

ST. JOHN, N. B., SATURDAY, JANUARY 6, 1900.

## The Straits of Ladysmith.

A letter from the London Times' correspondent in Ladysmith gives some idea of the difficulties of the siege.

'The situation in which Sir George White found himself was this: He found at his disposal to defend Ladysmith a force of 9,000 men, 86 field guns and a naval contingent with two heavy position guns. Of foodstuffs and small-arm ammunition he possessed a supply which would not, under ordinary circumstances, become exhausted in three months. But the artillery were not so well placed. The supply of shell worked out to a little over 300 rounds per gun for the field batteries, and, even with the naval guns, it was evident that expenditure would have to be made with a sparing hand. Ladysmith does not lend itself readily to defence. Roughly, the town lies in the bend of a horseshoe. But the hills which make this formation are disconnected, and the ranges and spurs straggle over a large area. Not only are they uneven, but their continuations stretch away in every direction, and form positions which in the majority of cases actually command the town. With the force at his disposal it was, of course, absolutely impossible to hold every hill, and, even contracting his front so as to hold the majority of strategic points, Sir George White found his 9,000 men, of which only 5,000 odd were infantry, holding a line of posts extending over eleven miles. Against this the enemy have brought at least 20,000 men, this being the very lowest average at which the estimate can be placed, there being reason to believe the combined force under Joubert, now occupying Natal, to be between 25,000 and 30,000 men.

'But this is not all; the experience of the last three weeks has shown the enemy to be not only numerically superior, but also possessed of arms which outrange anything that we can bring against them. It had not been for the timely arrival of the naval guns it is impossible to conjecture what the consequences would have been. Take, for instance, the most important arm—the artillery. We have thirty-six guns of the best-manned artillery in the world, but at the very outside, however well served our guns may be, they have not an effective range above 4,500 yards. Against this the Boers have brought into the field, guns fitted with the latest telescopic sights, and having a range of 6,000 to 8,000 yards. However devotedly our gunners may manoeuvre their weapons, they cannot dislodge an enemy in action against them whom they cannot see. This of the field artillery; and while I write a 6-inch position gun is shelling the town and defences from about 8,000 yards. If the naval guns had not arrived, if the Boers had cut the communication three days earlier, we should have been powerless to reply. As it is we have been forced to take most of their bombardment sitting. With regard to the infantry arm, the discrepancy is not so great. But the Mauser rifle with which the Boers are armed is the better weapon, and has a greater range. With a good pair of glasses and a Mauser it is possible to make tolerable practice at 3,000 yards. No British infantry is trained to these ranges. Our men know nothing of glasses; yet the farmer-soldier, our enemy, would not think of taking the field unless one man in four possessed powerful binoculars.

'Thus, at first sight, the task set Sir George White and his little force seemed stupendous. But there are saving contingencies, the first being the dislike which the Boer has ever shown to take the offensive. He will defend a position stoutly, but until he is absolutely certain of a success of a forward move he is loath to undertake it. Moreover, the South African Republic has been served badly by its agents, for if their ammunition had been as serviceable as their guns our casualties would have been three times as heavy as they have been. Their shrapnel is poor. On Monday, when the Forty-second Field Battery moved up to within 3,000 yards of the enemy's position, well-used shrapnel burst in front of the battery time after time. If these missiles had been from our own arsenals it would have been impossible for the men to have faced them and worked their guns. As it was, though they lost severely, they were able to make the

enemy's position untenable. Since the bombardment shells have been picked up filled with extraneous matter, proving the duplicity of the contractors who supplied the material.'

