonists of the war as an important public issue was also evident in the marginal part that the conflict and the Natal Volunteers played in the Legislative Assembly elections of 1901, with the exception of the continued evidence that in the Umvoti District the loyalty of Afrikaner colonists remained under suspicion.

On the level of active service the Volunteer Composite Regiment did perform satisfactorily, albeit without spectacular impact. Operations consisted of participation in cordon-and-sweep operations in conjunction with the blockhouse system, and the implementation of the scorched-earth policy in the rural districts of northern Natal. The long-term consequences of this particular duty will be considered in the overall conclusion. During the course of these operations the Volunteer Composite Regiment was split up into small contingents, a strategy that the British Army had consistently refused to condone previously when it was called for by Natal in the interests of settler

¹⁴⁷ Natal Witness, 6 October 1902.

¹⁴⁸ Natal Witness, 6 October 1902.

security.

As far as the active service performed by the comparatively few Volunteers remaining in the field, mostly in the Volunteer Composite Regiment, in the latter phases of the war is concerned, their low profile role did nothing to revive depleted Natal interest in the war, and in the performance of its military force. However, in the course of the decade following the concluding of peace, the Colony was successfully to generate an image of wholehearted commitment to the war effort that was to belie the damp note upon which it was actually concluded.

CHAPTER XIII

MEMORY AND REMEMBRANCE OF NATAL VOLUNTEER SERVICE IN THE ANGLO-BOER WAR

**'He is only a Carbineer, they said,
As gently they lifted his bleeding head;
But he was a mother's pride and joy,
In her home she thought of her soldier boy.'**¹

Hindsight and Embellishment

In the words of Dave Russell, this final chapter seeks to 'explore cultural forms as an aid to examining relations between the military and society'.² Here the concept is applied to the mobilization of the Natal Volunteer forces during the Anglo-Boer War, as well as the recollection during and after the war of their experience by the settler community and government of the Colony of Natal, who saw themselves as loyal subjects of the Empire.

There is a stimulating emerging literature on the debate surrounding the nature of collective (or social) memory and remembrance, with particular reference to memorials of commemoration.³

¹ By 'Poppy, a child of 13 years', original source unknown, newspaper cutting enclosed in Natal Carbineers History Centre, Anglo-Boer War file.

² Dave Russell, "'We carved our way to glory': The British soldier in music hall song and sketch, c1880-1914', in John M MacKenzie (ed), Popular Imperialism and the Military 1850-1950, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1992, p50.

³ For example, see Connerton, How Societies Remember, passim; Adrian Forty and Susanne Küchler (eds), The Art of Forgetting: Materializing Culture, Oxford and New York, Berg, 1999; and Paula M Krebs, Gender, Race and the Writing of Empire: Public Discourse and the Boer War (Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999. In this chapter the word 'memorial' rather than 'monument' has been used to describe physical structures such as the Volunteer War Memorial in the Court Gardens, Pietermaritzburg. However, for the lay reader the distinctions between the two in terms of definition is confusing. According to the Reader's Digest Universal Dictionary, a memorial is a vaguely defined 'something', including a monument or designated
(continued...)

This collective memory debate centres on the issue of whether it is 'embodied acts, rituals and normative social behaviour', or material objects, as enunciated in the Western tradition of memory since the Renaissance, that stimulate and perpetuate human memory.⁴

The attention of historians of the Anglo-Boer War has usually been focussed on the causes and military conduct of the war, and although the experience of British soldiers, Dutch-speaking South Africans, and Africans has received recent attention, the experience of the war by Natal's settler community of British heritage has not yet been discussed in a comprehensive manner.⁵

The Colony's contribution to the war effort was modest, but the settler community successfully exaggerated its military contribution through the promotion of a heightened collective memory. The ruling elite in settler Natal therefore sought to control historical memory - especially visible memory such as memorials - as part of a reinforcement and promotion of authority.⁶ The control of memory in turn promotes what Joanna Bourke calls 'selective recitals of the past'.⁷ In the process, the cracks in Natal's solidarity with the Empire evident in the reluctance of the Colony to embrace the war, and the vacillation of the support for its conduct, were repaired and Imperial sentiment even enhanced, and the culture of Empire shored up.⁸

³(...continued)

day, 'designed or established to serve as a remembrance of a person or event' (p963), while a monument is specifically a structure 'erected as a memorial' (p1002).

⁴ Forty and Küchler (eds), The Art of Forgetting, p2; Connerton, How Societies Remember, chapters 1 and 2.

⁵ Several examples of the existing literature in this field include Gooch (ed), The Boer War, Part Two; Lowry (ed), The South African War Reappraised, chapters 6 to 8; Pretorius, Life on Commando During the Anglo-Boer War; and Warwick, Black People and the South African War.

⁶ Harvey J Kaye, 'Why do Ruling Classes Fear History', Theoria, 86/October 1995, pp65-6; and see Connerton, How Societies Remember, pp3 and 6-7; Joanna Bourke, The Second World War: A People's History, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, p217.

⁷ Bourke, The Second World War: A People's History, p218, and see p219.

⁸ John M MacKenzie, 'Heroic myths of empire', in MacKenzie (ed), Popular Imperialism and the Military, pp109-135; John Lennon and Malcolm Foley, Dark Tourism: The Attraction
(continued...)

The commitment to commemorate in tangible form the military effort of the Colony was not a phenomenon unique to settler Natal and the Anglo-Boer War. James Belich has written of the same phenomenon in the context of New Zealand colonial wars, and makes the pertinent comment that 'the history of warfare is the history not just of what happened but of what people thought happened'.⁹ Keith Jeffery's study of the Irish experience during World War I is a particularly incisive entry in the literature on the commemoration of military events. For Ireland, the war effort in 1914-18 was dogged by political schism, as was the Anglo-Boer War in Natal, where the flawed military effort was given a make over of apparent undiluted commitment and subsequent apparent sacrifice.¹⁰

In Natal individual and collective memory of the Anglo-Boer War was manifested in various forms.

Photographs and Sketches

Firstly, on a specific military level, the record of individual Volunteers in the field is considered in the form of the sketches and photographic record of several members of the Natal Carbineers. This record was essential in preserving the actual and unadorned aspects of military service. The mediums of photography and the sketch-artist have been selected to illustrate Volunteer life in the field through the rich visual chronicles kept by several troopers of the Natal Carbineers. As far as photography was concerned, the invention of celluloid film by the 1890s and other technical advances, such as the shortening of exposure times, enabled cameras to be made sufficiently portable to be taken into the field by ordinary soldiers such as those in the Natal Volunteers.¹¹

⁸(...continued)

of Death and Disaster, London and New York, Continuum, 2000, pp67-9.

⁹ John M MacKenzie, 'Introduction: Popular imperialism and the military', in MacKenzie (ed), Popular Imperialism and the Military, p9.

¹⁰ See Jeffery, Ireland and the Great War, pp107-143.

¹¹ Haythornwaite, The Colonial Wars Source Book, p352; and see Laband and Knight, The War Correspondents: The Anglo-Zulu War, xvi-xvii; Barker, A Concise Dictionary of the Boer War, p94; Jonathan Marwil, 'Photography at War', History Today, June 2000, pp33-4.

Military and popular illustrated magazines adopted the new medium, and included the colonial military forces in their promotion of Imperial martial duty.¹² Photo-mechanical reproduction of photography made this possible, and had done away with the need for artist and engraver.

While these Volunteer photographers could select their subjects, they were compiling private records, and unlike the professional photographer or the military artist, working for popular illustrated magazines such as the Graphic, were not subject to the formal and heroic - and highly impressionistic - style of military illustration prevalent in this media.¹³ The visual record of the Volunteers was thus marked by an authentic realism in the depiction of military life.¹⁴ In contrast, sketches by British officers in the field, supplied to the English illustrated weeklies, were often enhanced and modified by a staff artist, distorting their authenticity in conforming with the conventions described above.¹⁵

Nevertheless, the Volunteer photographic record was not necessarily a passive one, but rather an agent in the reconstruction and interpretation of the Anglo-Boer War experience of English settler Natal. The photographs therefore constitute a reference as important and abundant as the textual

¹² See, for example, Robinson (ed), Navy and Army Illustrated, IX, pp92,93,155,179,256 and 448, X, pp221 and 375; Black and White Budget, I/II, pp10 and 22, III, pp155 and 315; Wilson, With the Flag to Pretoria, I, p35, II, pp477,496 and 501; Pat Hodgson, Early War Photographs, London, Osprey Publishing Ltd, 1974, pp28-9, and pp132-8, for formal photographs taken at Ladysmith and Colenso in October and November 1899 by Horace Nicholls, a professional photographer from Johannesburg. In the words of Jonathan Marwil, it was 'celebrated as a truth-telling technology, practised as a fine art' (Marwil, 'Photography at War', p31).

¹³ See Pat Hodgson, The War Illustrators, London, Osprey Publishing Ltd, 1977, passim. Also see Haythornwaite, The Colonial Wars Source Book, pp334 and 347-352; Roger T Stearn, 'Richard Caton Woodville, 1856-1927', Soldiers of the Queen, 97/June 1999, passim; Roger T Stearn, 'Boer War Image-maker: Richard Caton Woodville', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, pp213-223; Marwil, 'Photography at War', pp30-1; Laband and Knight, The War Correspondents: The Anglo-Zulu War, v-xix. Jeffery has also examined the nature of the Irish cultural response to World War I in the form of art, literature and music (Jeffery, Ireland and the Great War, pp69-106).

¹⁴ Marwil, 'Photography at War', p35.

¹⁵ Harrington, 'Pictorial Journalism and the Boer War: The London Illustrated Weeklies', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, pp237 and 239.

record.¹⁶

Three of the four photographers and sketch-artists represented in this thesis, Dacre Shaw, Henry Bizley, and John Nicholson, also kept candid and detailed diaries that are central to an understanding of the environment of the Natal Volunteer on campaign, as well as a representative sample of individual attitudes and conduct in the Volunteer war effort. The works were especially important for a localised Natal record of the war because, from late 1900, with the advent of the guerrilla war, the British illustrated press lost interest in the region.¹⁷ The work of the fourth photographer, William Harte, was of a higher professional standard, and the range and meticulous documentation of his photographs suggests that he alone of this group sought to create a visual archive and therefore probably exercised greater selection than the others. He was, for example, present in the siege of Ladysmith, but did not record the ravages of disease and death.¹⁸

The three photographers and one sketch-artist, Shaw, occupied a typical variety of positions in settler society. Bizley worked as a grocer in Pietermaritzburg. The Nicholson family, pioneer settler farmers of Richmond and Underberg, emigrated from Yorkshire in 1850.¹⁹ Legally-trained Dacre Ashe Shaw DCM practiced law in Pietermaritzburg and Kenya after the Anglo-Boer War, and was a respected member of the colonial community.²⁰ William Harte had been a stolid and

¹⁶ See Patricia Hayes, Jeremy Silvester and Wolfram Hartmann, 'Photography, history and memory', in Wolfram Hartmann, Jeremy Silvester and Patricia Hayes (eds), The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History, Cape Town, University of Cape Town Press, 1998, pp2-3; and see Brent Harris, 'Photography in colonial discourse: the making of "the other" in southern Africa, c1850-1950', in Hartmann et al (eds), The Colonising Camera, p20.

¹⁷ Harrington, 'Pictorial Journalism and the Boer War: The London Illustrated Weeklies', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, p240.

¹⁸ Marwil, 'Photography at War', pp32 and 34.

¹⁹ Himeville Museum, 'Nicholson Family Tree', pp6-10; JM Nicholson (ed), 'A Journal Written by Harriet Nicholson, 20 April to 28 July 1850', passim.

²⁰ Natal Carbineers History Centre, His Majesty's Supreme Court of Kenya at Nairobi, Record of Proceedings in Court No.1, 4 October 1950, enclosure in Dacre Shaw, 'Trooper, Natal Carbineers'; The Natal Who's Who, p176.

meticulous civil servant with the city government of Pietermaritzburg since 1889.²¹

Volunteer Funeral and Burial Rites

The second indication of collective memory was an implicit one, and it is appropriately one with its genesis in Natal, namely the manner in which Volunteer fatalities, both those of notable military and settler rank, as well as those of more modest military and civilian status, were laid to rest. In late Victorian Britain the manner in which the dead were interred, and remembered by their societies of origin in the form of funeral rituals and memorials, became a measure of respectability to be aspired to.²²

The dedication to formal funeral practice was reflected in Natal in the funeral in Pietermaritzburg of Colonel William Royston, who died on 6 April 1900 of enteric contracted during the siege of Ladysmith. Royston served as Commanding Officer of the Natal Carbineers from August 1881 to October 1889, when he was appointed Commandant of Volunteers.²³ He was fondly remembered in Natal colonial circles,²⁴ and also made a favourable impression on the higher command of the British Army.²⁵ The ceremony was an impressive one, and the city came to a virtual standstill.²⁶ He was buried with full military honours in the British military cemetery at Fort

²¹ Natal Carbineers History Centre, WHF Harte Papers, *passim*.

²² James Stevens Curl, The Victorian Celebration of Death, London, David & Charles, 1972, pp19,20-1 and 57.

²³ PAR, NCP 9/3, Natal Civil Service List 1899, pp72 and 189; Natal Mercury, 9 April 1900.

²⁴ PAR, MJPW 94, minute paper L&W 2832/1902, volume 1461/1902, Commandant of Volunteers to Minister of Lands and Works, 29 April 1902; and see Lugg, A Natal Family Looks Back, pp81-2.

²⁵ PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Camps, Orderbooks, Roberts to Hime, in Volunteer Camp Orders, Highlands, 19 April 1900. His siege commander, Sir George White, also thought highly of him (NAR, Leyds 1043, CD 458, White to Chief-of-Staff, 23 March 1900, p28; and see Natal Witness, 11 March 1901).

²⁶ Natal Witness, 9 April 1900; Times of Natal, 7 and 9 April 1900.

Napier.²⁷

Flags on public buildings in Natal were flown at half-mast,²⁸ and on 9 April a motion of appreciation for Royston was passed by the Natal Parliament, and a message of condolence to Mrs Royston was received from Queen Victoria, via Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson.²⁹ Royston gave his name to a Volunteer memorial shooting challenge trophy for inter-regimental competition, the Royston Memorial, first competed for in 1904.³⁰ His home in Pietermaritzburg, 'Mountain Rise', gave its name to one of the suburbs of the city where the principal thoroughfare still bears his name.³¹

When Lieutenant-Colonel RW Evans of the Natal Mounted Rifles was killed on 20 February 1902 while in command of the Volunteer Composite Regiment, his home town of Durban matched Pietermaritzburg's reaction to Royston's death in the tribute shown to him. His funeral was described as 'the most imposing military internment that has ever taken place in Durban'.³² Evans's status in Durban civil and military circles was on a par with that of Royston in the capital and the Natal midlands. His family were leading Durban merchants and landowners. Evans also has two streets in Durban, Evans Road and Winter Avenue, named after him.³³ Messages of condolence included one from the Executive Council of Natal, and from General Lyttelton, the British GOC

²⁷ Natal Mercury, 9 April 1900.

²⁸ PAR, NDR 2/8, Natal Volunteer Camps, Orderbooks, Highlands, 13 April 1900; Natal Witness, 9 April 1900.

²⁹ Natal Witness, 13 April and 10 May 1900.

³⁰ See Natal Museum Library, Natal Rifle Association Minutes, 5 July 1901; Times of Natal, 11 July 1900; Coghlan, Pro Patria, pp184-5.

³¹ Natal Mercury, 9 April 1900. See pages 215-16 for the more modest, but solid settler record boasted by Major CE Taunton, also of the Carbineers, killed on 3 November 1899 near Ladysmith. Taunton also gave his name to a street in Pietermaritzburg.

³² Natal Witness, 24 February 1902.

³³ Natal Mercury, 15 August 1901; Natal Witness, 21 February 1902; Spencer, British Settlers in Natal, 6, pp50-54; David Dick, Who's Who in Durban Street Names, Durban and Scotland, Clerkington Publishing Co, 1998, p234.

in Natal at the time of his death.³⁴

Major Charles Edmund Taunton of the Natal Carbineers, the only Volunteer officer to fall in action during the war, who had been killed near Ladysmith on 3 November 1899, was another prominent Volunteer casualty to be publicly commemorated by the settler community.³⁵

However, public concern in Natal was not reserved exclusively for Volunteer officers and for the Colonial elite. This was evidenced by the concern shown - albeit on a personal rather than official or political level - for the family of Corporal Peter Comrie of the Natal Carbineers after Comrie was killed at Scheeper's Nek on 14 December 1900 (See pages 336-7.) Volunteer concern for the deaths of the ordinary soldier from among the settler ranks was also apparent in the record of several formal burials on active service. On 16 December 1899, the day after the battle of Colenso, the three Carbineer fatalities from that battle were buried at a site three miles (4.8 kilometres) from Chieveley, in a ceremony conducted by the Bishop of Natal, Hamilton Baynes. To confirm the personal association that often existed between members of the Volunteer force, and between these men and the settler community, Bishop Baynes was a personal friend of one of the fallen, Trooper Bernard Warren, who hailed from New Hanover near Greytown.³⁶

Natal Carbineer diarist JB Nicholson left a poignant account of the last respects paid to a Volunteer killed in action when he recorded the burial of Comrie and another fatality, GM McKellar:

'We dug one grave, as there were only two spades and the ground was hard and stony, for

³⁴ PAR, CSO 1698, minute paper 1518/1902, Executive Council Minutes, 21 February 1902; Times of Natal, 21 and 24 February 1902; and see Natal Witness, 24 February 1902.

