

Excerpts from the Journal of Private Charles R. Bell

Natal Volunteers, Ambulance, Company C

2nd South African "Boer War" 1900-1901

The following is transcribed from a hand-written journal handed down through generations of the Bell family in South Africa. It has been transcribed without modifications by his great-great grandson, Nicholas C. Tambakeras, of Scottsdale, Arizona, USA.

It is a useful artifact, exploring much of the tedium, trouble and good effort made by the men in Company C during the pivotal closing months of the 2nd South African War. The journal describes the emotional struggles Private/Bearer Bell endures, and gives us an amusing perspective as relates to his thoughts regarding the war effort, the treatment of the common men by the officers, the role of black and Indian civilians in this time, and of the overall common Englishman's opinion of the conquest of South Africa and of their Boer "enemies." It might also prove useful for insight into the actions of officers in the army, as Private Bell mentions many of them by name.

It is well worth the read, in my estimation, as it is a story offered without much pretense. Bell does not seek to become a hero or tell a hero's tale of warfare. The journal, no doubt, acts as a way for him to pass the time and to channel some of his fears and frustrations in a constructive manner. In its seeming banality, this journal gives us a clear sense of what war is actually like for the common conscript of this era -- a window into the mind of one man, full of his own prejudices and peccadilloes, a man who longs to return to his beloved Johannesburg, where he may resume life with his wife Janet and their two young children, Agnes and Arthur.

Monday, August 27th, 1900

Hospital guard. I had a talk with one of the orderlies on hospital work and he thinks the best has been done under the circumstances. But, he believes the doctors might have done better.

Tuesday, August 28th

We fixed up a new house. It is a very comfortable place considering the circumstances. We had the first rain this season. It only lasted an hour.

Wednesday, August 29th

Up at 6:30, Parade at 7.

I am off duty today. Got one job to do every day, that is to cut up a quart of beef for the sections. It only takes about ¼ of an hour. I went out in the afternoon between showers to an old camp and got a lot of old galvanised iron. I went just with my drawers on, having got my trousers wet and not wanting to catch cold. I stayed behind to get some posts as we intended to build a kitchen to cook in during the rainy weather. Coming back, I met one of the fellows coming to look for me, as they thought something had happened to me with the wagon bringing the iron. Very good of him, I thought, as the things I was carrying were getting very heavy. They had tea

ready. Steak, bread and tea. I really enjoyed it after my walk. Hurried in about 7 and had rum issued at 8. It was a very small tot, but still very good on a wet night.

Thursday, August 30th

Awakened at 5. Had a read and a smoke. Called one of the guards at 6, dressed about 6:30. I was ready to go on parade, but heard no shout of fall in so I thought there was not going to be one owing to the rain. So what was our surprise when Morton, the section leader, came up and asked, "What's up with Tintown? None of you on parade. Of course we told him the reason. There was nothing said about it, but we felt annoyed, as it was the first time we had been absent.

After breakfast, I wrote a letter to Janet. Sorry I had no money to send her. I cut up meat then built our cookhouse, which will be a great convenience if this weather continues. We made some soup with beef, onions and potatoes and I had a pancake. So we did not do so badly during the day. Fisher, the leader for No. 2, came round to get the names of those who wished to go home. Over 20 men out of my section want to go. I hope I am one of the chosen ones.

Friday, August 31st

We extended our kitchen, as we found it would be better if made larger. We also made a table and some stools.

Got news of our General's [Buller] success up North. He has to do all the hard work after all that has been said about him. Had another Snap Shot taken while we were at work. Tintown seems to be causing quite a commotion in camp. We are, although dare I say, looked upon as men with opinions, but when there is any work to be done, they know we are there.

Saturday, September 1st

Our ration party went to the butchery and got meat then went to the station for bread, etc. I must not forget: While we were at breakfast, Fisher, the leader, took another Snap Shot of us.

Several guns were fired. It appears the Boers are still in the vicinity. I suppose there will be a general break-up amongst them very shortly.

We made some boiled pudding today. We are thinking of doing it regularly. Had rum issued.

This morning we started a new and proper way of parade. Instead of falling in any how, we have to do it properly.

Sunday, September 2nd

Fell in properly. The parade was over directly. Everyone present. After breakfast, we made a few Rolly Poly puddings. Sold them directly. This afternoon we made seed cakes and rock cakes for sale. I am on Camp Guard today. If we can only stay here another fortnight we may be able to make a bit.

One poor fellow was taken wrong in his head on Friday. He has to have a guard over him day and night.

Did a bit of washing today. I am thinking of going to Newcastle tomorrow.

Monday, September 3rd

Parade at 6:30 again. At 8:30, I am to sign for the balance due me through the end of August. The amount is £19-15-0.

Captain Mortimer refused to allow me or anyone else to go to Newcastle on any private business. He says even the officers are not allowed to go, but I think it is on account of one man having cleared away with some of the men's money. He punishes all for one man's fault.

We spent the rest of the day in making puddings, etc. We made a few shillings each. There were a lot of big guns fired this morning. It is said that there was a Dutch wedding on the go, but when our fellows saw the party on the move, they dropped a few shells amongst them. Wasn't it a shame to spoil their bit of fun.

Tuesday, September 4th

More good news from the front. We hear a gun or two occasionally.

Busy all morning making puddings. Sold all out in quick time. Another man has been making them, but we were before him. He has done a nasty trick or two, so we determined to take him down a peg.

5:30. Just go orders to be off tomorrow reconnoitering. Altered directly to 5am.

Wednesday, September 5th

Up at 4:10. One man giving one order and another man a different one at the finish. After striking tents and packing wagons, we had not time to get our coffee after making it. Captain Mortimer does this every time we have to go on the march. He is a hard-hearted man. Anything for the men's comfort he tries to forget, and he knows he has no right to send men on the march on empty stomachs. I'll bet that gets his own belly filled and he has every comfort, having two men to wait on him. And the men that have to do the work have to turn out without anything to eat. It is a great shame.