After the first bombardment small though it was, the civilian inhabitants became thoroughly unnerved. They appealed to Sir George White, who asked Joubert to allow trains of wounded and non-combatants to go south unmolested. Joubert refused, but offered them a camp in a place of safety in the plain of M'bulwana. The Times's correspondent says:

'On the receipt of this news the mayor convened a meeting of residents at the town hall. It was a strange crowd which attended. Every demonstration of South African white man was represented. The church sent a heavy contingent; half a score of women with blanched faces swelled the gathering. Respectable merchants, casual loafers, trembling natives of India all jostled each other to hear the words of

neutral flag, yet there were quite a number who remained. These people spent three days of armistice in discovering situations which promised to secure them against shell fire. The Klip River, which encircles the town with many bends, commanded itself to most, and by Sunday night its shelving banks presented a pathetic, yet almost amusing spectacle. Every civilian adult, white and black, capable of wielding pick or shovel had bent his back in honest toil, and the gravel cliffs of the streamlet will remain a lasting testimony to what man can do when moved by a sense of physical danger. The majority of delvers were able to secure some mining talent to aid them in their work. Others with longer purses enlisted the services of soldiers, who brought the rudiments of military fortification to bear upon their labors. Others, imbued only with the instinct of self-preservation, burrowed shafts perpendicular to the bank, so that the cliff face bore the appearance of a nesting

doctor, in his most kindly and considerate manner. 'Good! And now, my lad, I shall send you down to the convalescent camp at Green Point, where you will get more freedom and fresher air.' 'Oh, no, sir, don't do that, please. I don't care for them convalescing homes. I want to get back to the front to join my chums and give them 'ere Boers fits for sarning me in this 'ere way.'

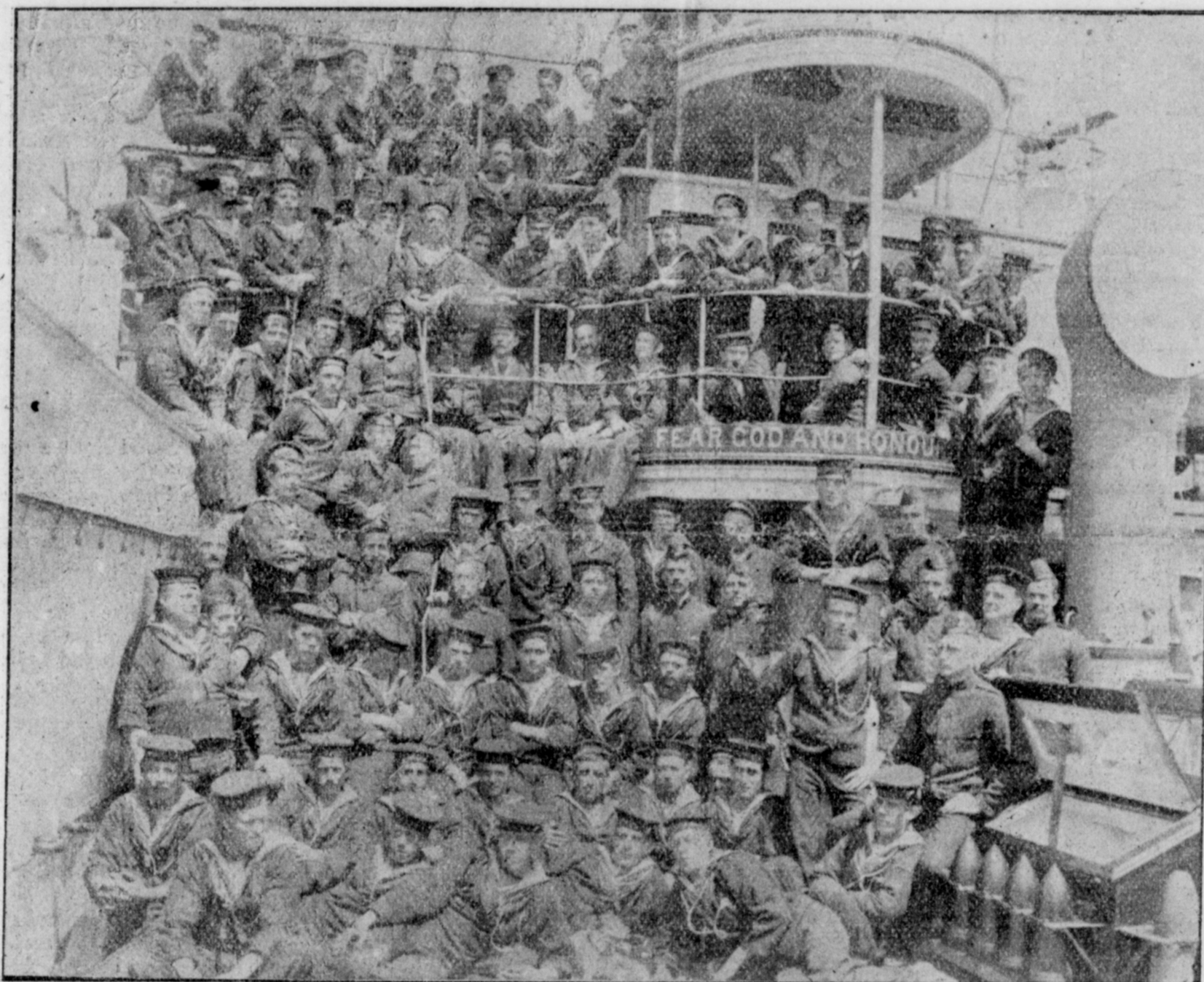
'Astounding to Sir William MacCormac was the nature of a case that occurred in the surgical wards. A private had been shot through the leg. The Mauser bullet entered his right leg about one third down from the knee cap, bored a singularly well defined round hole through the tibia (leg) bone, and emerged at the back (thickest part) of the thigh. The doctor is able to define its direction by inserting and removing a drainage tube. No shattering of this bone has occurred, and little inflammation and suppuration followed on so dangerous a gunshot puncture.'