³⁵ Extracts from Notes taken on the Boer Campaign, 3 and 4 November 1899; Natal Mercury, 8 November 1899; Natal Witness, 10 November and 8 December 1899 and 31 January 1900; Times of Natal, 21 November and 8 December 1899; Watkins-Pitchford, Besieged in Ladysmith, p21; Brookes and Webb, A History of Natal, pp190-3; Coghlan, Pro Patria, p10; Pearse, Joseph Baynes: Pioneer, pp135-7.

³⁶ Natal Carbineer History Centre, Peter Francis Papers, RNCA Papers, Dr RL Stevenson to Francis, 16 April 1964; Times of Natal, 15 January 1900; Mocke, 'Die Slag van Colenso', p147.

our comrades...We then solemnly placed the bodies in the grave and the last rites were performed by Colonel Evans, who read the Church of England service out of my prayer book which I always carry.

We then closed the grave and built a cairn of stones over it. We also built a small cairn where they fell and then we left them in their last long sleep trusting to meet them again on the silver shore where all tears are washed away.³⁷

Their rough burial was, despite the tinge of sentiment with which it is described, a necessity after any engagement in a remote location where fatalities are incurred, and was not unique to the Natal Volunteers in this war.³⁸ However, the lengths taken by the Volunteer Composite Regiment to erect a memorial to the two men on their return to the site on 1 June 1901 is a clear signal of the solemn remembrance by the colonists of these deaths. Nicholson again records that on that date a mule-wagon carried a tombstone, cement, and stone to the grave site and, under the guard of outposts placed on surrounding ridges in case of Boer attack, a simple memorial was fashioned on the northern Natal veld.³⁹ It is important in the context of the social impact of the war on the Natal Volunteers that, on both these occasions, Nicholson was not describing the disposal of a casualty who may have appeared little more than another statistic in a large military force such as the British Army. Rather, as was the case with the relationship between Bishop Baynes and Trooper Warren, Comrie was an acquaintance in civilian life, in this case from the Richmond district.⁴⁰ Then, in September 1901, Nicholson recorded in similar vein the death of a VCR comrade: 'Thus passed

³⁷ Nicholson diary, 14 December 1900.

³⁸ The generally warm South African climate was another factor encouraging the prompt disposal of remains. Lord Dundonald, describing the burial of the dead from the battle of Colenso on 16 December, left a particularly stark and revealing comment on the rapid putrefaction that could occur under these conditions. He wrote: 'When the curtains of the first ambulance were drawn back, a vast cloud of blue flies came out, and at the same time a fearful smell was blown by the light wind towards us...In hot climates death is brought home to us in an aspect which as a rule is mercifully kept concealed' (Dundonald, My Army Life, p111).

³⁹ Nicholson diary, 1 June 1901.

⁴⁰ See Hope, Yesterdays: The Story of Richmond, p36, for a short biography of Comrie, and p109 for a photograph.

away one of our best men and one whom we who knew him will sorely miss.⁴¹

Battlefield military graves, such as those of Comrie and McKellar, that evolved into on-site memorials, are distinguished in this chapter from 'public memorials', commissioned to commemorate regional Volunteer participation and casualties, or that of the Colony as a whole. By contrast with these, the location and style of these grave-memorials is similar to those for British casualties, which were also erected by individual regiments on or near the relevant battlefields. This manner of internment is evident on numerous KwaZulu-Natal battlefields, such as Hart's Hill on the Tugela Heights and Wagon Hill at Ladysmith. On 24 July 1964 the Natal Carbineer fatalities from the battle of Colenso on 15 December 1899 were re-interred in the Clouston Garden of Remembrance at Chieveley, along with British fatalities from this vicinity.⁴²

The Contemporary Written Record

Another level of commemoration that had its origins during the war is that of the written record of the Volunteer war effort in Natal and Britain itself. On 1 August 1900 the first indications emerged that the Natal colonial war effort was set to join the official historical record, when the editor of the Times of Natal called for 'the compilation of a concise, clear history of each irregular corps now in the field'.⁴³ While there is no specific evidence that this request was carried out, it is possible that there is a connection with the unit summaries contained in the Natal Mercury compilation, Natal Volunteer Record, published before the end of 1900.⁴⁴ The British illustrated media followed the hagiographic style of Natal Volunteer Record, with the publication in 1900 of The Colonies in the War by the Illustrated London News. Although comment on the burden carried

⁴¹ Nicholson diary, 1 September 1901.

⁴² Natal Carbineers History Centre, Peter Francis Papers, RNCA Papers, RL Stevenson to Francis, 16 April 1964. See Steve Watt, In Memoriam: Roll of Honour Imperial Forces Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 2000, passim, for comprehensive burial details, as well as monuments and memorials, for the Natal Volunteer force. According to Watt, pp83 and 280, Comrie and McKellar were re-interred at Vryheid, but no date for the re-interment is given.

⁴³ Times of Natal, 1 August 1900.

⁴⁴ See Natal Volunteer Record, pp108-89.

by both the Cape Colony and Natal as the geographic setting for much of the fighting was a fair one, the modest contribution of fighting forces, such as the 'one-in-five' men contributed by Natal in 1899 (see pages 130-1) was inflated and described in glowing terms.⁴⁵

In March 1901 the London-based Agent-General for Natal received a request from Lieutenant-Colonel GFR Henderson, the designated British official historian of the war, for source material from component units of the Natal Volunteers.⁴⁶ The Ministry of Lands and Works expressed some surprise that such records were being sought while the war was still in progress, and referred the Agent-General to the Natal Volunteer Record.⁴⁷ After the war Henderson's research project evolved into History of the War in South Africa, the multi-volume work compiled by Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice KCB. By 1904 no contribution from the Natal Volunteer Department had been received, although Lieutenant-Colonel HT Bru-de-Wold, the only staff officer to have served throughout the war, made some effort to gather records and compile an account.⁴⁸ The poor response to the appeal for written submissions could reflect a general apathy towards the war, or rather, in the context of the memorials that followed in the postwar decade, that a more visible public record was preferred. It was also possible that the hagiography evident in Natal Volunteer Record satisfied Natalians in the short term, as it was not until 1912 that John Stalker's annals, The Natal Carbineers, with its extensive coverage of the war, was published.

Stalker's work joined a historiography of Natal which was 'a product of a colonial society, and reflected the concerns and objectives of a minority white community attempting to establish itself

⁴⁵ 'The Colonies and the War', in Illustrated London News Record of the Transvaal War, 1899-1900, special number of Illustrated London News, London, 1900, pp55-6; and see Hall, The South African Campaign, p96.

⁴⁶ PAR, CSO 1673, minute paper 2798/1901, Henderson to Agent-General, London, 8 March 1901.

⁴⁷ PAR, CSO 1673, minute paper 2798/1901, Major SOV (full name omitted) to Minister of Lands and Works, 12 April 1901.

⁴⁸ PAR, CSO 1673, War Office Circular (AG1a) 14 January 1903, War Office to Agent-General, Natal, 24 March 1904, Bru-De-Wold to Commandant of Militia, 28 April 1904, enclosures in minute paper 2798/1901.

amongst a majority black population',⁴⁹ which concentrates on events associated with the expansion of British imperial power, and the consolidation of settler authority. Snell comments specifically on what he describes as a period of 'settler nationalism' in the 1870s-1890s.⁵⁰

Musical and Commemorative Ephemera

Music and the military band provided another medium for remembrance and commemoration, as did the manufacture of commemorative ephemera. Since the eleventh century military bands have exercised a powerful influence over the martial psyche and on morale.⁵¹ The evolution of the brass band is credited with a central part in the evocative power of military music,⁵² and the battlefield has inspired many pieces of music, as it has also done for the visual arts. According to John M MacKenzie, military subjects, along with the Christian Church, have been the most significant stimuli of 'directed musical performance'.⁵³ By the time of the Anglo-Boer War, both the Natal Carbineers and the Natal Mounted Rifles had established military bands. In the Natal Mounted Rifles Bandmaster GR Gibb was responsible for the establishment of the popular Ladysmith Siege Band.⁵⁴

There is little evidence in academic literature of musical works inspired by the Anglo-Boer War

⁴⁹ MC Snell, 'The Academic Historiography of Natal and Zululand 1910-1995', MA thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1997, p6.

⁵⁰ Snell, 'The Academic Historiography of Natal and Zululand', pp1,20-30,32-3 and 36; Paterson, 'The Military Organisation of the Colony of Natal', pp8-10.

⁵¹ Robert Giddings, 'Delusive seduction: Pride, pomp, circumstance and military music', in MacKenzie (ed), Popular Imperialism and the Military, pp34-46.

⁵² Giddings, 'Delusive seduction', in MacKenzie (ed), Popular Imperialism and the Military, pp41-2.

⁵³ MacKenzie, 'Popular imperialism and the military', in MacKenzie (ed), Popular Imperialism and the Military, p13.

⁵⁴ Coghlan, Pro Patria, pp195-6; Goetzsche, Rough But Ready: An Official History of the Natal Mounted Rifles, p357.

from the British and colonial perspective,⁵⁵ despite the fact that the nineteenth century was particularly rich in its repertoire of military music.⁵⁶ However, the service of the Volunteers did, in fact, inspire several pieces of patriotic sheet-music. One was 'The Lads of the Carbineers', with words by Lynn Lyster and music by Charles Hoby.⁵⁷ The first line read as follows: 'Here's a toast to the lads of the City, to the heroes who fought and fell!' 'The Natal Carbineers Barn Dance', composed by Fred C Blamey, and distributed by Vause, Slatter & Co of Pietermaritzburg and Durban, was dedicated to Colonel William Royston.⁵⁸ Blamey also composed the 'NMR Waltz', dedicated to Colonel Robert Evans, the most prominent casualty of the Natal Mounted Rifles.⁵⁹ The Volunteers as a whole were rewarded with the 'Long Tom Waltz' by James H Bartholomew.⁶⁰

The 'Natal's Volunteers', an undated piece of music in the style of that generated by the Anglo-Boer War, has been described as making up in fervour what it lacked in aesthetic quality, and it is this fervour to recall in exaggerated detail and style, at the expense of musical integrity, that adheres this particular component of Volunteer commemoration to the other commemorative themes

⁵⁵ See Albert Troskie, 'Les Boers (1902): A Notable Work Inspired by the Anglo-Boer War', *SAMUS: South African Journal of Musicology*, 11/1991, pp127-142. One study that addresses music inspired by the Boer cause is Aletta M Swanepoel, 'Music Inspired by the Afrikaner Cause (1852-1902), with Special Reference to the Transvaal Volkslied', *MMus*, UNISA, 1979, cited by Troskie, pp127 and 142.

⁵⁶ Charles Oxtoby, 'History in Song', *Lantern*, XXVI/4, August 1977, pp2-4. The works consulted were the journals *Nineteenth Century Music* and *SAMUS: The Journal of Musicology*, and the *South African Music Encyclopaedia*.

⁵⁷ Natal Carbineers History Centre, file, Natal Carbineers Band Music, 'The Lads of the Carbineers'; Jacques P Malan, *South African Music Encyclopaedia*, II, Cape Town, Oxford University Press and the Human Sciences Research Council, 1982, pp234-5). For several examples of the music generated by the war, see *Natal Witness*, 18 October 1899; Pieter Oosthuizen, *Boer War Memorabilia*, Edmonton, The Alderman Press, 1987, pp154-8.

⁵⁸ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Peter Francis Papers.

⁵⁹ Natal Carbineers History Centre, file, Natal Carbineers Band Music.

⁶⁰ Natal Carbineers History Centre, file, Natal Carbineers Band Music. The Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 had also generated commemorative sheet-music, such as the extravagantly titled 'The Zulu Expedition: Grand Military Fantasia', by Michael Watson (Blockhouse Private Museum, Ladysmith, sheet-music).

discussed in this chapter.⁶¹

The composition of musical numbers with an Anglo-Boer War theme was only one example of a significant industry in the production of memorabilia that emerged during the conflict and in its wake. This memorabilia, of which ceramicware in the form of mugs, plates and pipes is probably the best known,⁶² is reflected most prominently in the Natal Volunteer context by the accumulation of signatures of the members of regiments, usually officers, or components thereof, such as troops or squadrons, and the transfer of these to linen in the form of table-cloths or tea-towels.⁶³ The most ornate example of this type of memorabilia is a table presented to the widow of Colonel Evans of the Volunteer Composite Regiment. In this case, the signatures of officers of the VCR were engraved into the surface of the table, which is on display in the Talana Museum, Dundee.

The Commemoration of the Siege of Ladysmith

Commemoration by shared association is considered next, in the context of the Ladysmith Siege Club, the silver siege belts presented to the civilian nurses during the siege, and the periodic gatherings of siege veterans. In Ladysmith, the central focus of Natal Volunteer involvement in the war, the collective memory of the siege of that town was kept alive locally through the establishment in March 1901 of a 'Siege Club'. The chief object of the club was the 'preservation of all the incidents of the siege, especially the celebration on each successive year of the date of the relief'. The president for the 1906-7 year was David Sparks, a Natal Carbineer officer who played a leading part in regional business and political affairs.⁶⁴ Lord Roberts was entertained to a banquet by the Club on 21 October 1904, and in July 1905 Sir George White accepted an invitation to

⁶¹ Oxtoby, 'History in Song', pp4-5, where 'The Zulu Expedition', by Michael Watson, is also mentioned.

⁶² For a comprehensive reference to this field of collecting see Oosthuizen, Boer War Memorabilia, pp1-33.

⁶³ Examples of these cloths can be seen in the Natal Carbineers Museum, Geere Street, Pietermaritzburg, and the Collections Centre, KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Museum Service.

⁶⁴ Siege Museum, Ladysmith, minute book, 'Siege Club of Ladysmith', 26 February and 29 March 1903; Siege Museum, rules, Ladysmith Siege Club.

become the patron.⁶⁵ The All Saints Church in Murchison Street, damaged by shellfire on 20 November 1899, became a focus for solemn commemoration, and contains marble plaques of all the siege casualties, Imperial and colonial.⁶⁶ However, unlike the largely cohesive English settler composition and sentiment towards commemoration in Durban and Pietermaritzburg, Ladysmith, with its sizeable Dutch-speaking population, introduced an element of discord akin to Jeffery's World War I Ireland. The Siege Club, for example, included a clause effectively excluding any person who had fought or conspired against the British-colonial garrison.⁶⁷

The siege was, in fact, to inspire two lasting bonds of association. The first was that which existed among the volunteer nurses who served in Ladysmith during the siege, and between these nurses and the Volunteer soldiers they tended. This association inspired gifts from the Natal Carbineers (a silver belt), the Border Mounted Rifles (a gold fob watch), the Natal Mounted Rifles (a silver shield), and the Natal Volunteer Medical Corps (an inscribed watch), as well as a gold brooch from the Imperial Light Horse. The best known of these gifts was the ornate silver belts presented to each nurse by the Natal Carbineers in 1902.⁶⁸ The specific association forged by the siege was also manifested in the periodic reunions of veterans in Ladysmith. This culminated in a particularly poignant gathering in February-March 1950, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the relief.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Siege Museum, minute book, Siege Club. In 1930 the position of patron was held by another siege veteran, General Sir Ian Hamilton (Siege Museum, Ladysmith, menu, banquet, 1 March 1930).

⁶⁶ The Times of Natal, 28 August 1900; The Natal Mercury, 28 August 1900; Watt, The Siege of Ladysmith, p29; Natal Diocesan Magazine, 5/9, p177.

⁶⁷ Siege Museum, Ladysmith, minute book, 'Siege Club of Ladysmith', 26 February 1903.

⁶⁸ Natal Witness, 14 June and 16 August 1902, and see 22 August 2000; KG Gibson, 'Nursing Sisters in the Siege of Ladysmith: Their Awards and Presentations', Military Medal Society of South Africa, journal No.17, November 1980, pp1-4d. The service of nurses in the siege even inspired a popular novel typical of the genre inspired by the war (LT Meade, A Sister of the Red Cross: A Tale of the South African War, London, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1901).