Every time there is a fight on, we have to stick to the empty ambulance vans and still carry empty stretchers. The best or worst of going without food is that we generally have to wait on the road for two or three hours, whereas if things were worked right, men could have their meals in comfort and be on the field in lots of time. It is not our or any ambulance party's place to be on the battlefield at the start. According to the Geneva convention, we are not supposed to go within as many miles of the firing lines. And still we have had to do this, taking unnecessary risks. Our work is to help the wounded, not go where we are likely to get wounded ourselves.

Here we are (after starting in a great hurry), lying on our backs where we can neither get wood nor water to cook with.

At last it got so hot we were ordered into a donga (ditch). No one there except us, a doctor and his orderly. A nice position if the Boers had come out. But our guns kept playing onto them and kept them in check. Captain Martin told our Company to take a stretcher as there was a wounded man or two on some kopje (hill) close to or right amongst the Boers. But, after lying down awhile, they found that all the men were in. It would have been the height of folly to have gone, even if there had been men there, as some of us would have most certainly got shot. I noticed that as soon as the bullets began to fly around, Captain Martin was off hell for leather, as the saying is. He did not care at all for us. He wanted us to go where he dare not go himself. And, the men really want the doctor first.

Drunken Major arrested 3 of our men for Boers, but soon found his mistake out. It is a frequent thing to see officers drunk and another man and I were taken for Boers by some soldiers.

Thursday, September 6

Up at 5. Went to Sergeant Major to ask him to lend me a dixie (large pot which soldiers use to make stew, tea, etc) to get water for breakfast. He says no, these 5 belong to the RAMC (Royal Army Medical Corps) and he would not let us fill our bellies. But another section lent us their Dixie to get it in. Our men captured about 80 cattle and 600 sheep today. We had on Dragoon killed last night.

We are not allowed to leave the camp to fetch water for ourselves.

Friday, September 7th

RAMC can have water to wash with and we can't get it to make our tea or coffee with, at least only at meal times. This morning we were up at 5 again, had parade and breakfast. Then, 30 of us fell in with five stretchers and followed the troops. We are expecting a fight. Guns started soon after we left. We are now, 9:30, right in front of one line of our skirmishers, just behind the field artillery. Dragoons are out scouting.

Some of the RAMC had the cheek to say we were not within 500 yards of the range of the Boer rifles. It is a barefaced lie and whoever said it, they watch going anywhere near, as they stay in camp all day long.

We are getting on. We are now, 12pm, watching the Dragoons set the Boer houses on fire. There are 4 burning just now. Our men did not meet with any Boers. We retired and got back to camp about two.

We had a fearful storm of wind during the rest of the day and night and it was very cold. It looked like rain, but it did not come, I am thankful to say.

Saturday, September 8th

Up at 4:45, parade at 5. Breakfast. Fell in at 8 and we went to scour the country. On the left we passed some farms which are surrounded with beautiful soil, but there is very little cultivation. At one farm, near where the kopje is situated and from where the Boers were firing the other day, we found some women, but our fellows came away and left them there. I would have set the place on fire and cleared them all out, as they are only hiding places from which our poor fellows get shot. But, however, our General thought otherwise. We went on but did not come across any Boers and we got to camp about three in the afternoon. We had a good wash, fixed up our place and got to bed, being served rum before we did so. We heard from the section that stayed behind that they had been able to get beer the night previous. But, to show spite or small mind, our commander has got the people who were selling it were told not to serve the JBC. What for, we don't know, only that on parade this morning they got us up at 4:45 and kept us standing there in the cold without calling the roll. So we started to shout about it. So the Captain said we had to follow the troops when we could have gone straight to came and I suppose he stopped the beer for the same reason.

Sunday, September 9th

This morning we had parade at our usual time, 6:30. After roll call, no. 4 section were told to stand fast, as some of the men had been grmbling, saying they wanted a cook. One sneak of a fellow having volunteered t do it, but he wanted everything got ready for him. There was something else behind it. I suppose he thought he would get off some duty or make something out of it, but I am glad to say the majority stood out against it and we have to go on same as before. I was as pleased as though I had been presented with a fiver, although it would not do me as much good. After breakfast we made some puddings and sold them directly. I intended aking some cookies in the afternoon when we got orders that we had to go back to the place we had left and stay there ten days. It appears we ought not to have left it, but it is like most of the things this brigade does. All has to be done over again. It is not the men's fault.

We first got orders to fall in in 1 ¼ hour's time, then it was altered to a quarter of an hour. So it was all hurry-scurry. We set off at 3:15 and got our place at 6:15, being quite dark. Company 3 had 8 stretchers to 40 men. Instead of the stretchers being put in the wagns, the R.A.M.C. men must needs ride, by order of Captain Martin while we must walk, carry our kits and stretchers as well. Mr. Glencross paid for kaffir beer at a kroat we passed. I was on guard during the night for 4 hours.

This evening 3-6 morning, we sleep in the open air. I hope we shall have no rain while are out.

Monday, September 10th

Up at 6, parade.

Wrote a letter to Janet, having got one and two papers from her yesterday. I am staying in camp today while our other fellows are out. It is very monotonous, there is not the least bit of shade and the sun is very strong. It gets col in the evening, sometimes too much so. But, there is no frost.

The veldt that ha been burnt is turning nice and green so that we shall soon have good grazing fo our cattle. They are all, or most of them, looking well, but when the grass comes they will get fat. And another thing: it will relieve the railway to a great extent,there being no hay nor forage to send up. Of course, there will be oats and mealies wanted. Our en got back today about 5, not having me with. Any of the enemy have either cleared or are lying very quiet.