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Marines and Bluejackets on a British Warship.

wisdom which dropped from the lips of his worship, the mayor. Never before have I seen a crowd into the hearts of which terror seemed so firmly struck—terror bred of modern explosives. The most piteous face in the throng was that of a Maritzburg barrister, who had visited Ladysmith with the view of seeing the war as one attends a picnic. A bursting shell unnerved him, and to complete his misery the enemy cut communication. The mayor opened the meeting; men roared to a patriotic fervour hurled heroics to the crowd. The only dignified speaker was Archdeacon Berker, who closed his address with the prayer, 'that it he was to die he would die under the Union Jack in preference to the white flag.' The crowd applauded; some suggested the national anthem. It was sung in chorus over and over again. Not a man would flinch from his post, the townfolk of Ladysmith were of one mind. The meeting closed with a bar of 'Rule Britannia,' and then every one dispersed to pack his bag and to accept Boer magnanimity. Thus it was resolved, and on the following morning Col. Ward arranged for a camp at Intombi, about four miles south of the town on the railway. Trains were run down to a convenient point, hospital tents were pitched and during Sunday and Monday the majority of wounded were transferred from the town. Men with families carried their homes out in wagons, and, I regret to say it, dozens of men accompanied these caravans who might have borne arms in defence of the town.

'Although a number of the residents of Ladysmith sought the protection of the

home of mammoth sand martins. On every hand were gabions, sandbags and sangars. But the greatest defence of all was that of the Imperial Light Horse. The majority of these men are Johannesburg miners, and they at once began to undermine their camp with shafts and galleries. Commandeering every colored man that ventured near their camp they cut ten shafts in the river cliff, and, working night and day for forty-eight hours, constructed an underground gallery capable of holding half the garrison. The sequel to their industry was amusing, for as soon as the last barrowful of earth had been thrown to the surface, down came a staff officer, and the regiment was sent to support the Manchester Regiment on the most exposed crest line of the defences. But there was a pathetic side to all this labor. The poor women and children were terrified out of their lives. Exposed to the most erratic climate of the world, old dames, young mothers, and delicate women left their homes to grub out an existence in damp holes and dirty subterranean passages; conscious of the din of arms above them, their anxiety for the safety of fathers, brothers, sons, and husbands was intensified by the lying reports which reached and circulated even in the level of the river bed. Such is the history of a beleaguered town.'