⁶⁹ KCAL, KCM 91/26/1, Nurse Champion manuscript, 1950 reunion; Siege Museum, Ladysmith, 50th Anniversary reunion, signatures; Natal Daily News, 27 February 1950; Natal Mercury, 1 March 1950; Natal Witness, 3 March 1950.

The dichotomous spirit of reconciliation and bitterness generated by the Anglo-Boer War was epitomised by the siege. One example was JR Bayley, a section leader in the Ladysmith Town Guard, who was present at the 50th anniversary commemorations. After the war one of his four daughters married Ludwig de Jager, who had served with the Boer siege forces.⁷⁰ Then there was Johannes Lombard, one of the few remaining Boer siege veterans, whose son participated in the march-past and retreat ceremony on Friday 3 March, in the ranks of the 2nd Royal Natal Carbineers, his father's enemies of half a century earlier. Lombard senior had himself served with the Carbineers in the 1906 Natal Rebellion, and two relatives also served with Allied forces in World War II.⁷¹

However, a notable example of lingering hostility between English and Afrikaner occurred in Ladysmith in February 1960 - the Diamond Jubilee year of the relief. In an apolitical commemoration of the participation of both sides, the then 1st Royal Natal Carbineers were due to conduct a Retreat in the town on the 27th and receive the freedom of the borough, and official authority was received.⁷² A last-minute government ban on this participation - it was felt to be undesirable that a Defence Force regiment should 'celebrate' a British victory - was greeted with outrage in Natal.⁷³ The freedom was belatedly conferred in January 1963.

Campaign Medals, Honours, Colours and Parades

The campaign medals and honours for distinguished service, as well as the award of colours to Volunteer regiments, which the British government offered, along with the associated public parades, comprise the sixth of these public levels of recognition. The British Empire granted

⁷⁰ Natal Mercury, 28 February 1950.

⁷¹ Natal Mercury, 1 March 1950.

⁷² Natal Carbineer History Centre, file, Ceremonial and Functions 1855-1961, Borough of Ladysmith to Royal Natal Carbineers, 26 September 1959, Royal Natal Carbineers to Natal Command, 27 October 1959, Ladysmith to Royal Natal Carbineers, 29 January 1960, Royal Natal Carbineers internal circular, 9 December 1959, quoting Natal Command reference: A/CER/5/2, 30 November 1959.

⁷³ Natal Witness, 29 February 1960; Natal Daily News, 29 February 1960.

campaign medals, honours, regimental colours and parades to its regular and colonial soldiers for service in the Anglo-Boer War, and Natal gratefully accepted these rewards.⁷⁴ However, the war did not initiate the association of medals, parades and other links with Empire, but only reinforced them. In fact, as early as 1845 'ceremonies marking important occasions, such as the Queen's birthday, were used to promote Imperial symbolism and hence burnish the image of the fledgling colonial regime'.⁷⁵

On 19 October 1893 the Natal Carbineers participated in the opening of Natal's first responsible government.⁷⁶ Between 1875 and 1899 the Durban Light Infantry and its antecedent regiments attended 15 ceremonial parades with an Imperial connection.⁷⁷ In June 1897 24 members of the Natal Volunteers, accompanied by the Prime Minister of Natal, Harry Escombe, attended Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee celebrations in London.⁷⁸ Participants in commemorative events such as the 1897 Jubilee received medals to record this honour.⁷⁹

There were extensive celebrations in Natal itself to mark the Jubilee.⁸⁰ In Pietermaritzburg the programme of events included a Queen's Birthday Ball on 24 June, hosted by the Governor, Sir

⁷⁴ Dymond, Researching British Military Medals: A Practical Guide, p12.

⁷⁵ Dominy, 'The Making of the Rough and the Respectable', p53.

⁷⁶ Times of Natal, 18 and 19 October 1893; Natal Witness, 20 October 1893, and see 19 October 1893.

⁷⁷ Martin, The Durban Light Infantry, I, p47.

⁷⁸ Natal Witness, 11, 15 and 18 May, 14 June 1897; Times of Natal, 17 May 1897. The Australian colonies, with the exception of Tasmania, also sent contingents to this celebration where similar Empire bonding was evinced (Field, The Forgotten War, p4).

⁷⁹ See FK Mitchell, 'Royal Jubilee and Coronation Medals with Particular Reference to South African Recipients', The Military Medal Society of South Africa, journal No. 10 (June 1977), pp6-10; W McE Bisset, 'Postscript on Royal Commemoration Medals Awarded to South Africans, 1987-1977', The Military Medal Society of South Africa, journal No. 17 (November 1980), p3; H Taprell Dorling, Ribbons and Medals: Naval, Military, Air Force and Civil, London, George Philip and Son, 1956, pp108-9; Dymond, Researching British Military Medals, p13.

⁸⁰ Natal Witness, 13, 14 and 20 May, 16 and 21 June 1897.

Walter Hely-Hutchinson.⁸¹ Colonial newspapers published special commemorative issues, and businesses offered congratulatory cards, banners and flags.⁸² A 'Loyal Address' from the colonists was also despatched to the Queen.⁸³ On 20 June a combined military service for the British garrison was held in the City Hall, followed on the 24th by a grand military review.⁸⁴

In the case of the Anglo-Boer War itself, an early focus for commemoration was the issue of campaign medals. For the individual soldier the campaign medal was the most immediate tangible evidence of war service, and the Volunteers, as well as the government of Natal, showed a keen interest in securing its earliest possible issue. This concern was also evident in the efforts to secure a specific decoration for the siege of Ladysmith (see pages 261-2).

Natal Volunteer soldiers were eligible for the Queen's South Africa Medal (QSA) and the King's South Africa Medal (KSA). The primary medal, the QSA, was granted for war service in South Africa between 11 October 1899 and 31 May 1902.⁸⁵ The KSA was granted in October 1902 as a supplementary medal for the later period of war service from 1 January to 31 May 1902, with the proviso that recipients had to have completed eighteen months service by 1 January or 1 June 1902.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Natal Witness, 17 and 25 May 1897, and 19 June 1897.

⁸² Times of Natal, 17 May, 19 and 22 June 1897; Natal Witness, 22 June 1897.

⁸³ Natal Carbineers History Centre, WHF Harte Papers, Programme of the Royal Jubilee Procession, London, 1897, passim; Natal Witness, 21 May and 23 June 1897; Pearse, Joseph Baynes: Pioneer, p154.

⁸⁴ Natal Witness, 21 and 24 June 1897. For detail on the commemoration of the Jubilee in Durban, see Brian Kearney and Ian Swanepoel, 'Durban: The Gateway Context', in Wassermann and Kearney (eds), A Warrior's Gateway, p7, and see pictures on pp14, 18 and 146.

⁸⁵ Arthur Jocelyn, Awards of Honour: The Orders, Decorations, Medals and Awards of Great Britain and the Commonwealth from Edward III to Elizabeth II, London, Adam and Charles Black, 1956, p175. The city fathers of Kimberley partially succeeded where Ladysmith failed. An unofficial commemorative 'Kimberley Star' was presented by the mayor of Kimberley, but it was not permitted to be worn with other British medals (p176).

⁸⁶ Jocelyn, Awards of Honour, p176.

The importance to Volunteers of the campaign medal is evident from the acute disappointment among colonists when, on the occasion of the Royal visit in August 1901 of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York, an administrative bungle prevented the distribution of the QSA to the Volunteer regiments at a parade in Alexandra Park on 14 August.⁸⁷ Such presentations had been made to British and Australian troops on their return from the front.⁸⁸

Natal Volunteer medal recipients would have been eligible for up to seven of the 24 possible clasps. These were:

Talana: to all troops under Lieutenant-General Sir W Penn Symons's command on 29 October 1899, who were north of an east-and-west line drawn through Waschbank Station.

Elandsplaagte: to all troops at Elandsplaagte on 21 October, 1899, who were on the right bank of Sunday's River and north of an east and west line through Buys Farm.

Defence of Ladysmith: to all troops in Ladysmith between 3 November 1899, and 28 February 1900, both dates inclusive.

Tugela Heights: to all troops of the Natal Field Force, exclusive of the Ladysmith garrison, employed in the operations north of an east and west line through Chieveley Station between 14 and 27 February 1900, both dates inclusive.

Relief of Ladysmith: to all troops in Natal north of and including Estcourt between 15 December 1899, and 28 February 1900, both dates inclusive.

Laing's Nek: to all troops of the Natal Field Force employed in the operations, and north of an east and west line through Newcastle between 2 and 9 June 1900, both dates inclusive.

Natal: to all troops in Natal at any time between 11 October 1899 and 11 June 1900, both dates inclusive, who receive no clasp for an action in Natal nor the Cape Colony as already specified.

⁸⁷ PAR, CSO 1679, minute paper 5333/1901, correspondence, PE Smith to Colonial Secretary, 24 June 1901, and reply, 26 June 1901; Natal Witness, 9 July 1901.

⁸⁸ Times of Natal, 6 June and 10 July 1901; Natal Witness, 24 June 1901; and see Phillip Buckner, 'The Royal Tour of 1901 and the Construction of an Imperial Identity in South Africa', South African Historical Journal, 41, November 1999, pp329-31. These medals were eventually presented after the war, in modest ceremonies, for example, to the Natal Carbineers and Natal Royal Rifles in August 1903.

It was stated that no individual could be eligible for both the relief and defence clasps for either Ladysmith, Kimberley or Mafeking.⁸⁹ As late as October 1902 the delay in the issue of the requisite regimental rolls was still holding up issue of the QSA.⁹⁰

Proposals for specific decorations, other than the QSA and the KSA, for Natal troops and engagements, such as the siege of Ladysmith, was raised by settler organisations, the Commandant of Volunteers, Brigadier-General JG Dartnell, and the Governor, Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson, followed by Sir Henry McCallum, on behalf of the Natal government, for several years after the conclusion of the siege. These requests were turned down in favour of a proposed decoration for all regular and Volunteer veterans of the relief and siege campaigns. This was, however, never issued, and Natal Volunteers had to be content with clasps to the general campaign medal.⁹¹ Given the British government's decision, the Natal Volunteers had reason to feel aggrieved that the civic authorities of Kimberley secured the unofficial commissioning of two commemorative decorations for the siege of that town (4 November 1899 to 15 February 1900), namely the Kimberley Medal (which was, however suppressed, presumably on British orders) and the Kimberley Star.⁹²

Despite the limitations of the Natal Volunteer response to the Anglo-Boer War, limitations partially engineered by the British Army itself, the embracing vision of Empire remained strong, and was re-affirmed by the granting of honours to prominent colonial personalities in the Volunteer ranks. One of these was Major Duncan McKenzie of the Natal Carbineers, who was awarded the CB

⁸⁹ Natal Witness, 30 April 1901.

⁹⁰ Natal Mercury, 11 December 1900; Natal Witness, 28 October 1902.

⁹¹ PAR, CO (microfilm), [PRO 1/1/1/205] CO 179/211, Despatch 131, Governor to Chamberlain, 24 April 1900; PAR, MJPW 74, minute paper 3297/1900, Minute from Commandant Volunteers, Buys Farm, 25 April 1900; PAR, MJPW 74, minute paper 3297/1900, 6,23,24 and 26 October 1900; PAR, PM 22, minute paper 950/1901, Honorary Secretary, Mid-Illovo Farmers' Club, to Hime, 16 June 1901; PAR, PM 22, Hime to Honorary Secretary, Mid-Illovo Farmers' Club, 19 June 1901; Natal Witness, 31 May 1900; Natal Mercury, 11 December 1900; and see PAR, CSO 1710, minute paper 6292/1902, August 1902; PAR, MJPW 103, minute paper L&W 4394/1903, Secretary of Lands and Works to Commandant of Volunteers, 24 October 1902.

⁹² MG Hibbard, Boer War Tribute Medals, Sandton, Constantia Classics Publications, 1982, pp153-71.

(Companion of the Order of the Bath) and the CMG (Commander of the Most Distinguished Order of St Michael and St George) for his services.⁹³ The Commanding Officer of the Natal Carbineers throughout the Anglo-Boer War, Lieutenant-Colonel Edward Greene, was granted the honorary rank of full colonel in the British Army in November 1902, presumably in recognition of war service, although this was not specifically stated.⁹⁴ Brigadier-General JG Dartnell, who had received the CMG in 1881, received the KCB (Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath), and Lieutenant-Colonel HT Bru-de-Wold the CMG, as did Captain JR Royston of the Border Mounted Rifles.⁹⁵ Major George Leuchars MLA, the Commanding Officer of the Umvoti Mounted Rifles from 1898 to 1907, was rewarded with the KCMG and the DSO (Distinguished Service Order).⁹⁶

On 15 April 1903, less than a year after the end of the war, the Governor of Natal, Sir Henry McCallum, presented the Border Mounted Rifles and the Umvoti Mounted Rifles with their campaign medals during the first postwar annual Volunteer encampment at Hermannsburg near Greytown,⁹⁷ followed on 9 August 1903 by the Natal Carbineers and the Natal Royal Rifles.⁹⁸

The association of Colours as military symbols of the Crown and the Empire was absorbed by the Natal Volunteer regiments when the first Colours, the King's Colour, were presented to them on

⁹³ Twentieth Century Impressions of Natal, p413; Dictionary of South African Biography, II, p422; McKenzie, Delayed Action, pp351 and 355.

⁹⁴ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Natal Carbineers Service Register; Letchen, Medals and Decorations of the British Commonwealth of Nations, p16; and see Cannadine, Ornamentalism, pp85-7 and 98.

⁹⁵ Goetzsche, Rough But Ready: An Official History of the Natal Mounted Rifles, pp94 and 372. News of the awards to Dartnell, McKenzie, and Bru-de-Wold was received in April 1901 in the Colony from the Agent-General for Natal in London. Dr J Hyslop, of the Volunteer Medical Corps, was also given the DSO, and official notification was received of Trooper Farmer's DCM from the battle of Colenso (PAR, CSO 1675, minute paper 3336/1901, Agent-General, London, to Colonial Secretary, Pietermaritzburg, 26 April 1901).

⁹⁶ Du Plessis, The Umvoti Mounted Rifles, p3.

⁹⁷ Natal Witness, 16 April 1903; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, pp276-7.

⁹⁸ Natal Witness, 10 August 1903; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p278.

4 October 1904 in Alexandra Park, Pietermaritzburg, in recognition of war service.⁹⁹ The Times of Natal reflected the mood of the Colony in describing the occasion as 'a red-letter day in the annals of Natal'.¹⁰⁰

The Imperial symbolism of the King's Colour was reinforced in June 1925, when regimental colours (or standards in the case of mounted regiments such as the Natal Carbineers) were presented by Edward, Prince of Wales, later King Edward VIII. These colours and standards included a battle honour for the Anglo-Boer War. Separate honours were available for the siege and relief of Ladysmith.¹⁰¹

Colours continued to play an important part in the history of the Natal regiments which took part in the Anglo-Boer War. This was evident in the presentation of a Queen's Colour to the Natal Carbineers on 14 January 1955, on the occasion of that regiment's centenary,¹⁰² as well as the presentation of new regimental colours to Natal regiments in 1966.¹⁰³

Public Memorials of Commemoration

⁹⁹ Natal Carbineers History Centre, file, Ceremonial and Formal Functions 1855-1961, Union Defence Force Circular, King's/Queen's Colours, Chief of the General Staff, 28 August 1953; Times of Natal, 4 October 1904; Natal Witness, 4 October 1904; Anon, 'Regimental Colours', in Nongqai, II, September 1910, pp506-7; TS Davis, 'Regimental Colours', Paratus, December 1973, pp22-3; HH Curson, Colours and Honours in South Africa 1783-1948, Pretoria, Wallachs' Printing and Publishing Co, 1948, pp1-19; Knight, Go To Your God Like a Soldier, pp190-3; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, pp281-2; Curson, Colours and Honours in South Africa, pp36-7; Goetzsche, Rough But Ready: An Official History of the Natal Mounted Rifles, pp94-5.

¹⁰⁰ Times of Natal, 4 October 1904. Despite the auspicious nature of the presentation, these same Colours appear to have languished in a strongroom at the Pietermaritzburg City Hall until 1923, when it was proposed that they be placed in St Saviour's Cathedral (See Natal Carbineers History Centre, Colours, Medals and Insignia file, Tomlinson to Adjutant, 1st Mounted Rifles, 5 July and 5 October 1923).

¹⁰¹ See Curson, Colours and Honours in South Africa, p14; Klein, Light Horse Cavalcade, p10.

¹⁰² Coghlan, Pro Patria, pp85-6.

¹⁰³ Coghlan, Pro Patria, pp99 and 110-11.