Tuesday, September 11th

Up at 5:30, parade a 6, then had breakfast. Fell in at 8:15 and went out again with the troops. I think these marches are more a way of demonstrating in force than with the intention of engaging the enemy. It will be the means of them being kept off the line of communication, which is really what weare here for. At aout 11 we came across some of the Boer Outposts and they were sniping for about an hour, but no one was shot.

We started to retire about two o'clock. We got back to camp at 4:30, then turned in very shortly after tea.

I received a letter from Janet to say she is coming out with Arthur and Agnes.

Wednesday, September 12th

Stayed in camp today. It is very hot. We got the ambulance wagon to bring us some flour, etc. out. We set to and made scones, selling them directly. We were working at them until 8 o'clock.

Thursday, September 13th

Up at 5:30, started for Ingogo at 8:30, arriving at 11:30. It is another hot day. We made a lot more scones and sold out. We were glad to get back and sleep under cover. We caught a rat in our place when we got to bed. A fight took place this afternoon between a German and a Scotsman. I don't know whether it will be started again. The German says he will kill the Scotchman.

Friday, September 14th

Up at 5. I lighted the fire and got the pots on for the puddings. Went on parade.

The commander told the men that if they wanted to fight they must go out of the lines or must take the consequences. After breakfast I went to the butcher and bought some sut (a type of fat from oxen used to make suet pudding) then made ten puddings and 12 shillings' worth of scones. Sold most of them.

We are anxious to get our pay, as it is three weeks since we were paid last. All the men are short of money.

An amusing thing took place at the scrimmage the other day. While the men were advancing on the Boers, the Captain and minister were there. The minister was as white as a sheet. He asked one of the mento lend him a stick. The man thought he wanted it to make his horse go. He said here's a stick. The minister says have you a flag. The man says we want no flags, as they are

no protection. So the bullets coming thicker the Captain and minister cleared and someone shouted there goes the Bible and medicine chest. When you see things like these it makes you careless. And another thing. They never come and take us to church or come and give us a sermon or straight talk. And, according to them, we are a rough lot, so therefore we stand more in need of it than those that are goo.

There was a football match this evening between the field hospital and the R.A.M.C. which resulted in a draw. It was a laughable game. They gave one of the players the name of Cronje, one Gargle, another Micky Free and so on. The J.B.C. play the pick tomorrow.

Today we got news of the flight of Kruger and Steyn. Just like them to clear and leave the burghers in the lurch. I wonder what will be the next move. I think Schalk Burger will make peace, as he is a progressive. Another thing done today: The fellows are all going in for Snapshots of their places. A Jew who has rigged himself up a little place got himself taken today. I was just going to get washed, having my shirt off, nothing on but my trousers. So, when he was setting himself nicely, I crept up behind him and set myself in fighting attitude. The best of it was he was quite unconscious of me being there. I should like to be there when he sees it.

Saturday, September 15th

Up at 5:15. Got fires lighted, water in the pots. Parade. Breakfast then started and we made our puddings. About eleven we got word to go to Laing's Nek to join the Dubs (Dublin regiment) and go on to Makkerstroom. So, we were in a bit of a sweat bout our pudding, but sold all except two which were a bit underdone.

The Captain paid our Section a little money. The reason our section was chosen to come was that we have a full section. And another thing: he says we have given him very little trouble. Blarney, the war is drawing to a close. We had to ride anyhow on top of the luggage in the guards van. Anyhow, we had the pleasure of having a ride and sitting on the N.Z.A.S.M. (Nederlandsch-Zuid-Afrikaansche Spoorweg-Maatschappij - a British colonial railway built in the early 1880s) again. Some of the men were sitting astride the luggage high up, but when we got to Mt. Prospect Station they were told to get down. A good job they did or they would have been smothered.

Monday, September 17th

Up at 6, started for a place called Nakkerstroom about 8. Had a very good road all the way, one of the best I have seen in the country. We reached our journey's end about 5. It seems a nice little place. They have a fine stone built church, but the land here is very boggy. It is a place situated on a flat. A river runs through the center and hills surround it. This day the Dragoons brought us about 300 sheep and 100 head of cattle. Also, a lot of horses.

Tuesday, September 18th

This day I met Lee, who is in charge of wagns. He was going to the top of the hill with provisions for the troops. We went to the river and had a good wash, then made a lot of scones. We sold them all at 8 for 1p. We could have sold as many again, but we were short of flour. There were

another lot of cattle and sheep brought in today. More than yesterday. Got orders to go away tomorrow morning.

Wednesday, September 19th

Up at 5:15. Started at 7, passed through the town. The Union Jack was flying on the public buildings. A lot of Dutch men and women were there, packed up ready for starting to Volkrust. They all seemed pleased the thing was about over. After we got out of the town we had to go up a very steep hill then across a flat then up another steep hill. Then we found a valley in front of us, to get to which was down an almost precipitous hill. We have been sitting here over two hours. We have a splendid view. The Dragoons are picking up all the cattle and sheep they can find. We had a rough day of it over great mountains, through rivers, etc. We also had a bit of fun. There were a lot of pigs also commandeered and you ought to have seen the trouble they had with them. First, one getting away and then another. The lancers went after one and killed it with their lance. Some of our fellows had to carry it in on a stretcher. One charged six Dubs and cleared the lot. It was very amusing. They lost the lot at the finish, but a couple of suckers which we brought in the wagon.

We got to camp just at dark. We have a very cold night of it and found ourselves, at the finish, about 3 miles from where we started.

Thursday, September 20th

An old woman with a white flag came in first thing this morning. She was on horse back. She said the stretcher-bearers had stolen her cattle. Of course she made a mistake, as we have no chance of looting.

We were up at 5, fell in at 8. Started at 8:30. Took it very easy. We passed a lot of nice farms. It looks a sad sight to see them all desolate. At one, there were about 5 women. They had their faces covered as though they did not want to be recognized.

We camped for about one hour and a half on top of a hill from which we could see all the ground. We had been over with the Dorsets.