The following particulars of a visit to the Wynberg hospital were written from Cape Town under date Nov. 29:

'After seeing the wounds of the patients nearly all caused by gunshot, the onlooker is struck by the clean, well-defined, small, circular entrance and exit the Mauser bul-

let makes. It produces a canal not much, if anything, larger than a good-sized goose quill, and cuts its way through flesh and bone as neatly as an Archimedean drill would, leaving no ragged edges. It produces little local disturbance or bad after-effects. Hence shock to the system and subsequent septicæmia are owing to the lessened destruction of soft parts, and splintering of bone, minimized considerably. By careful antiseptic treatment the wounds heal in about twenty to thirty days. The course which some of these Mauser bullets take without rupturing important vessels or producing dangerous effects is simply marvellous. To cut through soft parts and follow the track made by these missiles without doing irreparable injury would tax the dexterity of the most skillful and delicate anatomist that ever handled a scalpel.

One of the wounded at Wynberg is a typical example. The Mauser bullet entering at the lower part of the abdomen,

now, sir,' replied he. Then remarked his

The railway telegraph operator at Elandsplas, who was for some time a prisoner in the hands of the Boers, till the battle of Elandsplas set him free, writes an interesting account of his experience as a captive. Field Cornet Pienaar was in charge of the Boer troop that took possession of the station, and as Atkinson, the operator, in question, refused to stop a train which was just able to get off before the Boers could hold it up, Pienaar threatened to have him shot. But after he had handed over his keys and cash, for which he received a receipt, "Pienaar," he writes, "addressed me in the following terms, much to the surprise of the one or two Englishmen present: 'I'm very sorry old man, that I said to you what I did when I first came. I said too much. You can understand my feelings. Seeing the train escape was bad enough, because you could have stopped it, and did not. As I rode up I saw one of my poor men fall, wounded by a shot from the train, and it made my blood boil. I spoke in the heat of passion. However, it is all over now. Here's my hand. We will have a drink.'

"As the evening approached more Boers rode in, so that by sunset six hundred or seven hundred of them were in the vicinity. That night about twenty of us were herded in a small ten by ten sitting room under armed guards, and our discomfort was added to by a constant stream of Boers coming in and out of the room in half dozens just to amuse themselves at our expense. Fortunately the bar was under the control of the Field Cornet, and the inevitable drunkenness was thus to a certain extent limited. One or two of the rougher youths amused themselves by pointing carbines at us, and, although checked by their leaders, there was always a doubt whether one of the crowd might not try his Mauser first and be punished after the mischief was over. Altogether that night was a miserable experience, and few slept in the heated atmosphere of that small room reeking as it did of stale tobacco and gin, guarded at its only exit, and consequently disturbed by fresh arrivals anxious to gape at the prisoners.

Other portions of this letter incidentally throw a vivid light on the kind of men the Boer commandos are made up of. The following passage shows how quickly they get to work when their scouts bring news: 'This morning, Oct. 20, Commandant Ben Viljoen and his men arrived early and took up a strong position among the stony kopjes a mile to the east of Elandsplas. About 9 a. m. the scouts brought in word of an English force approaching. In a remarkably short time hundreds of Boers were in the saddle, and directed first by a rather melancholy performance on a bugle, and subsequently by numerous whistles, such as are used by English police, were off in small parties of tens or twenties in the direction of Ladysmith. After a couple of hours' anxious wait for results, the Boers returned, having had no engagement, so we concluded the Boer scouts had come into touch with some reconnoitring force which had returned to camp after ascertaining their locale.'

(CONTINUED ON PAGE TWO.)