The settler ruling elite in the Colony also initiated permanent memorials of commemoration to the Volunteer war effort. Since prehistoric times, memorials have been erected to commemorate events or individuals, and these structures have ranged from stone circles, through statues to victory columns and obelisks.¹⁰⁴ Settler Natal internalised many of the tangible and intangible trappings of the Victorian culture of Empire, and this cultural baggage helped mould the Colony's response to the Anglo-Boer War. In the late Victorian period Natal's townscapes reflected what Jan Morris accurately terms an architectural 'badge of sovereignty'.¹⁰⁵ Central to Victorian culture was the opportunity provided by death for memorialising and ritual.¹⁰⁶

The Natal memorials to the Volunteers of 1899-1902 were similar in artistic style and visual imagery, and even constructed from the same (imported) materials, as those in Britain itself. In Britain it was also the home districts of the English Volunteers, such as the Yeomanry regiments, rather than the Regular army, that commemorated this service which, as was the case with the Natal Volunteers, had not proceeded smoothly and had produced mixed results. A typical example of an English Volunteer memorial was the one in Cheltenham in Gloucester, unveiled on 17 July 1907 by Lieutenant-General Sir Ian Hamilton, a veteran of the siege of Ladysmith.¹⁰⁷

As was the case with military parades, the unveiling of Anglo-Boer War memorials was not the first manifestation in Natal of homage to the Empire. On 8 July 1890, for example, outside the Legislative Assembly Building, a statue was unveiled to Queen Victoria that still stands on this site. The fact that the statue, designed by a celebrated sculptor, Sir Edgar Boehm, was a facsimile of

¹⁰⁴ Anon., Great British Monuments, The Diagram Group, London, Franklin Watts, 1987, *passim*.

¹⁰⁵ Jan Morris, 'In Quest of the Imperial Style', in Robert Fernor-Hesketh (ed), Architecture of the British Empire, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986, p11; and see Brian Kearney, Architecture in Natal: 1824-1893, Cape Town, AA Balkema, 1973, p52; Melanie Hillebrand, '"A bad row of teeth"?: Pietermaritzburg's architecture', in Laband and Haswell (eds), Pietermaritzburg 1838-1988, pp48-9.

¹⁰⁶ Stephen Bayley, The Albert Memorial: The Monument in its Social and Architectural Context, London, Scolar Press, 1981, pp13-15.

¹⁰⁷ Mick Kippen, 'Cheltenham's Memorial to the Boer War, and to those men from the town who fought and died in South Africa 1899-1902', Soldiers of the Queen, 105/2001, pp14-15.

statues in Cape Town and Sydney, suggests the Empire-wide extent of such homage. The ceremony was conducted by the Governor, Sir CB Mitchell, and the Natal Carbineers and the Natal Royal Rifles furnished detachments towards an official escort and a guard-of-honour.¹⁰⁸

In the military context, public memorials are the most prominent symbol of the commemoration of military service. The least controversial and simplest memorial of this sort to manufacture was the brass or marble plaque (or tablet) listing fatalities, and such plaques were consequently the first form of public commemoration to the Natal Volunteers to be unveiled in the Colony. On 14 August 1901 the Duchess of Cornwall and York unveiled a marble mural tablet in the foyer of the City Hall, Pietermaritzburg, to the casualties of the Natal Volunteer force.¹⁰⁹ In the case of the Natal Carbineers,¹¹⁰ one large plaque to the dead of this regiment was unveiled on 4 September 1904 in Pietermaritzburg's St Saviour's Cathedral, with smaller plaques placed in the local parish churches of component troops or squadrons at Newcastle, Dundee, Richmond, Estcourt, Ladysmith and Nottingham Road.¹¹¹ The Volunteer Composite Regiment was represented by a white marble tablet unveiled in March 1903 in St James' Church, Dundee.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Times of Natal, 7 July 1890; Natal Witness, 8 and 9 July 1890. See Laband and Haswell (eds), Pietermaritzburg 1838-1988, p85, for a photograph of this ceremony.

¹⁰⁹ KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Museum Service, TR Bennett Papers, Official Programme, Their Royal Highnesses The Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York; Natal Witness, 15 August 1901; Natal Mercury, 15 August 1901. The plaque in St James's Church, Dundee, was unveiled in September 1904 (Natal Mercury, 27 September 1904).

¹¹⁰ Natal Carbineers History Centre, Harte Anglo-Boer War photograph album, 'South Africa'. (fragmentary title), 11 June 1904. For comment on this practice in the English setting see Curl, The Victorian Celebration of Death, p17; King, 'Remembering and Forgetting in the Public Memorials of the Great War', in Forty and Küchler (eds), The Art of Forgetting, p161.

¹¹¹ Natal Witness, 5 September 1904; Times of Natal, 5 September 1904; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, pp280-1. When St Saviour's was deconsecrated in May 1976, the war memorials it contained, as well as the King's Colour and regimental standard of the Natal Carbineers, were relocated to the old St Peter's church in Church Street. At the time of writing (April 2002) the 1904 plaque remains in St Peter's, while the standard and colour have been transferred to the Natal Carbineers Museum in Geere Street (See Ian Darby, Cathedral of the Holy Nativity, Pietermaritzburg, Pietermaritzburg, nd, passim).

¹¹² Natal Witness, 12 March 1903.

Despite a public decision in August 1900 not to erect memorials to individual regiments, but rather to the Volunteer movement as a whole,¹¹³ the first monument to be unveiled, on 25 September 1904, was the Border Mounted Rifles Memorial at Umzinto on the Natal South Coast. It took the form of an obelisk made from Scottish granite, and was a local tribute to the Alexandra Troop of the Border Mounted Rifles. The list of dignitaries attending was headed by the Commanding Officer of the BMR, Lieutenant-Colonel JF Rethman MLA.¹¹⁴

The BMR monument was followed by the unveiling on 9 April 1905 of the Volunteer Memorial in the Town Gardens, Durban.¹¹⁵ The Governor, Sir Henry McCallum, performed the ceremony which reportedly drew a crowd of 5 000 people.¹¹⁶ The memorial was conceived by the Durban Light Infantry, and construction was funded by public subscription, supplemented by grants from the Durban Town Council and the Durban-based regiments. The memorial included four brass panels, each commemorating campaign incidents of either the Durban Light Infantry, the Natal Mounted Rifles, the Natal Field Artillery, or the Natal Naval Volunteers.¹¹⁷

Pride of place, however, goes to the Classical Revival Volunteer War Memorial in Pietermaritzburg (see frontispiece).¹¹⁸ Situated in the Court Gardens opposite the ornate red-brick Free Renaissance City Hall, it forms part of a veritable pantheon of memorials to the major campaigns which involved Natal military forces. There is the Anglo-Zulu War Memorial and the Memorial Arch or Cenotaph to the fallen of the two World Wars and, nearby, the memorial to the casualties of the Bushman's River Pass skirmish of November 1873.¹¹⁹ In the immediate vicinity are several

¹¹³ Natal Mercury, 29 August 1900.

¹¹⁴ Natal Mercury, 27 September 1904; Gordon, Honour Without Riches, pp308-9.

¹¹⁵ Goetzsche, Rough But Ready: An Official History of the Natal Mounted Rifles, p101.

¹¹⁶ Natal Mercury, 7, 8 and 10 April 1905; Natal Witness, 10 April 1905;

¹¹⁷ Natal Mercury, 10 April 1905.

¹¹⁸ Melanie Hillebrand, 'Aspects of Architecture in Natal: 1880-1914', MA thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1975, pp56-62 and 166-7.

¹¹⁹ The story of the Anglo-Zulu War Memorial, unveiled on 11 October 1883, resembles
(continued...)

impressive symbols of colonial administration and Imperial heritage and association: the Colonial Buildings, the Legislative Assembly Building with its statue of Queen Victoria, the Post Office, and the statue of Sir Theophilus Shepstone CMG, one of the Colony's most prominent public officials.¹²⁰

A memorial committee was convened at a public meeting in the City Hall, Pietermaritzburg, on 16 November 1900, chaired by the Prime Minister, Sir Albert Hime, to discuss a suitable memorial in the capital of the Colony.¹²¹ The Volunteer War Memorial enjoyed a smoother gestation than the Irish National (World) War (I) Memorial, only completed in 1938, twenty years after the end of World War I, and which was bedevilled by disputes over location and design.¹²² As was to be the case in Jeffery's Ireland after World War I, there was debate over funding, and the form that it should take. In late 1901 it was proposed that the memorial should be a monument to the fallen Natal Volunteers. The debate also included a proposal to let the government foot the bill, but many, including Colonel Greene of the Carbineers, favoured the usual method of public subscription. It was also felt preferable to erect one large memorial rather than have many smaller ones scattered throughout the Colony.¹²³ The collective civic process was another important facet

¹¹⁹(...continued)

that of the Volunteer War Memorial (M Coghlan, 'The Last Casualty of the Anglo-Zulu War: Damage to the Anglo-Zulu War Memorial, Pietermaritzburg', Military History Journal, 10/1, June 1995, pp24-6). Also see Bassett (ed), The Buildings of Pietermaritzburg, I, p307; Hillebrand, 'The Pietermaritzburg Town Hall', in Laband and Haswell (eds), Pietermaritzburg 1838-1988, p54.

¹²⁰ See Hans Fransen, 'Architecture: the new amidst the old', in Laband and Haswell (eds), Pietermaritzburg 1838-1988, p56.

¹²¹ Times of Natal, 17 November 1900; Natal Witness, 17 November 1900.

¹²² Jeffery, Ireland and the Great War, pp113-121. Carman Miller has also pointed out that in Canada, the British dominion most ravaged by dispute over participation in the Anglo-Boer War, memorials have nevertheless proliferated (Carman Miller, Painting the Map Red: Canada and the South African War, 1899-1902, Montreal & Kingston, Canadian War Museum and McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993, xi; and see AG Morris, A Canadian Mounted Rifleman at War, 1899-1902: The Reminiscences of AE Hilder, Cape Town, Van Riebeeck Society, 2000, frontispiece).

¹²³ PAR, MJPW 89, Evans to Commandant of Volunteers, 4 December 1901, in minute
(continued...)

in the evolution of private grief for war dead to public commemoration.¹²⁴

In December 1901 the planning for a local memorial was temporarily sidetracked by the proposal from a Mr MJ Farrell, an architect, for an extravagant memorial complex in the city. It entailed the demolition of the Post Office and Supreme Court Building (the present Tatham Art Gallery), and the laying out in its place of a public square, complete with monument.¹²⁵ This proposal fell on barren ground. The inspiration for this design was probably a proposed memorial to British and colonial dead in London, in the form of a 'Hall of Heroes' on the Strand.¹²⁶

The Pietermaritzburg memorial had been approved by April 1904, when it was recorded that the design and execution of four allegorical panels for the podium (Britannia and her Colonies; the Death of the Warrior and Vision of the Mourner; St George and the Dragon; and Justice and Mercy), with a central pyramidal column (following the Egyptian belief in the regeneration of the dead),¹²⁷ had been entrusted to a highly regarded British sculptor, George E Wade.¹²⁸ The

¹²³(...continued)

paper L&W 6330/1901; PAR, MJPW 89, Evans to Commandant of Volunteers, 4 December 1901, in minute paper L&W 6330/1901; PAR, MJPW 89, minute paper L&W 6330/1901, 4-19 December 1901; Natal Advertiser, 19 November 1900.

¹²⁴ King, 'Remembering and Forgetting in the Public Memorials of the Great War', in Forty and Kuchler (eds), The Art of Forgetting, pp147-150.

¹²⁵ PAR, CSO 1693, minute paper 10567/1901, MJ Farrell to Volunteer Memorial Committee, 13 December 1901. An evenly matched debate existed between adherents of the artistic or the utilitarian in the structure of memorials (King, 'Remembering and Forgetting in the Public Memorials of the Great War', in Forty and Kuchler (eds), The Art of Forgetting, p159.

¹²⁶ PAR, PM 17, minute paper 50/1900, Proposal Imperial Monument, 5 December 1900; PAR, PM 17, minute paper 50/1900, 28 May 1900; Natal Witness, 26 May 1900; and see Jeffery, Ireland and the Great War, pp107-111.

¹²⁷ JB van der Merwe, 'Monumente - Hulle Plek in die Moderne Samelewing: As Kunsuiting, as Utiliteitsvoorwerp, met Speciale Vermelding van SA Monumente', MA thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1984, pp3-6; personal communication, Dr Walter Peters, School of Architecture, University of Natal, Durban, 22 February 2002.

¹²⁸ St James's Gazette, 26 April 1904, enclosure in PAR, PWD, 2/166, minute paper
(continued...)

impressive dimensions of the memorial, the quality of the imported materials, and the trouble taken to secure the services of a reputable sculptor, all reflected the Colony's commitment to a prominent public symbol of its war effort, regardless of however flawed that had been, in the Anglo-Boer War.

The design was the work of AE Dainton, the official architect for the Natal Department of Public Works. Dainton enjoyed a distinguished record, and was also responsible for the Legislative Assembly Building (1899-1902).

The symbolism of sacrifice and memory was an important feature of the design of war memorials, and although the Natal Volunteer casualties of the Anglo-Boer War were to be dwarfed in number by those of the World Wars, this criterion also applied to the memorials to the former conflict in the Colony. There was a strict convention governing the depiction of sacrifice. The subdued design and ambience of this memorial and of the others in the Court Gardens complex, is one of heroic dedication and sacrifice. Where figures have been added to the simple central feature, usually a form of obelisk, the poses are neutral and non-aggressive, thereby avoiding controversy at a time when public unity was important to the act of commemoration.¹²⁹

The dead were listed, but more important was the sacrifice itself, and this sacrifice was often linked to a nationalist or, in the case of Natal, Imperial purpose. The path for this greater purpose was smoothed by the passage of time that usually occurred between a conflict and the unveiling of a memorial. In the case of the Volunteer War Memorial, this period was five years.¹³⁰ Although a

¹²⁸(...continued)

2330/1906; Natal Witness, 16 February 1907. The allegorical components that dominate the Volunteer War Memorial fall into what JB van der Merwe terms abstract memory (Van der Merwe, 'Monumente', p101).

¹²⁹ King, 'Remembering and Forgetting in the Public Memorials of the Great War', in Forty and Küchler (eds), The Art of Forgetting, pp161-4.

¹³⁰ Michael Rowlands, 'Remembering to Forget: Sublimation as Sacrifice in War Memorials', in Forty and Küchler (eds), The Art of Forgetting, pp130-2; King, 'Remembering and Forgetting in the Public Memorials of the Great War', in Forty and Küchler (eds), The Art of Forgetting, pp152 and 155-6. Both Rowlands and King's examples are drawn primarily

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detailed comparison of the Volunteer War Memorial with the commemoration in Natal of World War I is beyond the scope of this study, the close proximity in Pietermaritzburg of the Cenotaph, and the writing of Cannadine on the Irish experience in that war, suggests that a similar, albeit more intense, pattern was followed to remember its dead.¹³¹

The overarching purpose and justification of the sacrifice of war for the overall national good was represented by a female figure, reflective but composed. In the case of the Volunteer War Memorial, the female figure of Victory, representing the nation (Natal in this case) was placed on top of the column, sheathing the sword of war and the names of the dead ring the central plinth beneath her.¹³² The classical revival style contrasts with the Gothic revival of the Bushman's River Pass Memorial (1874), which had been popularised by the Albert Memorial in London.¹³³ The construction of the Volunteer War Memorial, between October 1906 and February 1907, was undertaken by Williams and Bell, a building and contracting firm of Pietermaritzburg.¹³⁴

The unveiling on 16 February 1907 by the Governor, Sir Henry McCallum, included a speech by

¹³⁰(...continued)

from World War I, and Natal memorials of that conflict mirrored the experience of Britain (See Natal Witness, 24 October, 13 November and 19 December 1922 and 24 July 1924).

¹³¹ See, for example, Natal Carbineers History Centre, file, Ceremonial and Formal Functions 1855-1961, programme, service for the unveiling and dedication of the Estcourt Town and District War Memorial, 20 July 1924, City of Pietermaritzburg, Remembrance Day Armistice Anniversary, United Memorial Service, 11 November 1938; Natal Witness, 13 November 1922.

¹³² Rowlands, 'Remembering to Forget: Sublimation as Sacrifice in War Memorials', in Forty and Küchler (eds), The Art of Forgetting, pp134-7. For a detailed study of the allegorical 'armed maiden' in Western cultural landscapes, where the sword represents the weapon of justice, see Marina Warner, Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form, London, Vintage, 1996, xx, pp147,155 and 159.

¹³³ Nicola Smith, 'The Albert Memorial', in Macready and Thompson (eds), Influences in Victorian Art and Architecture, pp65-72; Bayley, The Albert Memorial, passim; Great British Monuments, pp24-5.