The Boers' handsome marvellous positions and still they could not hold them. There are some magnificent views all around where we have been during the last few days I could not have believed it if I had not seen it for myself. Some lovely farms, lovely valleys, any amount of water trickling down the hillsides from the springs of which there are any amount.

We are camped for the night near Pagwani. A very nice spot.

Friday, September 21st

Up at 5:30. Our commander seemed as though he was fast which way to go, but at last it was decided to go via Volksrust. It was a long way round, but, however, we made a start at 8:30 and got our journey's end about 3. We just alighted about until 7 then turned in, as we are off again tomorrow to escort a convoy over to Wakkerstroom.

Saturday, September 22nd

Up at 5, had breakfast. Enjoyed it after being a week on hard biscuits. Made a start at 8:15 with about 40 wagons loaded with provisions, etc. Enough to last the troops about 3 months.

We had a stop of about ½ an hour to let the convoy get up. We had got so far ahead, the oxen going so slow compared with mules and horses. When they got up we made another start and went on for about four miles. Then we outspanned (made a brief camp) for a couple of hours. We had some cocoa and the animals got rest and a feed.

We have some inveterate gamblers in our crowd. Some of them only boys, but almost every time we stop they start a game called Swedish banker. One man holds what is called the bank. He holds and deals the cards, dealing each player 3 cards and if the player thinks his hand good enough, he calls whatever he likes up to the amount of the bank. The dealer turns up the top card of what is left and it just depends whether it is better than what the other man holds whether he wins or loses. If the bank is called and won, then the next player takes the bank.

We arrived at our journey's end about 6, thoroughly tired. We had tea. Rum was served out, after which we turned in and I did not get up until 7 o'clock next day.

Sunday, September 23rd

Had a very quiet day. Had a good wash in the river, a walk in the afternoon playing with a little pig we have got. Turned in at 7.

Monday, September 24th

Up at 5:30. Packd up and on the march to Volksrust at 8:30. We stopped halfway for 2 hours and saw a lot of fellows who were wounded in a skirmish out Nakkerstroom way. One man had 5 bullets in him We arrived at Volksrust at 5.

The Dub and his Queen's Chocolate. Staff Sergeant asked why he did not send it home. He said his wife had a toothache and he did not want to make it bad and have her cursing the Queen. At the same time he had given it away for liquor.

We went into Volksrust to get dinner at the station. When we arrived we found we could not get it. We felt awfully riled as we depended on getting a good feed for once. It appears someone had been creating a disturbance there and it was put upon the privates who have all to suffer for the fault of one man. And, at the same time, it might be an officer that is to blame, but they have no restrictions placed upon them.

Oh no, they can do nothing wrong. We had to go back hungry and thirsty.

Tuesday, September 25th

Started for the station at 8:15. Dr. Lloyd got a wagon to put our kits on to save us the trouble of carrying them. He is an Officer and a Gentleman, a credit to the profession to which he belongs.

Having to wait at the station some time, we got some coffee and cake. While eating it, Major Gordon, of the Dubs, came up and asked the price. He said it was too much when we told him we paid 5p for coffee and 6p for cake. He said 1 for coffee and 3 for cake was quite enough. From one thing we got talking about another. He stood there talking to me fully 20 minutes. I think the other officers got jealous to see him talking to a common stretcher-bearer. First a Lieutenant came about something, then a Captain, but he still went on with the conversation. If more of the head men would do so, there would be a brighter outlook for the British Army, because I know the feeling amongst the men and it is this: they are quite full up of risking lie and limb and pulling up with the whims of the officer. And then, if they are disabled, nothing but the workhouse or starvation at the finish. It is not good enough -- that is the opinion of the majority of the men.

We talked about the language question. The ill feeling caused by the war. But, I told him that we had as much cause to show ill feeling as the Boer had. We touched on the hypocrisy of the President. I gave him my opinion about the military rule. We also talked about different things having, to my way of looking, a very interesting conversation. We had to part at the finish. I thanked him for giving me the chance of speaking. He said he was pleased. At the finish he asked me if I would like to have a permit to get anything, but I thanked him and said no Sir, that is not what I want, but to see a better feeling. He bid me good morning. I was sorry we could not go into things a bit more, but I think the little that was said will make him think and enquire into things more. I hope so.

We left him near Mt. Prospect and came on to Ingogo. What did we get when we got there? Why, different treatment altogether. Boots too big. Sergeant Major refused to change them. But, he changed his mind and the boots as well.

Wednesday, September 26th

Served out with hard biscuits. I threw them on the veldt and went and bought a dozen loaves, selling them to the fellows. Met the Sergeant Major as I was coming back with the bread, but took no notice of him.

For dinner they served us out with Bully Beef (Canned Corned beef - apparently not too bad upon first few servings, but insufferable when served repeatedly. This ration was served to British troops all the way through to the 1930s) and preserved vegetables. What we got we threw away, as all the other sections had fresh meat and we thought it very hard after being out eleven days that we had to come back to Bully again, because they have only to requisition for anything they want and they get it.

Thursday, September 27th

We had fresh meat and potatoes. They are now only giving us jam twice a week instead of every day.

Friday, September 28th

Busy making puddings. Bully Beef and Potatoes again.

Saturday, September 29th

Up at 4:30. We made a lot of puddings. Finished them at 9:30. Sold out. We had rum in the evening. Very windy.

Sunday, September 30th

Parade at 6:30. Up at 5. Lighted fires and had coffee before parade. I was put on camp cleaning then had to parade to sign paysheets. It made us very late with our pudding, but, however, we sold them all and made about 9 shillings each. One of the most fearful storms I ever witnessed took place here today. It had been blowing hard all day, but, about 2 o'clock, there came a whirlwind, dust and stones combined. It took us all our might for about 5 minutes to hold our roof on. Then it came on to rain and the wind changed all at once into a fresh quarter and took the roof, although we had about 200 weight of stones on, flying through the air for about 15 yds, although some of the stones weighed at least 20 lbs.

It was a blessing no one was hurt. However, we got fixed up, but we had an awful windy night.

Monday, October 1st

Another awful wind. Can't cook anything today. I think this is the worst place I was ever in for wind and shall be glad when we get away from here. Had letters and papers from Janet as well as papers from Frank.

Tuesday, October 2nd

A very cold night. Up at 6. Went on guard. I cut up meat and made some good stew. After dinner we made puddings and scones. We had not half enough.

My mate Cook went off to try and get some curious but was unlucky in not coming across anything. It made me very busy, what with firing up making puddings and scones, selling cigarettes, etc. I feel very tired, but can't go to bed as I have to do two hours' guard.

Wednesday, October 3rd

Heard of the capture of a convoy at De Jager's drift. It may be the cause of us being kept on the job longer than we thought, as we were hoping to be disbanded very shortly. But, these little things keep upsetting us. I am busy making puddings and scones again. Sold out about 5:30, had tea and turned into bed. We had rum served out and we enjoyed it, although there is very little of it for us.

Thursday, October 4th

Up at 6, parade at 6:30. I then went to the Station for flour, etc. It is about a mile off our camp. I got back and made a lot of puddings. They sold out about 1:30. I then went back to the river and washed all my clothes. I had a bath also. On our way back we called at a fruit store. It appears that the owner was one of the men from the Silver Tote on Market Square. He told me he had seen George Lockett at Ingagane and that George had gotten a letter from his boss wanting him

to go back at once. George showed the letter to the Colonel who granted him his discharge. I suppose George will be glad.

The R.A.M.C. had new clothes given them today, but so far there are none for us. We have had one shirt given out in seven months.

In connection with hospital work, there is one man to whom I must give a word of praise and that is Corporal Cole. He does his work in a thoroughly conscientious manner. If all men had been like him there would not have been so much suffering and so many deaths as there have been. He deserves all the credit.

"Stop the noise," shouted the Sergeant of an Irish regiment the night after the Battle of Allemans Nek. The noise ceased at once. "I'm fed up with this row," he said, in his broad Hibernian tongue. "See here, I'll have nothing but silence and very little of that mind ye."

Friday, October 5th

Had a quiet day, but there are so many flies about it is impossible to have any rest. And they stop us from reading as well.

Saturday, October 6th

Up at 6, parade 6:30. I went and gathered a sack of dung for fire after parade. I then went and applied for a pair of trousers. The Company Leader said he would see the Captain after breakfast. He told me he had seen him and that the Captain said he knew we were entitled to an issue of new clothes, but that we might be disbanded almost any time and that the clothing would be of no use to the men afterwards. He is trying to run the Corps on economical lines and we have to go in rags through it or else buy our own things, which I don't intend doing unless my things get too bad. And if I do, I shall buy civilian clothes and then I suppose there would be a row about that if the general saw it. But, I am alright, having applied for clothes.

I never in all my life was in such a windy, dusty, hot, fly-blown, disagreeable place as this. No shade at all. It has one redeeming feature: there is plenty of water, there being two rivers and we being in between the two so that we have not far to go to wash. It is only about a mile.

I had a bathe in the Buffalo River this afternoon and enjoyed it immensely. We got, in our groceries, jam, flour, currants, etc. ready for puddings tomorrow. There are going to be sports held here on Monday and the men are busy training for it.

We had our rum issued again. Turned in at 6:30. Thought we were going to have a quiet night, but the wind got up about 8. Oh, what a night! Blow, blow, blow and nothing else. Dust and fire flying all over the camp. We scarcely slept during the night. It has been blowing again all day. We look like a lot of niggers with the dirt and dust covering us. We can't do any cooking. 'Ingogo' means "big wind." A very appropriate name. We shall remember this place all our life. It is an eye opener. We hear that the sports that were arranged for tomorrow are postponed. So, there is something on. We hear that Lord Roberts is coming through here tomorrow or the day

after. We also hear the reason sports are put off is that some of our men have got 300 Boers in a trap at Doornkop and some of our brigade have gone to try and capture them. I hope they are successful.

Turned in at 5:15. Up at 6. Parade 6:30. Had breakfast then started and made puddings. The men were at us for them $\frac{1}{2}$ an hour before we intended selling them. They were so hungry that we made about 40 lbs worth and sold all out. We could have sold more.

Went to the river and had a bathe this afternoon. Turned in at 6:15.

Tuesday, October 9th

Up at 6, parade at 6:30. Got the fire on and had puddings boiling by 8:30. Our party was told to go off and empty the hospital. I hope we are going away this week. Unless they give us the clothes we are entitled to, I intend going to the Wilness and Mercury offices as soon as I go down as a living illustration of how they turn us away from the army when they are done with us.

Wednesday, October 10th

Rumours of all kinds were flying about yesterday and today about possible disbandment. But, they were all put to the lie by number 3 section going yesterday by train to Laing's Nek and from there to Wakkerstroom so that we shall have to stay here another 5 days anyhow. And the Sergeant Major went to P.M. Burg (Pietermaritzburg) and will not be back before Tuesday. I see General Buller is coming down during the next few days. I hope it is for the purpose of disbanding us.

I have felt very much upset at not receiving a letter from Janet. I am very anxious to hear whether she is coming out or not, so that I shall know what to do about sending money.

We are busy again with our puddings. Short again. Hospital guard at night.

Thursday, October 11th

Twelve months today since the declaration of war was made. When we come to think over what we have gone through during that time, it makes one (or ought to) feel thankful we are still in the land of the living and in the enjoyment of good health, especially when we remember so many that have been cut off.

Had another rush for Duff (boiled pudding). We had a good day.

The paper is full of nothing else but the return of the Natal Volunteers. "Our Boys" as they are called. They are praised as though they had done all the fighting, as though they had been in all the battles that have been fought, whereas, as a matter of fact, they have been in very few, having been kept on the line of communication. Of course, they have done their duty, but nothing to call forth all this sickening nonsense.