¹³⁴ St James's Gazette, 26 April 1904, enclosure in PAR, PWD 2/166, minute paper 2330/1906; PAR, PWD 2/169, minute paper 4747/1906, specifications and schedule for erection of Volunteer War Memorial; and see Camp, Historic Pietermaritzburg, p19.

the Prime Minister, Frederick Moor, and was, according to the Natal Witness, an impressive occasion. Few representatives of Natal's governing and settler elite were missing, and the Colony's military regiments and cadet corps were present in strength. The newspaper enthused:

'It [the memorial] stands chief amongst the monuments of the capital City of the Colony, and in simple, yet terse language proclaims to present and future generations the valiant deeds of the men of Natal who forfeited everything on earth to uphold the honour of the Colony they loved and the Empire they cherished.'¹³⁵

The sentiments expressed by the Natal Witness were echoed by Sir Henry McCallum.¹³⁶

McCallum also alluded to the 1906 Natal Rebellion which had once again called the Colony's military forces into the field, as well as exhibiting a distinctly conciliatory tone in reference to the Natal Afrikaner community. Together these two allusions illustrate a degree of conciliation on a local level between English and Afrikaner settlers in the Colony at the expense of its African population.

When Robert Giddings wrote that the

'choreography of public ceremony is also supposed to re-enact the ways in which ancient ceremonies of Church, state and law were performed, to bring before us the timeless configurations of our social experience, to bring briefly to life significant moments of our past history',¹³⁷

he could easily have been referring to this unveiling ceremony. An important point made by Michael Rowlands is that represented in a memorial such as the Volunteer War Memorial is an evolution from the sombre remembrance of individual death to a heroic collective assertiveness and moral righteousness. The collective assertiveness was reinforced later the same year when, in

¹³⁵ Natal Witness, 16 and 18 February 1907; and see PAR, PWD 2/169, minute paper 4747/1906, *Erection of War Memorial*; Times of Natal, 18 February 1907; Natal Mercury, 18 February 1907; and see Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, p283.

¹³⁶ Natal Witness, 18 February 1907.

¹³⁷ Giddings, 'Delusive seduction', in MacKenzie (ed), Popular Imperialism and the Military, p27.

November 1907, another Volunteer memorial was unveiled on the battlefield of Isandlwana, this time to the Natal Carbineer dead of that Anglo-Zulu War engagement.¹³⁸

The stylised ritual which marked the unveiling of the war memorials in the Colony, and later by the Province of Natal (in the case of the World Wars) was an important component in the deployment by the settler elite of the commemoration (exaggerated in the case of the Anglo-Boer War) of military effort to reinforce image and authority.¹³⁹

In the light of the disputed history of the Anglo-Boer War, and of the Imperial epoch in South Africa, it is important briefly to consider the long-term survival of the memorials considered above.¹⁴⁰ There is little evidence of deliberate iconoclasm, and the recent examples of damage to war memorials in the Pietermaritzburg city centre, such as that to the Anglo-Zulu War Memorial, were accidental rather than deliberate.¹⁴¹

However, since the inception of democratic local government in 1995 many of the local authorities that administer these memorials no longer necessarily share the cultural heritage associated with their erection. The transfer from a ruling elite with its roots primarily in the English settler class that ruled Natal during the period of the Anglo-Boer War, to an African elite has seen a certain expunging of the memorabilia of the former such as the removal of the portraits of officials from

¹³⁸ Natal Witness, 6 November 1907.

¹³⁹ See Connerton, How Societies Remember, pp44-5,48,51-2,63,66 and 70-1.

¹⁴⁰ For general comment on the physical and social endurance of memorials, see King, 'Remembering and Forgetting in the Public Memorials of the Great War', in Forty and Küchler (eds), The Art of Forgetting, p151.

¹⁴¹ See Coghlan, 'The Last Casualty of the Anglo-Zulu War', passim; Natal Witness, 15 April and 15 December 1994, and 3 March 2001. The maintenance of the Volunteer battlefield graves are the responsibility of the South African War Graves Commission. Situated in more remote locations than the urban war memorials, they have been subject to more deterioration and vandalism (See Natal Carbineers History Centre, Anglo-Boer War file, Stevenson to Royal Natal Carbineers, 17 September 1960, EG Witherspoon to Royal Natal Carbineers, 16 October 1960, Stevenson to Royal Natal Carbineers, 1 November 1960, CC Henderson to Royal Natal Carbineers, 22 November 1960, Foster to Stevenson, 17 June 1961, and EG Witherspoon to Royal Natal Carbineers, 25 August 1961; Natal Carbineers History Centre, Peter Francis Papers, Stevenson to Colonel Francis, 16 April 1964).

civic offices.¹⁴²

Generally, though, there has been minimal disturbance of war memorials to colonial military campaigns and those of the World Wars. The reason for the endurance of these symbols despite the presence of potentially hostile socio-political environments is central to the debate over memory. Firstly, with the partial exception of World War II, living memory of conflicts such as the Anglo-Boer War has now receded. This has meant that memorials such as the Volunteer War Memorial have come to contribute more to forgetting than remembrance because their existence has simply been absorbed into the cityscape.¹⁴³ It is only when memorials have been damaged, as in the case of the Anglo-Zulu War Memorial in 1994,¹⁴⁴ or when they are threatened with removal altogether, as in the case of the former Soviet Union after 1989, or when they become a focus for specific commemoration, as in the case of the battle of Colenso centenary commemoration at the Clouston Garden of Remembrance in December 1999, that memorials tend to catch the public attention.¹⁴⁵ In fact, the Volunteer War Memorial itself went un-noticed during the Anglo-Boer War commemorations from 1999 to 2002, and it was only when the structure was threatened with casual vandalism in 1997 that its bronze plaques were temporarily removed for safekeeping before a security railing was erected in June 2000.¹⁴⁶

Royal Visits, and Military and Political Dignitaries

The interaction of colonists with British dignitaries, both Royal and political or military, also cemented the Imperial connection. The Royal visit to Natal of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York (later King George V and Queen Mary) in August 1901 provided an opportunity for Natal to reaffirm the spirit of Imperial connection that in theory underpinned the Colony's

¹⁴² Natal Witness, 3 December 1998, 10 and 15 April 1999.

¹⁴³ Forty, 'Introduction', in Forty and Küchler (eds), The Art of Forgetting, pp6,9 and 13.

¹⁴⁴ Natal Witness, 15 April and 15 December 1994.

¹⁴⁵ Forty, 'Introduction', in Forty and Küchler (eds), The Art of Forgetting, pp10-12.

¹⁴⁶ Natal Witness, 10 and 16 January 1998, 29 December 1998, 4 September 1999 and 1 July 2000.

participation in the war. Pietermaritzburg, as the seat of the colonial government and of British military authority in Natal, was the focus of official visits associated with the Empire, especially those of Royalty.¹⁴⁷ The Natal Witness commented that

'The soldier boys, the soldier men who lined the streets [of Pietermaritzburg], from the Scots Guards to the Linesman, the Colonial Volunteers who marched in the procession, the Zulu warrior, the Native Scout in khaki - all combined to make a living picture of Britain's greatness.'¹⁴⁸

A commemorative pamphlet published by this same newspaper ventured the opinion that Natalians 'hope to be recognised as a loyal people that have not feared to cast all we had into the Empire's balance'.¹⁴⁹ A few months earlier, in May 1901, the Pietermaritzburg Council, inspired by the fashionable imperial fervour inspired by the impending visit, even proposed the renaming of several city streets such as Longmarket, Loop, Greyling, Boom, Berg, Pietermaritz and Burger Streets, to Queen, King Edward, Gallwey, Milner, Cornwall, York and Hutchinson. The proposal was, however, never implemented.¹⁵⁰ Cannadine terms the pageantry which typified such occasions as 'the spectacular projection' of the Imperial connection to the peripheries of the realm, especially in circumstances of strain or crisis, as had been the case during the Anglo-Boer War.¹⁵¹ Impressive ceremonial arches, which dominated the street scape of Pietermaritzburg, were a striking example of such pageantry.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ See Jill Raybould, 'Colonial capital to provincial centre, 1904-1912', in Laband and Haswell (eds), Pietermaritzburg 1838-1988, p90, and Ruth Gordon, 'Royal visitors', pp94-5.

¹⁴⁸ Natal Witness, 15 August 1901.

¹⁴⁹ The Royal Visit to Natal, Pietermaritzburg, Natal Witness, 1901, pp5 and 8.

¹⁵⁰ Christopher Merrett in Natal Witness, 23 February 2002.

¹⁵¹ Cannadine, Ornamentalism, p111, and see pp114 and 121-2.

¹⁵² The Royal visit to Natal, pp32-5; Natal Mercury, 15 August 1901. The visit had a similar effect on the settler populace of Durban. See McCracken, 'The Political Scene in Wartime Durban', in Wassermann and Kearney (eds), A Warrior's Gateway, pp19-20.

The visit meant a temporary recall to the colours for regiments such as the Natal Carbineers.¹⁵³ The Governor, Sir Henry McCallum, proclaimed public holidays for 13 and 14 August.¹⁵⁴ The main ceremonial function of the visit, at the Oval in Alexandra Park, included a review of the colonial Volunteer forces, attended by an estimated 10 000 people.¹⁵⁵ The impressions of the visit left by Harold Archibald, a trooper in the Border Mounted Rifles, were imbued with the pomp and ceremony of the occasion.¹⁵⁶ The Imperial bond in Natal in terms of Royalty appeared to be re-affirmed despite the wavering commitment to the war.¹⁵⁷ In fact, although it was one of the intentions of the visit to the colonies of settlement to express the gratitude of the crown for the war service furnished by these colonies, settler Natalians, after their frenetic response to the visit, would probably have been dismayed to learn it was only after intense political pressure from Milner, the British High Commissioner in South Africa from 1897 to 1905, and Joseph Chamberlain, the Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1895 to 1903, that South Africa was included in the itinerary at all, and then only for a brief 53 hours.¹⁵⁸ It is important once again to remember that this Royal party was not the first affirmation of this description either. Queen Victoria's son, Prince

¹⁵³ Natal Witness, 8 June 1901; and see Natal Carbineers Regimental Orders for August 1901, in Natal Witness, 2 August 1901. PAR, MJPW 87, minute paper L&W 4348/1901, Royal Visit, Volunteer Encampment Programme, August 1901; Nicholson diary, 6-12 August 1901; Bizley diary, 13-15 August 1901; Times of Natal, 9 August 1901; Natal Mercury, 23 August 1901. KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Museum Service, TR Bennett Papers, 'Official Programme of Arrangements in connection with the Visit of Their Royal Highnesses The Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York'.

¹⁵⁴ The Royal visit to Natal, passim.

¹⁵⁵ Nicholson diary, 14 August 1901; The Royal Visit to Natal, p68.

¹⁵⁶ HD Archibald, 'Harold's Reminiscences: The Reminiscences of HD Archibald', quoted in Gordon, Honour Without Riches, pp300-03; Gordon, Place of the Elephant, p97. The Archibalds were another settler family to see considerable service in Natal military and political circles. Perhaps the most prominent was Robert Montgomery Archibald MLA, who served as Speaker of the Natal Legislative Assembly in 1902 and 1906 (See Gordon, Honour Without Riches, pp253-4 and 321-3).

¹⁵⁷ This visit has been considered in detail in Theo Aronson, Royal Ambassadors: British Royalties in Southern Africa 1860-1947, Cape Town, David Philip, 1975, pp53-65.

¹⁵⁸ Buckner, 'The Royal Tour of 1901', pp324-48.

Alfred, for example, visited Natal from 3 to 5 September 1860.¹⁵⁹

Another opportunity to cement the Imperial connection was the coronation of Edward VII in 1902,¹⁶⁰ attended by a Natal contingent comprising three officers, two warrant officers, four sergeants, eight corporals and 83 men.¹⁶¹ Back in remote northern Natal the Volunteer Composite Regiment held their own celebration coronation dinner at the De Jager's Drift camp on 26 June, together with the Royal Lancashire Regiment and the Army Service Corps,¹⁶² and were also presented with a 'King's Gift' of 1/6, to commemorate the coronation, that was distributed in the form of tobacco.¹⁶³

The military bond also remained strong, judging by the positive reception accorded both Roberts and Buller in Pietermaritzburg and Durban. In October 1900 Buller returned home to England from his controversial tour of duty in Natal. His visit coincided with the continued commemorations of the return of the Natal Volunteers from service. At a reception in Pietermaritzburg on 17 October Buller congratulated the Colony on 'the growth of military spirit and military ardour'.¹⁶⁴ Lord Roberts also paid a visit to Pietermaritzburg, on 4 December 1900. The guard-of-honour at the station comprised the King's Royal Rifles, the Headquarters Squadron of the Natal Carbineers, plus

¹⁵⁹ Natal Witness, 24 and 31 August and 7 September 1860; Aronson, Royal Ambassadors, pp28-9; Gordon, The Place of the Elephant, pp44-6.

¹⁶⁰ Natal Witness, 2 May and 3 July 1902.

¹⁶¹ PAR, MJPW 93, minute paper L&W 2131/1902, Commandant of Volunteers to Hime, 26 April 1902; PAR, NDR 2/6, Muster Roll VCR, 1 April 1902; and see PM 26, Frank Churchill to Hime, 22 January 1902; Natal Mercury, 26 April, 6, 26 and 27 June 1902, and 25 July 1902.

¹⁶² Natal Mercury, 3 July 1902.

¹⁶³ Nicholson diary, 6 July 1902.

¹⁶⁴ Natal Witness, 18 October 1900; Times of Natal, 18 October 1900; Natal Advertiser, 19 October and 2 November 1900; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, pp169-171. For further detail on Buller's enthusiastic reception in Pietermaritzburg and Durban see Natal Volunteer Record, pp20-32.

a contingent from the Volunteer Composite Regiment.¹⁶⁵

Would similar receptions be extended to British politicians, particularly those who had played an important part in bringing about a war that had not been in Natal's interests and which the Colony had not welcomed? Such visitors did indeed receive a positive welcome. On 25 October 1901, for example, Lord Milner was welcomed with enthusiasm to Ladysmith,¹⁶⁶ and in January 1903, Joseph Chamberlain was fêted in similar style during a visit to Natal.¹⁶⁷

Dark Tourism

Finally, brief mention will be made of the attention paid to Anglo-Boer War battle sites as attractions for visitors, an aspect of what is termed 'dark tourism' in the field of heritage management. It was suggested above that with the passage of time physical structures such as monuments retained relevance through their association with acts of commemoration, for example on the occasion of major anniversaries. In British military culture such ceremonies do not take place only at memorial precincts in cities or towns, such as in the case of the Volunteer War Memorial in Pietermaritzburg, but also on or close to relevant battlefields such as Colenso.

Pilgrimages to sites of military actions and the locations of the burial of its casualties have in the twentieth century become an important facet of dark tourism.¹⁶⁸ Although dark tourism is most often associated with the enormous casualties of the industrial conflicts and episodes of genocide in the twentieth century which gave rise to what Lennon and Foley call a 'memorial culture',¹⁶⁹ the sites of the battles of the Anglo-Boer War with which the Natal Volunteers were associated have

¹⁶⁵ Natal Witness, 5 December 1900.

¹⁶⁶ KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Museum Service, TR Bennett Papers, newspaper broadsheet, Ladysmith, 25 October 1901. Also see Natal Witness, 31 October to 4 November 1901.

¹⁶⁷ KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Museum Service, TR Bennett Papers, invitation and programme, Ladysmith celebrations, Natal Witness, 28 December 1902 to 5 January 1903.

¹⁶⁸ Lennon and Foley, Dark Tourism, 2000, pp3-5.

¹⁶⁹ Lennon and Foley, Dark Tourism, chapters 2 to 4 and 7.

exerted a strong attraction on the informed tourist, particularly from Britain, as have those of the Anglo-Zulu War.

On 28 April 1900 the first British battlefield tour party departed Southampton. Its itinerary included Ladysmith and Elandslaagte.¹⁷⁰ In October of the same year Mr C Hogan, manager of the Colenso Livery Stables, placed an advertisement in the Natal Witness for tours to the 'Colenso battlefields'.¹⁷¹ At this time, probably in 1900, the first battlefield guide, The Battlefields of Natal Revisited, was published by John Singleton.¹⁷²

The Spioenkop battlefield also became an early tourist attraction. The Spion Kop Hotel and the Spion Kop Hostel, opened by proprietors Tennent and Arbuthnot in September and November 1902 respectively, catered specifically for those 'tourists and others desirous of visiting the battlefields in the neighbourhood'.¹⁷³ When Milner and Chamberlain visited Natal, escorted tours of the Anglo-Boer War battlefields were an integral part of their itineraries.¹⁷⁴ The Natal Volunteers visited Colenso several times in later years, almost as a pilgrimage. The annual training bivouac was held there in 1904, 1909 and 1911, and in 1904 mock fights were staged over the earlier battlefield.¹⁷⁵

Conclusion

¹⁷⁰ Natal Advertiser, 25 April 1900.