Friday, October 12th

Parade 6:30. Did no business today owing to the wind. We spent an hour or two making our tin shanty a bit firmer. The wind comes in such strong gusts that it is a wonder it has not blown it away. I can't understand this place.

There was no news in the paper. There is a good speech in which was given to the S.A. League by Mr. Cecil Rhodes, a speech which, if read and taken to heart and followed out, will soon allay all this bitterness that the war has caused. Both sides have suffered equally heavy so that neither can call the other...

The best thing to do is let the the thing die and try and live and work together for the good of the majority, not to work or fight for cliques of any sort.

Turned in at 6 and had a fair night's rest.

Saturday, October 13th

Up at 5:30. Lovely morning. Parade 6:30. We thought we were going to have a nice day, but, after we got our pots on, the wind got up and it blew all day. You ought to have seen me at about 2 o'clock. As black as a nigger with the dust. But, we managed to get a few puddings made as well as some cookies I made in the afternoon. I was working up to 6:30.

Tonight the wind is blowing quite a hurricane. I shall than the Lord when we get out of this place. I can assure you I shall always remember INGOGO. Our Company Leader calls this place "the arse hole of Creation."

Had a fearful night with the wind and only managed about 2 hours' sleep.

Sunday, October 14th

Up at 6, parade 6:30. Today is a most fearful day. Hot winds, clouds of dust, veldtfires all round. Hell itself can't be more miserable. Everyone is going about shaking their heads, to disgusted to speak. Some of the men are lying on the veldts in the burning sun to get away from the dust and the constant flip-flop of the tents. The meal has just come up and some of it looks as though it had been trailed through the dust for a mile or two. It is simply black, but it can't be helped to talk about eating a peck of dust. We are constantly eating and drinking it in this dirty hole. It is sickening.

Monday, October 15th

Up at 6, parade 6:30. This is a much better day. No wind all morning. We made up all our flour, etc. into puddings. Sold out. We may get the order to move anytime now and we don't want to have a lot of stuff left on our hands.

Had a letter and two papers from Janet. I am glad to hear they are alright. I have not written for 4 weeks now, as it is no use if she is coming out. We are looking forward to getting disbanded any day now. The sooner the better.

This afternoon, Cook, my mate, and I went down to the Buffalo and had a bathe. We enjoyed it, I can tell you. After the dust of yesterday we were black. We went to a coolie store to try and get things but he had neither soap or anything to eat and drink. We were very much disappointed, as we wanted a change. Cook tells me for the first time that he is a married man. It appears she got to like drink and drunk him out of house and home. He has two children at Bloemfontein College. His eldest girl died. She would have been about fifteen now.

I have been thinking a lot today about the question of recruiting. The army and if the the authorities and if the people of England would listen, we could have any amount of recruits. The officers are to blame. They put on so much side. Never mind what a man is. If he risks his life and limb for my country he is surely worth looking after when he is fighting.

Tuesday, October 16th

Up at 6, parade 6:30. We could not get flour or currants so there were no puddings made today. We had a bottle of Whisky brought up from P.M. Burg. Enjoyed it, I can tell you. Went and had a bathe in the afternoon. there are all sorts of rumours flying about the cam about disbandment, but none of them are to be relied on. Turned in early -- 6:15.

Wednesday, October 17th

Up at 5:30, parade 6:30. Put on guard 6-8.

I made a bet of 5 shillings with Pollington that we are to be disbanded on or before November 14th. The rule in hospital is when the doctor goes round on inspection for the orderly to put his head in the tent and shout attention as though they should have that ceremony with wounded men.

Thursday, October 18th

On parade this morning the men asked the Company Leader about clothes. All he could say was that the captain had refused to requisition for clothes until he got to know what was going to be done. A lot of the men are going about in rags. After breakfast we made a few puddings. Sold out.

During the morning the Company Leader, Mr. Glen Cross, came up with a pyjama jacket. He said was it you that was asking me for a shirt? I said no, but he says you can have this and I will give you a Tam a Shanter and a pair of socks. So, I took them. While I was there I asked the Sergeant Major about tobacco. He says next week, but I will give you a small tin. I asked him if I was to pay he says oh give me a kiss. I says you might die if I did. So I was in luck's way.

This afternoon some doctor's wife from Newcastle paid a visit to the hospital and to the battlefields around. We do not see many ladies here. It causes quite a commotion when one does come. No. 3 section arrived back from Wakkerstroom after having a trip there with a convoy. They had a good time finding the difference between Dr. Lloyd and Dr. Martin. Today they have been trying some of the men for Baden Powell Military Police. I passed out at 9. We are anxious to get back to dear lively JHBurg. But, we propose and the foolishness of the Boers

dispose. When will they learn who are their best friends? Oh, by the way, we hear that Capt. Martin has sent in his report on the company to the I.B.C. Under his charge he says that on the march and in the field we are most cheerful, willing and hardworking in fact, untiring in anything we have to do. But, in camp, oh dear he says, we are liable to get into mischief.

Mr Peters was telling us today about his experience in the hospital at Charlestown after the battle of Alleman's Nek. He said that he and another man carried into the operating tent 35 cases which were all dressed by a civilian doctor who took great pains with the patient. In fact, he was working until dark and one of the military doctors told him to hurry up. He said no, the men must be dressed properly and not hurried over. He asked the patients many a time when he was operating if they would like a little brandy and was as kind as one man could be. Peters also said that he washed several of the men and he had one dirty towel to dry them all with. When he asked for a clean one, the orderly said no, that will do. He also told us that one corporal was drunk and his attention was drawn to a man with a cramp. The corporal was asked to call the doctor. He said no I can't disturb him at this time of night. The man died next day. Isn't it a shame that these things should be allowed? It is to be hoped that there will be great and radical changes before another war breaks out. God grant it may be a long time and that I may never be in another one.

I was reading today a story of a wounded man who said he would like to go through the same again if he was under General Buller. He said he did his work properly, not like some generals who were like a slovenly housemaid, who just swept the middle of the floor clean and never touched the corners but left them dirty for someone else to clean.

Turned in at 6:30. Spent a rather bad night.

Friday, October 19th

Up at 5:30, parade 6:30.

Another windy day. We could not do anything, which made the day seem very long. We are all in one mind. Let us get disbanded and back to our work again. And these hot windy days make us think more about it than if it was cool and we had something to do. Anything would be better than this monotony.

Turned in at 6:15.

Had papers from Frank Lloyds Pearson's and answers.

Saturday, October 20th

Up at 6, parade 6:30.

Read General Buller's speech in which he criticizes his critics smartly. The Company Leader spoke about clothes again to Captain Martin who said he would get his instructions from the Brigade Major.

The Sergeant Major wanted me to give the Kaffirs the same meal as I gave to the whites. I said I would not be party to anything of the sort, as it was not fair. They were only preparing a rod for their own backs by spoiling the boys. I asked him how he and the Captain would like to take the rough meat and the boys have the choice. At last he said have it your own way. Made a few puddings. Sports today. It came on to rain about 6, but there was not half enough. It just laid the dust a little.

Turned in at 7.

Sunday, October 21st

Up at 5:15, parade at 6:30.

We got our puddings on the go by 8:30. They will get a good boiling. The Company Leader said the Captain had made enquiries and he said we may be disbanded very shortly, but if he does not hear something definite within a week he will issue clothes to the men.

After the sports they had a concert last night. The General, his staff and most of the officers of the various regiments they made themselves quite free with the men. Beer galore, singing, and good fellowship. Some of our chaps did not land in camp until this morning. I missed it owing to clothes.

We had a rush for the puding today. We also had a good feed of it ourselves. The Company Leaders came round for some as they had some visitors from the Dorsets, but we were sold out. I was sorry. We look like having a very heavy storm again.

Kaffir women come round every day looking for food. During the night, I was dreaming that I had twins and fighting and talking like anything. I woke up at quarter to 2 and put this down.

* The Dorsets are a company from Dorset, England. In Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's The Great Boer War, they are referred to as being exceptionally durable fighters during the Battle of Spion Kop.

Monday, October 22nd

Up at 5:30, parade 6:30.

I don't feel well this morning. I don't know what is the matter. I am dull, heavy and low-spirited. Took 10 grams Quinine and felt better in the afternoon. Had a walk to the station in the evening. I tried to get a pair of civvy trousers but there was only khaki. But, if the government can't afford clothing, I'm sure I can't.

Turned in at 6:30.

Tuesday, October 23rd

Up 5:30, parade 6:30.

Made puddings and cut up meat.

The men cleared out the hospital. The Kaffir name for Captain Martin is Captain Jig a Jig. Nice name for a toff, ain't it?

We have a mixed lot of men here in age ranging from 55 down to boys of 18. There are all trades represented: hotel keepers, dairymen, miners, pupil teachers, carpenters, etc. Men who have been making their 15 to 20 pounds per week. Men also who are practically independent, but their property and interests are in the Transvaal and they had not settled things before the war so they had to take on this job. This is the time to find out what men are. I must say that I have had my eyes opened. I used to have a lot, I see now too much, faith in human nature. The majority here have let me see what a poor foundation I had for my faith. A more selfish, conceited, deceitful, foulmouthed, lewd lot I never came across. There are continual rows amongst us. I can't stand a lot of their ways and I let them know it. A waste of time, as I only get a lot of abuse for it. Some of them don't want what is fair, but just think of their own comfort and their own guts. Shan't I be glad when we are out of it.

Turned in at 6:30. Another windy night.

Wednesday, October 24th

Up at 5:15, parade 6:30.

Nothing of any note.

Turned in at 7:30.

Thursday, October 25th

Up at 5:45, parade 6:30.

Got the fire on and went and gathered a bag of dung. Made a fw puddings, but it is a windy morning and loos like rain. I wish it would. There is talk of a move next week.

No letter or papers arrived from Janet this week. What's up? I feel very very anxious. If I could only get to know what she was or intended doing it would take a great weight off my mind.

We had not half enough Duff today and we don't feel inclined to make any more. A thunderstorm came on about 5 and it is now raining slowly. If it will keep on all night it wil do a lot of good, as the country is very parched.

They served us out lime juice today. It would be a good job if they would keep it, as they only disgust the men with the small quantity given -- about ½ a tablespoon per man.*

Turned in at 6.

* Interesting to note that they likely serve lime juice to balance the diet and prevent scurvy and other vitamin deficiencies. As is his usual stance, Bell's contrarian nature rears itself -- even when he is being shown a bit of consideration and kindness from his superiors.

Friday, October 26th

Up at 5:45, parade 6:30. Camp guard.

Two wagons went to Dundee. I made a bet of 5p with Pegram we are disbanded on or before the 14th November. I went on guard from 8-10 this morning and, in the evening, asked permission to sleep in our own place instead of the lousy tent. I got it from the Company Sergeant. The other leader on duty, Gootley, was inclined to be a bit nasty over it.

Up at 5:30. No parade for guards.

Saturday, October 27th

My mate Cook has got tired of cooking so I shall do it on my own if I can get wood etc. I shall be able to get a young Maltese that is here to give me a hand. I made three puddings today, but can't get any fruit for tomorrow.

Two of the ambulance wagons that have been away over two months returned today. Benham and Rowley in charge. All sorts of rumours. The Captain went to Newcastle today. They say he has brought word back that we shall not be disbanded until March. The German's shanty got on fire. Not much damage was done.

I tried to buy a pair of civilian trousers but the Coolies told me they were not allowed to sell to the military. One man got fined 25 pounds for doing so in Newcastle.