¹⁷¹ Natal Witness, 8 November 1900.

¹⁷² Christison Rare Books, Pietermaritzburg, catalogue 18, item 279.

¹⁷³ Natal Witness, 17 September and 5 November 1902.

¹⁷⁴ KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Museum Service, TR Bennett Papers, 'Rough proposed itinerary for Lord Milner's visit to Natal, October - November 1901', Chamberlain visit, December 1902-January 1903, commemorative programme; Natal Witness, 29 October to 4 November 1901, and 1 to 3 January 1903.

¹⁷⁵ Natal Witness, 1 April 1904, 13 April 1909, and 15 to 21 April 1911; Artee, 'Reminiscences of an ex-Carbineer', 1950, p11; Stalker, The Natal Carbineers, pp279-80, 286-8 and 294-6.

This thesis has been concerned with the investigation and interpretation of the role of the Natal Volunteers in the Anglo-Boer War, but has also aimed at an assessment of the perception of this role within Natal colonial society. This chapter has in turn demonstrated that the modest reality of the limited impact on military operations of the Volunteers is most accurately represented by the candid visual record left by individual soldiers and by the emotive simplicity of battlefield homage to the dead. In contrast, Natal's public collective memory of the Anglo-Boer War, manifested in diverse forms ranging from formal funeral rites, the written record, agitation for commemorative honours, and memorials of commemoration, was more stage-managed, and was associated more accurately with the re-assertion of the Colony's Imperial connection than with the cracks and divisions that had characterised the war years in Natal. This contrast is clearly articulated in the diary record by JB Nicholson of the Royal visit of 1901. In contrast to the exaggerated pomp and circumstance surrounding this event evident in the press and in popular media, Nicholson, by that point in the war a seasoned campaigner, left an almost cynically hard and unimpressed account.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ Nicholson diary, 12 to 15 August 1901.

CONCLUSION

Perception and Reality

**Bravo Natalia! Once again, bravo!
When, in the Empire's need, she called to thee,
To fight for equal laws and liberty,
Thy sons into the fray sprang eagerly.
Bravo Natalia!¹**

In January 1900 the Natal Mercury printed an article from The Times lionizing the contribution of Natal to the war effort. It began on the following note:

No feature in the great crisis through which South Africa is passing has, from the Imperial point of view, been so satisfactory as the attitude of Natal. Without hesitation or reserve, without counting the dangers and sacrifices involved, the brave little Colony has thrown in its lot with the Imperial Government, and used its utmost endeavours to help the work of the Imperial authorities.²

The validity of such praise - a typical example of the perception of the Colony's supposed whole-hearted support of, and contribution to, the British war effort in Natal during the Anglo-Boer War - is at the core of this study.

In the introduction to this thesis it was stated that the stance of the Natal government and settler colonists, and their military response to the war, has to date been of only peripheral concern to the historiography of the Anglo-Boer War. This study has investigated whether or not this marginalisation has been deserved. In the process, the focus of study has been inverted to investigate the Natal response to the war from the perspective of the Colony rather than from the British political or military one. In this regard the Natal government, the English settler community, the colonial press, and the records of participating military regiments, all projected

¹ Times of Natal, 8 December 1899.

² Natal Mercury, 11 January 1900.

a positive, often exaggeratedly partisan and unwavering popular commitment to the war, with a strong emphasis on Imperial solidarity and sentiment, and on blood ties with Britain. Colonial self-promotion was particularly evident in the response in the Colony to the relief of Ladysmith, and in the exaggeration, channelled largely through the media, of relatively minor campaign incidents or skirmishes, such as Volunteer participation in the successful action at Acton Homes in January 1900, and the disputed Volunteer part in the occupation of Lang's Nek in June 1900.

The complacent Colonial perception of commitment to the war effort has been measured in this study against what actually proved to be a moderate and vacillating role played by the Colony in the war. The Colony's was a largely selfish commitment closely tied to specific Natal interests. This thesis has suggested a distinct discrepancy between the fact of Natal commitment to the Anglo-Boer War, and the fiction projected during the conflict and in the years following its conclusion, particularly in the Colony itself. For example, although the reception home in Pietermaritzburg and Durban of the Volunteers in October 1900 earned the force an enthusiastic welcome from the English settler community, there was evidence that this welcome, occurring at a time when colonial interest in the war was low, was tinged with relief that the Colony's military commitment had mercifully been curtailed. Further evidence of the diminished importance of the war in colonial affairs was displayed by the marginal role that it played as an issue in the Legislative Assembly elections of September 1901, despite the fact that the election coincided with a major Boer incursion into the Colony.

The most apparent evidence of the gulf between the perception and reality of the Natal war effort was evident in the public domain of collective memory, both during and after the war. The erection of memorials of commemoration, the receptions accorded to visiting royalty and political and military dignitaries, the contemporary written and musical record, the commemoration of the siege of Ladysmith, as well as the agitation for recognition in the form of medals, honours and colours, all represented a conscious effort to re-assert the bond between the Colony and the Empire that had actually been found wanting during the war. This official embellishment of Natal's very ordinary war record was in contrast to the candid private records kept by Volunteers and genuine ceremonies of remembrance such as the battlefield internment of casualties.

While this conclusion questions the validity of the scale of wartime commitment claimed by the

Natal Volunteers, the reader is not asked to condemn as altogether deliberate the creation of the partial illusion. Its genesis can be explained in two comparable examples taken from commentary on the Australian irregular involvement in the Anglo-Boer War. Firstly, the contemporary Australian perspective on the weight of numbers, both of participants and casualties, was to be irrevocably altered by the subsequent enormous scale of World War I. Then, in terms of contemporary interest, once the initial patriotic flush of mobilization had died away, the disjointed and penny-packet deployment of colonial irregulars, together with the contentious and domestically unpopular guerrilla phase of the war, made it difficult for observers to attach emotional significance, let alone strategic importance, to military events without, perhaps, adding some embellishment in order to invest them with some relevance.³

Also, as was the case with the government of Natal, Australian politicians had required considerable persuasion from Britain to pledge support for Imperial interests in South Africa.⁴ In a situation akin to that of Natal, the Illustrated London News Record of the Transvaal War ignored the realities in the case of Australia, and presented a patriotic picture of martial ardour.⁵ With regard to Canada, Carman Miller argues that 'English Canada's response to the war was less monolithic and selfless than many historians have assumed',⁶ and was at odds with the 'popular public facade'.⁷

The War and Society Context of Volunteer Commitment

In Britain the slide to war in the 1890s, and the conduct of the conflict itself, were directed largely by strategic and political motives. However, in the case of Natal, situated vulnerably and

³ See KS Ingles, preface, in Field, The Forgotten War, v; Field, The Forgotten War, pp2-3. A similar situation pertained in relation to Canada (Miller, Painting the Map Red, xii).

⁴ Field, The Forgotten War, pp11-18.

⁵ 'The Colonies in the War', in The Illustrated London News Record of the Transvaal War, p57.

⁶ Miller, Painting the Map Red, xiv, pp16-48.

⁷ Miller, Painting the Map Red, pp4,7-9; and see Morris, A Canadian Mounted Rifleman at War, xiii-xxv.

strategically in one of the major theatres of operations, factors of a strongly socio-economic character complicated any whole-hearted commitment to participation in the war, and influenced the level of ongoing support.

Popular and military commitment, as well as Natal government and settler endorsement of the war, were only occasionally stimulated when the Colony's parochial interests were most directly threatened. One of these occasions was at the outset of the war when the northern Natal towns of Newcastle, Charlestown and Dundee were threatened and overrun by the Boers. Yet, in November 1899, for example, even a threat as immediate as a Boer incursion into the Natal midlands failed to elicit an unequivocal course of action by the Natal government. Nor did it lead to the appropriate deployment of the Volunteer regiments, or the effective mobilization of the Colony's reserve tier of defence, such as the rifle associations and home guards.

The strong and close bond that existed between the Natal Volunteers and the settler society from which they were drawn, and the interests that this social strata represented, were made evident during the course of the war by an immediate and even exaggerated concern with the welfare of the force. This concern was most evident in the lobbying in areas of special interest such as medical care and battlefield commendations.

However, it was in the wake of the relief of Ladysmith, which from Natal's perspective was the climactic military event of the war, that concern for the welfare of the Volunteers was increasingly overlaid by agitation for their demobilization. This agitation occurred against the backdrop of several specific strategic issues, such as the halt of the Natal Army in the vicinity of Ladysmith during April and May 1900, and the restriction of the Volunteers to the geographical area of the Colony. It was also motivated by settler financial concerns, both in terms of the portion of the cost of the force borne by the local exchequer, and concerns about the cost to the Volunteer soldiers themselves of continued service in the field.

Solidarity with the Imperial military cause in South Africa rapidly waned from this point. This was shown in the materialistic demands of the siege town, Ladysmith, for compensation, the agitation of many Volunteers - particularly civil servants and farmers - for exemption from continued service, and the expectation of employers for preferential treatment for employees serving with

the Volunteers.

Settler opinion therefore became increasingly intolerant of the drawn-out low-key British pacification operations which followed the end of the formal phase of the war in mid-1900. It chafed particularly at the recurrent military exigencies between June 1900 (caused by the continued guerrilla resistance of the Boers - most dramatically represented by Louis Botha's incursion in September-October 1901) and the end of the war. These episodes of crisis necessitated delaying the demobilization of the bulk of the Volunteer force, which finally occurred in October 1900, followed by the retention in the field of a representative composite unit, the Volunteer Composite Regiment.

The Military Effectiveness of the Natal Volunteers

**'Had the whole campaign been left to the irregulars
it would have been one endless succession of ambushes,
sniping-parties, surprises and ruses,
continued until such time as the last Natal sniper
had stolen a march on and got first shot
at the last Boer sniper, or visa versa'.⁸**

Bond asserts that the role of cavalry in reconnaissance and liaison duties was actually enhanced in the period between the introduction of the magazine-rifle and machine-gun, and full mechanization.⁹ Within this framework, this thesis has investigated the specific military effectiveness of the Natal Volunteer force. Once again, perception and reality diverged. In Natal the concept of citizen soldiering in the British mould was strong at the time of the Anglo-Boer War, but it had evolved against the backdrop of minimal military demands, limited training, and a strong and often unsympathetic and fickle social agenda. The Natal Volunteers were, therefore, unable to match or assimilate the professional standards of the British Army in areas such as discipline, which in turn complicated and compromised co-operation with the British forces in

⁸ Danes, Cassell's History of the Boer War, p420.

⁹ Brian Bond, War and Society in Europe, 1870-1970, Leicester, Leics, Leicester University Press and Fontana Paperbacks, 1983, pp50-1; and see Dwyer, 'Raiding Strategy', pp272 and 280.

Natal.

It is also likely, though never explicitly stated, that offers of military assistance from the colonies were from the outset appreciated by Britain more for their political value in the context of the solidarity of the Empire, than for their military utility.¹⁰

In the field, the Natal Volunteer force, whose participation in the war in support of Britain had been secured with difficulty, did indeed find itself marginalised in most of the major actions of the formal phase of the campaign in Natal, with the notable exception of the battle of Colenso in December 1899.

However, despite these drawbacks, this thesis has argued that the military faculties that the Volunteer force (particularly its mounted component) did potentially possess, most notably in the fields of scouting, reconnaissance and escort duty, were seldom effectively utilised by a conservative British military structure and its unsympathetic commanders (with the few isolated exceptions of officers such as Major Hubert Gough). Consequently, at the battle of Willowgrange in November 1899, for example, on the Spioenkop campaign in January-February 1900, and in the major attritional infantry battles for the Tugela Heights in February 1900, the Volunteers were marginalised.

When opportunities were realised to demonstrate effectiveness in action, the Natal Volunteers produced equivocal results. In the skirmish at Bester's in October 1899, and during the minor forays from Ladysmith during the first week of the siege, Volunteers failed to impress. Nevertheless, at Gun Hill on the Ladysmith perimeter, at Colenso, and at Hussar Hill (all in December 1899), as well as at Acton Homes in January 1900, the force performed creditably. Even so, the cases of Gun Hill and Colenso were questioned in colonial circles as being examples of the inappropriate deployment of mounted troops in infantry roles, likely to be costly in terms of casualties.

When Volunteers were deployed in appropriate roles, such as scouting and reconnaissance, as was

¹⁰ See Miller, Painting the Map Red, p32, for the case of Canada.

the case prior to the battles of Willowgrange and Colenso, and in the preparation of the Ladysmith siege perimeter, the mounted component of the force was able to demonstrate that it was capable of playing a meaningful role in military operations. Examples of this appropriate type of deployment occurred in the Dundee district in September and October 1899, in the vicinity of Colenso and Estcourt in October and November 1899, during the march from Chieveley to Spioenkop in January 1900, during the less prominent actions during the final effort to relieve Ladysmith through the Tugela Heights in February 1900, and in Buller's successful operations against the Boers in far northern Natal in May and June 1900, as well as in a general sense in the latter region from 1900 to 1902.

In terms of individual performance, the positive aspects of colonial military operations were reflected in the highly commended campaign records of Volunteers such as Major Duncan McKenzie, Corporal William Park Gray, and Troopers FC Farmer and David Sclanders, with Farmer and Sclanders both earning decorations for bravery.

The small infantry component of the Volunteer force, regiments such as the Durban Light Infantry and the Natal Royal Rifles, struggled even more than their mounted compatriots to secure a meaningful role in the war, and were for the most part relegated to rear-echelon line of communication duties.

The siege of Ladysmith presented a special case in an assessment of Natal Volunteer capabilities. Militarily, the bulk of the most effective component of the Volunteer force, the mounted regiments, were stranded in the besieged town from November 1899 to February 1900, and were denied the opportunity effectively to demonstrate their tactical abilities. On the other hand, the fortitude the Volunteers displayed in defence of the most important town in northern Natal in the face of disease, privation, and Boer bombardment, excited the concern and interest of the Colony and the Empire at large, and in the process led to a widespread positive appreciation of the force.

In terms of social context, as well as military effectiveness, this study has also sought a point of reference for the Natal Volunteers from within the British and dominion military establishments and public life. Such was found, firstly, in the English Yeomanry and Volunteers who served in

South Africa, and who were described by Anglesey¹¹ as inferior to the Natal Volunteers. There were common points between the Yeomanry and the Natal Volunteers regarding deficiencies such as in poor mobilization, training, motivation, and deployment.¹² However, unlike the Volunteers, the Yeomanry suffered several severe and embarrassing military setbacks.¹³

In the credit column the English Volunteers - like their Natal counterparts - could, despite their amateur status and training deficiencies, be effective if properly deployed.¹⁴ The point of closest common military ground with the Natal Volunteers probably resides in the conclusion that any positive reputation earned by the English Yeomanry lay less in large-scale battles than in 'the unrelenting day-to-day routine of escorting convoys, rounding up Boers and minor skirmishes'.¹⁵ So it was too with the Natal Volunteers.

Militarily, therefore, the Natal Volunteer war effort, although flawed, was commendable where and whenever the circumstances of unsympathetic British Army higher authority, manipulation and interference by the Natal government, terrain, strategy and tactics permitted the exercising of skills such as scouting, reconnaissance and escort duty. As has been suggested, their military heritage and their level of training most suited the force for these duties.

Nevertheless, in the wake of the Anglo-Boer War the Natal government felt compelled to consider a re-organisation of its military force in response to what had proved an inadequate Volunteer response, particularly in terms of recruitment.¹⁶ According to Tylden, it had been

¹¹ Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, IV, pp86-103.

¹² Bennett, Absent-minded Beggars, pp32-3,43,56,60-1,64-5,78-9,97-8,168-9 and 174-5.

¹³ Bennett, Absent-minded Beggars, pp110-122,203-7 and 209-11.

¹⁴ Bennett, Absent-minded Beggars, pp52,70-4,96,98-9 and 101-10.

¹⁵ Bennett, Absent-minded Beggars, p215.

¹⁶ Paterson, 'The Military Organisation of the Colony of Natal' p99; Pared, 'Justifying the Obligation of Military Service', p118; Daemon and Guest, 'The Anglo-Boer War and its economic aftermath', in Duminy and Guest (eds), Natal and Zululand from Earliest Times to 1910, p356-7.

'apparent to unprejudiced observers that the not over-stringent compulsion inherent in the commando system of the Transvaal and OFS Republics had given better results than the haphazard volunteering methods of the Cape and Natal'.¹⁷

On 13 March 1901 the Natal Witness had commented:

'One of the most important subjects to come before Parliament during the approaching session will probably be that of colonial defence. The campaign now closing has opened the eyes of colonists to some glaring defects in our defence organisation, and there is, we believe, a general disposition to profit by the lessons that have been taught us.'¹⁸

Thomas Watt of Newcastle was adamant that compulsion 'is the only way to get some people to do their duty'.¹⁹ Such was also the opinion of a commission appointed in August 1902 to investigate Natal defence.²⁰ In 1903 the Natal government accordingly introduced into the Legislative Assembly a bill for the establishment of a militia force based on compulsion, with the proviso for a ballot to supplement Volunteer numbers.²¹

Apart from concern about the Volunteer response to Anglo-Boer War service, several further considerations prompted these major changes in the Colony's system of defence.