Turned in at 7.

Sunday, October 28th

Up at 6, parade 6:30.

Had a nice steady rain all night. The wind is blowing again but there is no dust. A great relief. Had a quiet day. A party came round and held a short service. First time since we left Ladysmith. We had a bit of good singing and we felt all the better for it. Lovely sunset today.

Turned in at 7:30.

Monday, October 29th

Up at 5:30, parade at 6:30.

Made a few Rolly Poly puddings. They do not pay as well as the others. Sold out. We got in most of our money. Cook was afraid we should lose some of it. I bet Pitt 5 shillings we

disbanded in November. I have lost a bit by betting, but, if we stay on, I will more than make it up by Duff and Cigarettes. I went to the station twice this day for goods.

I am looking forward to a letter from Janet. The mail comes in tomorrow.

Tuesday, October 30th

Up 5:30, parade 6:30.

Made up puddings and cut up meat. We sold all the pudding. The fellows seem to enjoy it, although there are some who seem to get tired of it. I don't wonder. I bought a suit serge (a durable, worsted wool) for 5 shillings. Very cheap. I received no letter from Janet, yet I hope it may come tomorrow. Frank sent the letter and papers.

Turned in at 7.

Wednesday, October 31st

Up at 4:30, parade 6:30.

Made puddings. I hear there is a move on. We are likely to go to Laing's Nek, so they say, but we take it with a large piece of salt as some of the people here seem to take pleasure in spreading rumors and upsetting the men. Thirty-one pounds on the book today.

I went and had a bathe and called at the station on my way back and, there to my surprise, whom should I see as acting Station Master but Mr. Hagg who used to be book keeper at Gabriel and Ballantyne Builders. He said he did not like the place at all. We had boiled ham issued for breakfast if you pleas. About 2oz per an.

Turned in at 7:30. I had a letter from Janet saying she had made up her mind not to come out. I feel disappointed, but still, now I know what to do. It is just as well, seeing the country is so unsettled. Sent her four pounds in Postal Orders off at once.

Thursday, November 1st

Had an awful night with the wind blowing almost a hurricane. Up at 5:30, parade 6:30.

The ham was very nice. As we often say, it was more-ish. Hospital guard tonight. Looks like rain. A very strong wind is blowing. Came on to rain at about 2 o'clock. It rained all day and night. Hospital guard at night. Fr a wonder, not a single patient in the hospital. Had nothing at all to do but turn in and sleep. Got a nice rest.

Friday, November 2nd

Up at 5:15. Had coffee. It is still raining and has kept on all day. Having nothing to do after 10. Turned in and have been in bed all day. It is the warmest place. There is a cold wind blowing, making it very unpleasant. Some of the sections have not been able to cook anything. So, they have had bread, tinned stuff, and water.

Saturday, November 3rd

Up at 5:30.

I had a big row with a great bluffing bullying fello called Round. Made puddings, the day being a fine one. It came on very windy at night.

Turned in at 6:30.

Sunday, November 4th

Up at 6, parade at 6:30 and again at 8:15 for clothes. They are going to let me have a pair of trousers and a hat after waiting seven months for it. We killed a small pig yesterday and are going to have it for dinner this evening. When we got the pig cooked I could not eat it as I had a severe dose of the fever and shaks on me. Took ten grams quinine.

* At this point, it becomes obvious to the reader that Bell has contracted malaria. This might account for his somewhat depressive state and seeming languor.

Monday, November 5th

I feel rather better this morning. We made puddings and had a big rush for them. Men were waiting over an hour until they got cooked, but it is too much having to get our own wood, it having to be brought about 2 miles and then it has to be [word indecipherable] and it is not worth the risk of having six months. I think I shall give the job up and just sell cigarettes. I hear we are going to Blood River 12 miles from Dundee. We have to walk. It is about 75 miles from here.

Tuesday, November 6th

I feel dull and languid due to the change of season. I think as much as everything and partly to the dull monotonous life we are leading and also to the irritation caused by the low tricks I see done by some of the men.

I made another bet of 5 shillings with Pollington that we are disbanded on or before the 26th Nov. Money was given today. I applied for 12 pounds but the Captain offered me 7. I would not take it as I have 32-100 on the books. Clothes were issued today. I got a pair of trousers and what is called a hat. I would not wear it but went straight to the store and bought another one.

Closing Fragment

...with or without an excuse. Now, what does the first nurse say that comes before the Commission on its arrival in S.A.? She says that she never saw such patient patients as the Tommies. They took bedsores and other things, meaning lice, flies, etc., as a matter of course. And I am sure she was in a better position for seeing how things were carried on than Colonel Ryerson. When he went to visit a hospital the officers knew a few days before that he was coming and had everything spick and span ready for him. These visitors never see the hospitals as they are at ordinary times. And another thing that we all have noticed is this: since Mr. Burdell Coult's has brought up the question of the hospital invalids and wounded, men have not been kept lying

about to suffer and die in the tents, but have been sent away home and to the base hospitals where they receive every attention. At Elands Laagte, where there was a hospital for about 130 patients, they have often had as many as 240 in, day after day, instead of sending them away to where they would have had a change of air and water. They were kept on the ground where they contracted disease and were kept there to die. There were 2, 3 and 4 deaths almost every day. The men could have easily been sent away as we were close to the railway line. No they must be kept here.

Dr. Gilyard was the name of the doctor that was shot. A man beloved of all. He told the men that were carrying him and also everyone else that it was a shame to send six men all that way over such a bad piece of ground. He sent his orderly to the Dragoons camp for assistance and it took them 3 hours. And that was less than halfway and still this brute of ours told the men they would be able to do the journey in an hour and a half or two hours. He would send us off four to a stretcher if he had the power or dare exercise it. But, Major Wright told us we should have six at least. This fellow keeps sending us out with five. There is only one man that we should like to carry and that is Captain Martin.