¹⁷ Tylden, The Armed Forces of South Africa, p14; and see Coghlan, 'The Natal Volunteer Movement 1846-1873', p4.

¹⁸ Natal Witness, 13 March 1901. Participation in the war had also prompted reforms in the Canadian militia (Miller, Painting the Map Red, xi and xiv).

¹⁹ Natal Witness, 4 April 1901.

²⁰ Natal Witness, 18 August 1902.

²¹ HR Paterson, 'Natal 1903 Militia Act', BA Honours thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1981, passim; Paterson, 'The Military Organisation of the Colony of Natal', chapters 4 and 5; Guest, 'It was the Best of Times, it was the Worst of Times', p45; Tylden, The Armed Forces of South Africa, p14; Goetzsche, Rough But Ready: An Official History of the Natal Mounted Rifles, p92-3; and see Militia Act, 1903, and Regulations under the same for the Natal Militia Force, ix-x and pp69-70; Volunteer Act, 1895, and Regulations under the same for the Volunteer Force, Natal.

One of these concerns, an increasingly restive African majority,²² had been an issue raised by settler Natal on several occasions during the course of the Anglo-Boer War. At its inception, and during the war, in fact, an important reason behind the reluctant and ambivalent response of the settler government to armed conflict with the Boers was the concern that such conflict, and associated British interference in Natal domestic affairs, could compromise the control exercised by this government over its numerically preponderant African population. However, during the war, the African population was largely quiescent, and even furnished active support to the colonial war effort in the form of scouts and contributions to relief funds.

It was under such circumstances that, in December 1902, Joseph Chamberlain, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, announced a threatened withdrawal of the British garrison from Natal, and therefore the devolution on the Colony of the responsibility for its own defence which had been a condition of the granting of responsible government in 1903.²³

The proposals of the 1903 Bill called for a total establishment of almost 4 000 men, costing £21 000 for ammunition and saddlery alone.²⁴ However, opinion in Natal was reluctant to abandon the concept of volunteering in favour of a form of compulsion.²⁵ It was only in 1913 when, following Union in 1910, the Union Defence Force was established with the amalgamation of the military forces of the former British colonies and Boer Republics, that the provision for compulsion and a centralised military structure was accepted.²⁶

²² Paterson, 'The Military Organisation of the Colony of Natal', pp87-90; and see Stern, The Citizen Army, pp299-300.

²³ Paterson, 'The Military Organisation of the Colony of Natal', p90.

²⁴ PAR, MJPW 103, minute paper L&W 5026/1903, 21 July 1903; PAR, MJPW 127, minute paper 5486/1903, Commandant of Volunteers to Minister of Justice, 19 September 1903.

²⁵ Natal Witness, 13 March and 1 November 1901, 12 July and 18 August 1902, 8 April 1904 and 8 April 1905.

²⁶ Paterson, 'The Military Organisation of the Colony of Natal', pp128-136-8; RJ Bouch, 'Development of a Unified Military System', in RJ Bouch (ed), Infantry in South Africa 1652-1976, Pretoria, Documentation Service SADF, 1977, pp46-50; Goetzsche, Rough But Ready: An Official History of the Natal Mounted Rifles, pp129-30; Martin, The Durban Light

**The Legacy of the Anglo-Boer War in Natal on
English-Afrikaner Relations**

'The Boers are a bigoted people - they will always say they have been overpowered, not beaten. I think the only safe way for the future is to put as many English and overseas colonials [in] as possible and give them self-government as soon as possible, they will fight a good deal amongst themselves.'²⁷

When the British Army departed in 1902 there still remained for the Volunteers the task of rebuilding the Colony (and after Union in 1910, the Province) of Natal with those of their fellow colonists who had supported the Boer cause, or were suspected of complicity with the Boers during the war.

Kitchener was not optimistic about the future:

'I fear the so-called loyalists will never live at peace with the Boers, though we may force the latter into a cessation of hostilities, we shall, I fear, never bring them down to consider themselves thoroughly defeated, and to be ready to crouch down and lick the feet of the local white settlers whom they despise.'²⁸

On the other hand, contemporary observers such as Clement Stott, who wrote of the war largely as an adventure yarn, saw reconciliation as a simple matter:

'The Dutch farmers and British colonists have ever lived peaceably side by side, the relationship between them being most cordial, and as soon as the war-clouds are entirely

Infantry, I, p147; Coghlan, Pro Patria, p22.

²⁷ PRO, PRO 30/57/22, Kitchener Papers, Y48, Kitchener to Broderick, 26 April 1901.

²⁸ PRO, PRO 30/57/22, Kitchener Papers, Y62, Kitchener to Broderick, 21 June 1901, and see Y102, Kitchener to Broderick, 15 November 1901.

dispersed this peace will be again restored and the former friendships renewed.¹²⁹

This thesis has argued that in the localised context of Natal, despite the tensions raised and exacerbated by the war, the Colony did not welcome a war with the Boers. It became apparent that the Colony interpreted its military obligations, as defined under the terms of the 1893 responsible government legislation, as directed more against the threat posed to the security of its settler population by the African majority than against the Boer Republics and the Natal Afrikaner. The latter were regarded as race and class allies by the Colony's ruling hierarchy. Such an attitude prevailed despite the localised destruction of Natal Afrikaner farms in northern Natal between 1900 and 1902 in response to the Boer-Natal Afrikaner looting of settler farms. It also survived the evidence of complicity with the Boers by a proportion of the Natal Afrikaner colonists, as well as such specifically inflammatory incidents as the participation of Volunteers in the battle of Colenso, and the disputed 'White Flag' incident at Acton Homes.

It is suggested that it was the reluctance of Natal fully to engage the Boers as enemies, except, to a certain extent, when they posed a direct threat to settler interests and property, that partially accounted for the vacillating attitude of the Colony towards the war effort. Such restraint would be in sharp contrast to the more thorough military effort in 1906 and 1907 in response to a major uprising from amongst its African population, which posed a more direct threat to the entire settler community.

However, the Anglo-Boer War did promote Afrikaner nationalism, and one target in later years for such sentiments was the English settlers in Natal who had taken up arms for Britain against the Boer Republics. Kitchener had commented as early as June 1901: 'I fear it will be many generations before they (the Boers) forget this war and that they will bide their time and when we are least prepared for it to try the issue again.'³⁰ That time arrived with the Afrikaner Nationalist electoral victory in 1948. From that date until the early 1960s, the descendant regiments of the Natal Volunteer force which had participated in the Anglo-Boer War were subjected to numerous

²⁹ Stott, *The Boer Invasion of Natal*, p219.

³⁰ PRO, PRO 30/57/22, Kitchener Papers, Y62, Kitchener to Broderick, 21 June 1901.

hostile measures on the part of this Afrikaner-dominated government.³¹ In Natal the rise of Afrikaner nationalism was manifested most strongly in the northern districts of Natal such as the Klip River Magistracy, and in the districts of Vryheid and Utrecht, acquired from the old Transvaal Republic.³²

This thesis has, in summary, investigated popular and official sentiment in Natal which presented a glorified and inflated perception of the Volunteer war effort. It was found that a considerable gap existed between this perception and the reality of a lack of Natal government enthusiasm, poor levels of Volunteer recruitment and preparedness, inappropriate deployment and marginal involvement in operations, as well as the prevailing shadow of civil war in the Colony (particularly in the northern districts) between the Volunteers and English settlers on the one side, and the Afrikaner population on the other. Nevertheless, on a positive note, this thesis has confirmed the potential that existed for the Volunteers to have exercised a modest influence on the conduct of the war in Natal in the fields of scouting, reconnaissance and escort duty, had the factors outlined above not compromised their effectiveness.

³¹ See Coghlan, *Pro Patria*, pp57-66 and 97-100.

³² Harris, 'The Reluctant Rebels', conclusion; and see Natal Carbineers History, Royal Natal Carbineers Association Minute Book, volume 1 (1945-1958), annual report, 31 March 1954; Coghlan, *Pro Patria*, pp79-81.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

**'It was once said of the Anglo-Boer War that
it 'resulted in the spilling of more
ink than blood.'¹**

In The Causes of Wars Michael Howard makes the important point that 'the historian's mind is not a blank sheet of paper, however much he may try to clear it of prejudices and preconceptions.'² This comment applies to most sources on the Anglo-Boer War: diarists, war correspondents and historians, as well as the statements, correspondence and letters of officers. A clear example in this study of the Natal Volunteers has been the qualifications that have had to be read into the ritual commendations offered by senior British officers, as well as politicians and public servants.

The nature of the evidence and its origins in military operations is also important, as is the fact that the evidence used by the historian is less exact than that of the scientist and more open to subjective interpretation:

'This need for selection [writes Howard] is particularly great in the case of the military historian, especially when he deals with operations. The evidence is confused and usually contradictory. Eyewitnesses are in no psychological condition to give reliable accounts of their experiences. Loyalty and discretion may result in the suppression of discreditable evidence, especially if all ultimately turns out well. Military historians, more than any other, have to create order out of chaos.'³

Despite the above note of caution it is important, as emphasised by John Laband, for the military historian to delve beyond the 'well ploughed' sources on military detail, such as weapons, uniforms, fortifications, military institutions, ethos and training. He also emphasises the need to

¹ Stone, 'The Victorian Army: Health, Hospitals and Social Conditions', p7.

² Howard, The Causes of Wars, p212.

³ Howard, The Causes of Wars, p212; and see Marwick, The Nature of History, pp301 and 311; Tosh, The Pursuit of History, pp55-7,97.

move beyond, and be wary of, the superficial, sensational narratives that colonial conflicts tended to spawn in considerable numbers.⁴

Primary Sources: Archival

**'The danger with historical interpretations
which are reached without the testing
and time-consuming work in the archives is that
they may reflect little more than the transient
theoretical preoccupations of their authors.'**⁵

When it is considered that the Natal colonial Volunteers were a small cog in the British Army's military machine in Natal, it came as a pleasant surprise to discover the wealth of primary archival source material on their operations. Information for initial research was accumulated in The Natal Carbineers History Centre in Pietermaritzburg. Research was aided by the fact that the regiment is the basic administrative formation in the army, and in the case of the Natal Volunteer units in the Anglo-Boer War, this equates to the basic fighting formation - the battalion.⁶ It must also be mentioned that when the scope of the study was extended to all regiments of the Volunteer force, such as the Natal Mounted Rifles, it was found that the archives of these regiments held very little in the way of primary records, with the result that emphasis on this level of research remained with the Natal Carbineers.

The Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository (PAR) offered a wealth of useful material on the Natal colonial war effort. Major archival groups included the Natal Defence Records, the Archive of the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Justice and Public Works, the Colonial Office, and the Colonial Secretary's Office.⁷

⁴ Laband, 'Kingdom in Crisis', pp1-3.

⁵ Iain R Smith, 'A Century of Controversy over Origins', in Lowry (ed), The South African War Reappraised, p23; and see Tosh, The Pursuit of History, p111.

⁶ Tracing your Family History: Army, London, Imperial War Museum, 1999, p4.

⁷ See Marwick, The Nature of History, pp198-233, for an excellent guide to the

(continued...)

Robert Morrell suggests that this archival record benefitted from the exactitude and reliability that were characteristic of the Natal colonial administration, especially as the period under scrutiny overlapped with the meticulous ministry of Albert Hime.⁸ The volume and quality of the sources also enabled the expansion of the initial Natal Carbineer parameters of the study. The Natal Defence Records and the Prime Minister's Office yielded valuable specific references on Natal colonial defence matters, but the extensive holdings of the Colonial Secretary's Office, the heart of colonial administration on the territory, also generated a wealth of information.⁹

Beyond Pietermaritzburg, successful investigations were conducted in the National Archives Repository, Pretoria (NAR), particularly on the Boer angle to colonial engagements, and in the Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban. Of particular interest in the NAR was the rich collection of Boer telegrams that flowed between Pretoria and the battle fronts.¹⁰

Collections in the museums of the Natal midlands, such as the Siege Museum, Ladysmith, were also useful. The Public Record Office (PRO), the National Army Museum (NAM), the Imperial War Museum (IWM) and the British Library, all in London, yielded fruitful material and journal papers on the context on the British direction of the war, and on Natal colonial participation. However, much of this official record has been lost.¹¹

(...continued)

identification and assessment of primary sources; and also Smith, The Changing Past, p42.

⁸ Morrell, 'The Family Man and Empire', pp37-8. The fact that in this branch of the Civil Service Natal closely followed the procedures adopted in the British Civil Service, is evident from Sir Cosmo Parkinson's amusing description, in Sir Cosmo Parkinson, The Colonial Office from Within, London, Faber and Faber, 1945, pp28-30 and 37-8, of the construction and processing of files, and of the nature of 'officialese'.

⁹ See the State Archives Handbook, 1991, p14:41.

¹⁰ De Souza, No Charge for Delivery, p2.

¹¹ Terry Sole, 'Military Medal Society of South Africa Newsletter', 222, p5; and see Simon Fowler and William Spencer, Army Records for Family Historians, London, Public Record Office, 1998, p36. Also see LJ Butler and Anthony Gorst, 'Public Records', and Elizabeth Shepherd, 'Archives', in Butler and Gorst (eds), Modern British History, pp33-62.

Diaries

In The Face of Battle, John Keegan admits to the dubious veracity of personal reminiscences as recently as the late Victorian period, especially as far as other ranks are concerned.¹² The often poor quality of the record was due to the low standard of education among the social classes from which most British military manpower was recruited. However, eyewitness accounts of military campaigns by the ordinary soldier were not altogether new, and were recorded during the Napoleonic Wars, and as far back as the Thirty Years' War (1618-48).¹³

It has been a feature of the South African part-time forces throughout their history that other ranks often boasted impressive educational records and professional careers. Erskine Childers, of the City of London Imperial Volunteers (CIV), wrote that diaries written from the perspective of the ordinary soldier placed the experience of war by the Natal Volunteers within the socially structured Natal settler society. He suggests that the social background of the Volunteer was apparent under even the most routine, basic and physically remote campaigning.¹⁴ The diaries, letters, and personal manuscripts from the Volunteers therefore proved more useful than anticipated, especially during the long tedious months of the guerrilla war. Taithe and Thornton further assert that most war narrative that survives had a commercial value or served a military purpose.¹⁵ Natal Volunteer diaries, as well as those compiled by civilians, did not serve a military purpose, although several of those covering the siege of Ladysmith, were published. The most important diaries, though, were those that extended into the guerrilla phase in northern Natal, where the written record is sparse. In the British Army, in contrast, it tended to be officer diaries

¹² Keegan, The Face of Battle, p31.

¹³ K Watson, 'Bonfires, Bells and Bayonets: British Popular Memory and the Napoleonic Wars', in Taithe and Thornton (eds), War, p97; Geoffrey Parker, The Thirty Years' War, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984, pp299-300.

¹⁴ Bennett, Absent-Minded Beggars, p217.

¹⁵ B Taithe and T Thornton, 'Identifying War: Conflict and Self-definition in Western Europe', in Taithe and Thornton (eds), War, p10; and see Ian Beckett, 'Military Historians and South African War: A Review of Recent Literature', Soldiers of the Queen, 54/1998, pp12-13.

that were of more use.¹⁶

In his study of Ireland in World War I, Keith Jeffery emphasizes the utility of personal testimony, social contextualisation and the popular attitudes of the immediate voice of participants. According to Jeffery, this mirror to social context was also reflected in popular war poetry published in local newspapers, not unlike those quoted in the introduction and conclusion to this thesis.¹⁷

Natal Volunteer narratives have been exhaustively consulted, and while they infuse many of the popular secondary published histories with specific detail, they are limited in analytical detail. The diaries consulted here provide a coherent and detailed context to the often disparate operations.¹⁸ However, it is also worth bearing in mind the comment of one anonymous participant in the Anglo-Boer War, that 'a private individual fighting in an action is in practice the worst place, of any man concerned, to get a general idea of what is going on.'¹⁹ Having said that, two of the most detailed and insightful personal accounts used, namely, those of Dacre Shaw (Natal Carbineers), and Ludwig Krause (Boer), both the products of legally-trained minds, proved to be excellent sources. Despite the educational qualifications and likely literary ability of diarists such as Shaw and Krause, the diary sources consulted here, compiled on the spot and therefore not suffering from loss of detail over time, they do, nevertheless, as chronicles, reflect the social background, prejudices, and preconceptions of their writers, and, despite their apparent authenticity and

¹⁶ One of these diaries consulted here was that of a Lieutenant Malcolm Riall of the West Yorkshire Regiment. (See Riall (ed), Boer War, pp14-5).

¹⁷ Jeffery, Ireland and the Great War, pp147-8 and 156; Natal Witness, 26 October 1899; Times of Natal, 8 December 1899.

¹⁸ Sixsmith, 'Kitchener and the Guerrillas in the Boer War', p203. Carman Miller has made a similar observation with regard to popular accounts of Canadian service in the war (Miller, Painting the Map Red, xii; and see Morris, A Canadian Mounted Rifleman at War, vii).

¹⁹ Kruger's Secret Service, 'By one who was in it', John London, John MacQueen, 1900, p180. Also see Dacre Shaw, 'With the Natal Field Force during the War', Pietermaritzburg College Magazine, 1/4, September 1900, p20. Shaw's opinion was echoed by an anonymous soldier of the DLI. (Natal Mercury, 6 April 1900).

honesty, need to be interpreted with caution .²⁰

During the guerrilla phase of the war there was comparatively little of great significance to report at troop level, but, as the editors of Frederick Tucker's diary point out, the often trivial and repetitious entries from this period reflect 'the crushing regularity of the routine for the lower ranks once the glory of full scale battles had been replaced by the guerilla tactics which the Boers were forced to adopt.'²¹ Useful material from battalion level and above is rare.²²

Many diaries concentrate on the siege of Ladysmith, and there is considerable interest and variety contained in these records. Arthur Davey, in The Defence of Ladysmith and Mafeking, suggests that this was probably no accident:

'A siege has arresting characteristics that give it dramatic flavour: it has a well-defined timespan, its principal actors have critical roles to play, and the arena has comprehensible limits...Those involved, particularly the defenders, share experiences more intimately than campaigners in the open fields of war. If the investment is prolonged, lulls may be punctuated only at intervals by assaults, sorties or severe bombardments'.²³

It was these dairies and letters, many of the latter published in the press, that made it apparent that an initial preconception of siege inactivity was far from the case.

Letters

Soldiers who kept diaries were often those who also diligently wrote home, and whose families usually preserved this correspondence. This source therefore proved a valuable ancillary to the diaries. In his diary on 5 September 1901, JB Nicholson commented: 'How great a privilege letters

²⁰ Tosh, The Pursuit of History, pp61-2.

²¹ Todd and Fordham, Private Tucker's Boer War Diary, p8. Also see Lieutenant-Colonel Sir John Younghusband, quoted in Anglesey, A History of the British Cavalry, IV, p213.

²² Carver, The National Army Museum Book of the Boer War, 'Preface', p.xi.

²³ Davey, The Defence of Ladysmith and Mafeking, p11.

are can only be realized by those who for a week or two are unable to get any news.²⁴

Newspapers and the Contemporary Popular Press

**'Nobody can write a really accurate account for
months after a war has ended.'²⁵**

Wartime reporting in the press furnishes a wealth of 'circumstantial evidence' of a campaign, but relatively little in the way of concrete material. However, the Natal colonial press maintained a strongly biased and uncritical line towards the local Volunteer force, and while detail of events is voluminous, the contribution of the Volunteers is often considerably exaggerated.²⁶ This press, as well as the British popular press which was widely read in the Colony, was feeding a public 'steeped in heroic military imagery' and asserted the moral purpose and military ethos of Empire.²⁷ One of the challenges of this study has been to determine where accurate reportage ended and partisan praise began. WH Bizley terms this 'the double-speak of war reporting'.²⁸

Although the Anglo-Boer War did not see the degree of military censorship that was to characterize the World Wars, Sir Redvers Buller, who despised correspondents, did his utmost to withhold information and to disseminate disinformation to the press.²⁹ This specifically affected the Spioenkop campaign when the colonial newspapers clamoured impotently for news.

²⁴ JB Nicholson Diary, 5 September 1901. See Tosh, The Pursuit of History, pp48-9, for further comment on the association of the diary and letters in primary sources.

²⁵ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Lyttelton Papers, NGL/fam/395a, Lyttelton to Spencer, 3 July 1900.

²⁶ See, for example, 'The Lads of the Carbineers', in Natal Witness, 26 October 1899 and again on 5 February 1900, and 'Bravo Natal', in Times of Natal, 8 December 1899.

²⁷ Jeffrey Richards, 'Popular imperialism and the image of the army in juvenile literature', in MacKenzie (ed), Popular Imperialism and the Military, p81, and see pp85 and 87.

²⁸ Bizley, 'Maritzburg during the Siege of Natal', p65.

²⁹ Simon Haw, Bearing Witness, Pietermaritzburg, The Natal Witness, 1996, p139.

Significantly, though, reporters and their product were not banned outright.³⁰

Despite their limitations as factual sources, the colonial newspapers, such as the Natal Witness, the Times of Natal, and the Natal Advertiser, have been utilized to fill in the gaps left by the military reports and the archival officialese.³¹

An essential cog in newspaper reportage from war fronts was the bellicose war correspondent.³² Even George W Steevens of the Daily Mail, who departed more than most of his contemporaries from the patriotic bombast that typified nineteenth century war reporting, was a committed member of this jingoistic genre.³³ The founder and editor of Steevens's newspaper, the Daily Mail, Alfred Harmsworth (later Lord Northcliffe), had a reputation for imperialist bellicosity.³⁴ Harmsworth was also the publisher of the illustrated weeklies, With the Flag to Pretoria and After Pretoria, both of which were unabashedly propagandistic, as were many others in the popular

³⁰ In fact, in late March 1900, the colonial government had cause to instruct the GOC, Line of Communication, to cancel an order, entailing the suppression of the Standard and Diggers' News, the leading dual-medium newspaper on the Rand until the British occupation of Johannesburg in May 1900. (PAR, PM 17, Minister of Lands and Works to GOC, Line of Communication, 27 March 1900).

³¹ Twentieth Century Impressions of Natal, pp280-7; Bizley, 'Maritzburg during the Siege of Natal', passim.

³² The war correspondent has been characterized in the following terms: 'Bold, brash and larger than life, the war correspondents and artists of the late 19th Century were described by Kipling as possessing "the constitution of a bullock, the digestion of an ostrich and an infinite adaptability to all circumstances." Whatever they were, these men gave the public the jingoistic slant they wanted on Britain's imperial wars' (The British Empire, BBC/Time-Life Books, number 53, passim; and see Burroughs, 'Imperial Defence and the Victorian Army', p72). Roger T Stearn, 'Correspondents and colonial war, c1870-1900', in MacKenzie, Popular Imperialism and the Military, pp139-157, provides a succinct summary of the correspondents' portrayal of war.

³³ The British Empire, 53, p1480; Roger T Stearn, 'GW Steevens and the Message of Empire', Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, 17/2, 1989, p211; Haythornwaite, The Colonial Wars Source Book, pp332-3; John M MacKenzie, 'Introduction', in John M MacKenzie (ed), Popular Imperialism and the Military, p16.

³⁴ Stearn, 'GW Steevens and the Message of Empire', p212.

press genre such as Black and White Budget and The Graphic.³⁵ The senior partner in this stable of illustrated weeklies was the Illustrated News, launched in May 1842.³⁶

Many correspondents also published their reports in book form.³⁷ The contribution of Steevens was From Capetown to Ladysmith (1900). These accounts are invariably colourful and entertaining, but they were often clouded by personal concerns and bruised egos, as suggested by Lieutenant D Howard Gill of the Royal Field Artillery.³⁸ Yet serving soldiers themselves regularly published their experiences, but the effect of the chronicles of the soldier-historian was often

³⁵ Gilles Teulié, 'British War Propaganda in Harmsworth's With the Flag to Pretoria and After Pretoria', Soldiers of the Queen, 100/March 2000, pp25-6; Eldridge, Victorian Imperialism, p191; Roger T Stearn, 'Boer War Image-maker: Richard Caton Woodville', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, p213; Peter Harrington, 'Pictorial Journalism and the Boer War: The London Illustrated Weeklies', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, pp224-7, 231 and 234. In the 1890s Harmsworth also launched a range of weeklies for boys, such as Pluck and Marvel in the same vein (Richards, 'Popular imperialism and the image of the army in juvenile literature', in MacKenzie, Popular Imperialism and the Military, pp100-101).

³⁶ Christopher Hibbert, The Illustrated London News: A Social History of Victorian Britain, London, Angus & Robertson Publishers, 1974, pp11-12.

³⁷ RG Hackett, South African War Books: An Illustrated Bibliography of English Language Publications relating to the Boer War of 1899-1902, London, the author, 1994, passim; Stephen Badsey, 'War Correspondents in the Boer War', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, p189.

³⁸ See Stephen Badsey, 'War Correspondents and the Boer War', in Gooch (ed), The Boer War, p190. The focus of Gill's comment was Bennett Burleigh's The Natal Campaign (1900). Gill wrote on 31 October 1899 in the wake of the disastrous battle of Nicholson's Nek:

'Bennett Burleigh of the Daily Telegraph leaves by train for Maritzburg, as he has no intention of being besieged. I hear he wrote an awfully slashing article about the fight, blackguarding everyone from Sir George downwards, but it was stopped by the press censor.

The cause of his ire was really that he had never been informed where the main part of the fight was to be, and as he went out to Modderspruit he never saw a sign of it, except the episode of Wing's Battery and the Volunteers passively holding Lombard's Kop and Bulwana. So, if he did write an account, it was all hearsay.' (UNISA Archives, Gill diary, 31 October 1899, pp54-5).

propagandistic.³⁹

Thankfully, correspondents covered the progress of the Natal Volunteers in close detail, with enthusiasm and concern.⁴⁰ Editorial opinion, driven by the portrayal of 'the righteous and long-suffering Britannia standing up to the insufferable Boer bully', generally reinforced the favourable reporting of the colonial Volunteer forces.⁴¹

Although the Natal press was very aware of the parochial interests of its colonial settler readership, considerable inspiration was drawn from mainstream English newspapers such as The Times of London. The wartime history of this newspaper confirms the strong political agenda in the journalism of the period.⁴²

The Transvaal press provided an often refreshing and imaginative alternative angle on events.⁴³ The Friend of the Free State and Bloemfontein Gazette, was not beyond firing a comment at the Natal Witness:

'The Natal Witness is nothing if not amusing, and some of its late stories about the Free

³⁹ MW Daly, 'The Soldier as Historian: FR Wingate and the Sudanese Mahdia', The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, 17/1, 1988, pp99-106. John Laband has commented that in the context of the Anglo-Zulu War 'officers and officials were as eager as newspaper correspondents to rush into print with their experiences'. (JPC Laband, 'Kingdom in Crisis: The Response of the Zulu Polity to the British Invasion of 1879', PhD, University of Natal, 1990, p498; and see Arthur Marwick, The Nature of History, p200; Haythornwaite, The Colonial Wars Source Book, p334).

⁴⁰ Haw, Bearing Witness, p138; Natal Witness, 3 November 1899; Times of Natal, 24 September and 13 November 1900.

⁴¹ Davey, The Defence of Ladysmith and Mafeking, p33; GA Dominy, 'The Imperial Garrison in Natal with Special Reference to Fort Napier 1843-1914: Its Social, Cultural and Economic Impact', PhD, University of London, 1995, pp32-3.

⁴² See Dorothy O Helly and Helen Callaway, 'Journalism as Active Politics: Flora Shaw, The Times and South Africa' and Jacqueline Beaumont, 'The Times at War, 1899-1902', in Donal Lowry (ed) The South African War Reappraised, chapters 3 and 4, passim.

⁴³ Natal Mercury, 5 June 1902; State Library, Pretoria, Microfilm, Transvaal Leader, Number 2.

State have been simply killing. It has manufactured Federal Generals and put speeches into their mouths, and it has killed and buried such a number of our soldiers that there cannot be many more 'Boahs' left in this land.'⁴⁴

The spirit of journalistic repartee was not always lighthearted, and the perceived caricature and vilification of the Boers and their leaders in the Natal press was not kindly received in the Republics, especially in the light of the good relations that had prevailed before the war.⁴⁵

All newspaper sources have to be treated with caution as far as immediate reports of engagements are concerned. A case in point is the Natal Mercury, whose report of Monday 6 November 1899 on the skirmish on Friday 3 November at End Hill, Ladysmith, is fanciful and devoid of real substance.⁴⁶

Printed Works

Books, both contemporary and modern, seldom form the core source material for any one topic. Most references to the Natal Volunteers were usually contained within broader campaign and regimental histories. Contemporary eyewitness accounts also have to be treated with discretion as historical documents. The leading examples were LS Amery's The Times History of the War in South Africa, and Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice's History of the War in South Africa.⁴⁷ Amery admitted that complete 'impartiality in dealing with so momentous and so recent a conflict...is hardly attainable.'⁴⁸ He also acknowledged his strong prejudice in favour of British Imperial motives and policy.⁴⁹ Maurice's work followed soon after the war, but, unlike The Times History, its authors did directly canvas the Natal Volunteer force for information, albeit with

⁴⁴ Friend of the Free State and Bloemfontein Gazette, 30 January 1900.

⁴⁵ Friend of the Free State and Bloemfontein Gazette, 9 February 1900.

⁴⁶ Natal Mercury, 6 November 1899; and see Tosh, The Pursuit of History, pp42-3.

⁴⁷ Natal Witness, 7 November 1900.

⁴⁸ LS Amery, 'preface', in Amery (ed), The Times History, I, v-vi.

⁴⁹ Amery, 'preface', in Amery (ed), The Times History, I, vi; John Barnes and David Nicholson, 'Introduction', in Barnes and Nicholson (ed), The Leo Amery Diaries, I, pp12.

limited success.⁵⁰ Amery, for example, was strongly critical of Buller, who typified all that he saw as wrong with the Victorian British Army.⁵¹ Between 1910, when the last of the four volumes of Maurice's history was published, and 1979, when Pakenham's The Boer War appeared, Anglo-Boer War historiography was dominated by these two monumental secondary sources.⁵²

Specific mention must also be made of the various regimental histories, such as Stalkers's The Natal Carbineers and Goetzsche's Rough But Ready: An Official History of the Natal Mounted Rifles, which presented a simplified and uncritical annals of the Anglo-Boer War service of these components of the Natal Volunteer force. As such, these sources had also to be treated with caution.

Hew Strachan comments that contemporary historians with a strong British military background 'inevitably started with more than the average number of preconceptions'.⁵³ Strachan's words may be true of many of the contemporary sources consulted for this thesis, from newspapers and popular illustrated magazines to the adventurous stories of Stott, Pearse and others. Nevertheless, these contemporary works could not be ignored as they provide essential detail on the experience and opinions of the Natal Volunteer soldiers who were usually on the fringe of the mainstream war, and seldom warranted a mention in later books such as Pakenham's.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ PAR, CSO 1673, Minute Paper, Wilson to Agent-General for Natal, 29 March 1904, enclosure in 2798/1901.

⁵¹ Amery, 'preface', in Amery (ed), The Times History, II, vii-viii; Barnes and Nicholson (eds), The Leo Amery Diaries, I, p33, Amery to Chirol, 23 January 1900; Sandys, Churchill: Wanted Dead or Alive, pp170-1; Powell, Buller: A Scapegoat?, pp160-1; MS Stone, 'The Victorian Army: Health, Hospitals and Social Conditions', p11; Iain Smith, 'A Century of Controversy over Origins', in Lowry (ed), The South African War Reappraised, pp26-8.

⁵² Ian Beckett, 'Military Historians and the South African War: A Review of Recent Literature', p12.

⁵³ Strachan, European Armies and the Conduct of War, p2.

⁵⁴ Books such as Pakenham's The Scramble for Africa, consulted briefly for this study, also need to be treated cautiously because of their often adventurous style and sometimes cavalier treatment of the facts, a point made strongly by Ian Phimister. (Phimister, 'Unscrambling the Scramble for Africa', pp203-4).

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VII **Photographs**

- Frontispiece: Mr JN Ruddiman, KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Museum Service.
- Photograph 1: Wilson, With the Flag to Pretoria, II, p496.
- Photograph 2: Robinson (ed), Navy and Army Illustrated, X, p221.
- Photographs 3-6: WHF Harte Anglo-Boer War photograph album. Harte Collection, Natal Carbineers History Centre and KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Museum Service.
- Photographs 7-9: Dacre Shaw Anglo-Boer War sketches. Mr Lovett Carnelly, Muden, and KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Museum Service.
- Photographs 10-11: HG Bizley photograph album. Talana Museum and KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Museum Service.
- Photographs 12-14: JB Nicholson photograph albums. JM Nicholson, Pietermaritzburg, and KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Museum Service.
- Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository, Photograph Collection.

VIII **Maps**

The Times, 13 October, 8 November and 16 December 1899.

IX **Videos**

The Boer War, Channel 4 (four parts), 2000.

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