



DESPATCHES FROM THE FRONT

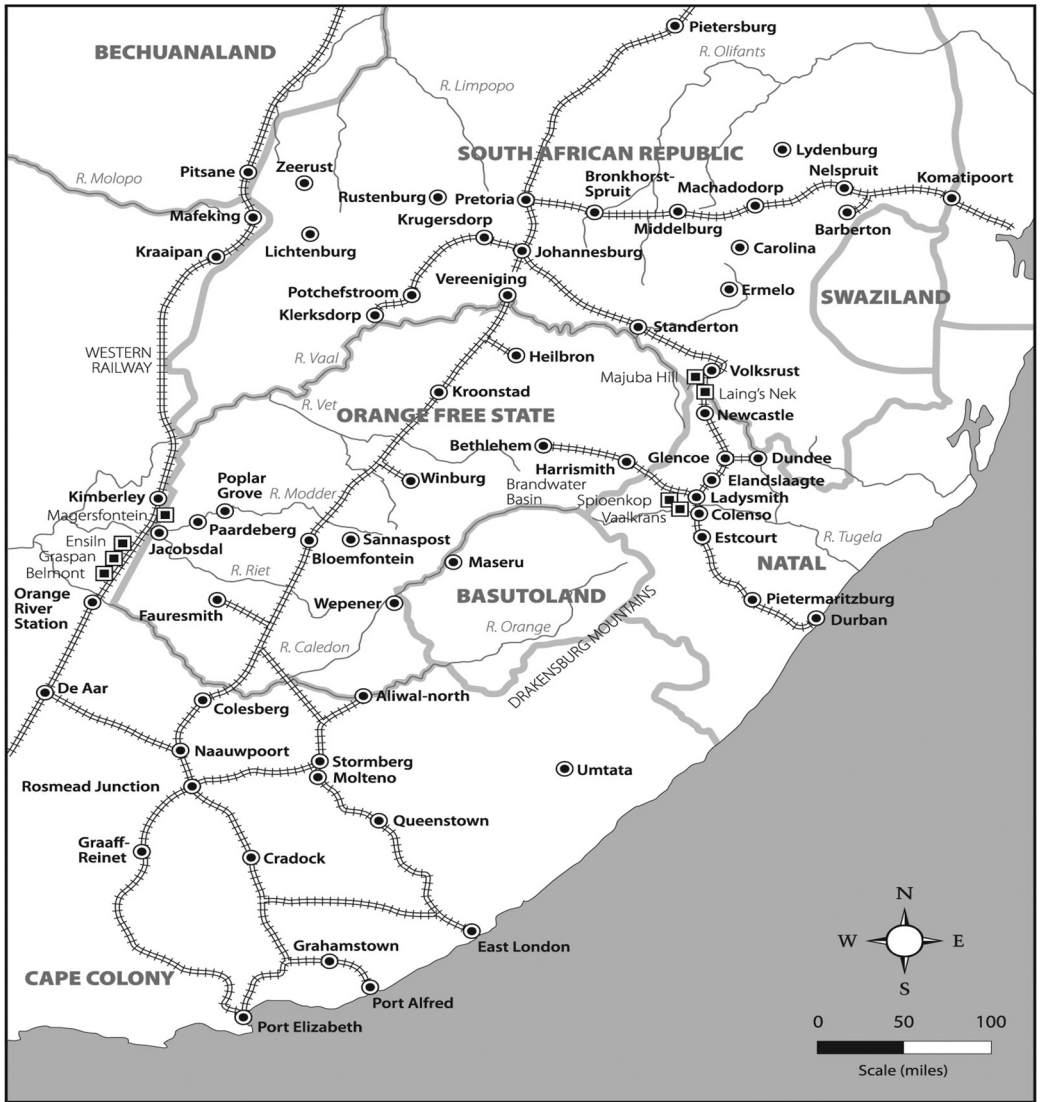
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**BOER WAR**  
1899-1902

LADYSMITH • MAGERSFONTEIN • SPION KOP  
KIMBERLEY • MAFEKING



INTRODUCED AND COMPILED BY  
**JOHN GREHAN & MARTIN MACE**

**THE BOER WAR**  
**1899–1902**



**BECHUANALAND**

**SOUTH AFRICAN REPUBLIC**

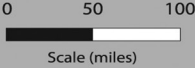
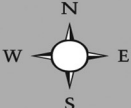
**ORANGE FREE STATE**

**BASUTOLAND**

**SWAZILAND**

**NATAL**

**CAPE COLONY**



**DESPATCHES FROM THE FRONT**

*The Commanding Officers' Reports from  
the Field and at Sea*

# **THE BOER WAR**

## **1899–1902**

**Ladysmith, Magersfontein,  
Spion Kop, Kimberley, and  
Mafeking**

**Introduced and compiled by  
John Grehan and Martin Mace**

**with additional research by  
Sara Mitchell and Robert Cager**



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# Contents

<i>Introduction</i> .....	vi
<i>Abbreviations</i> .....	x
1. Battles of Talana Hill, Elandsplaagte, Belmont, Graspan and Modder .....	1
2. Battle of Graspan, Naval Despatches .....	42
3. Battle of Ladysmith .....	48
4. Battle of Stormberg .....	60
5. Battle of Magersfontein .....	66
6. Battle of Spion Kop .....	75
7. Battle of Paardeberg .....	87
8. Relief of Kimberley .....	94
9. Siege of Mafeking .....	107
10. Relief of Mafeking .....	141
11. Relief of Ladysmith .....	144
12. The Battle of Diamond Hill and the Capture of Johannesburg and Pretoria .....	183
13. Battle of Blood River Poort .....	206
<i>Index</i> .....	226

# Introduction

Like so many conflicts that Britain has been involved in, it's Army was ill-prepared for war when the fighting broke out in South Africa in October 1899. The conflict that ensued is commonly referred to as the Boer War, but is more properly named the Second Boer War.

Despite the warnings from many senior figures in South Africa, and threats from the President of the Transvaal, Paul Kruger, Britain had only 14,750 regular soldiers to defend the colonies of Natal and the Cape. The Boers, from the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, could count 50,000 well-armed mounted infantry in their ranks.

The complex origins of the war resulted from more than a century of conflict between the Boers and the British, as well as the deteriorating relationship between the two sides in the years since the end of the First Boer War (was fought from 16 December 1880 until 23 March 1881). That deterioration spilled over into outright war on 11 October 1899.

On that day the Boers mounted a surprise offensive into the British-held Natal and Cape Colony areas. With no regular army units, the Boers had no problems with mobilisation. As with the First Boer War, since they were generally a civilian militia, each Boer wore what he wished, usually his everyday dark-grey, light-grey, neutral-coloured, or earhtone khaki farming clothes – often a jacket, trousers and slouch hat. The exception was the *Staatsartillerie* (Afrikaans for “States Artillery”) of the Transvaal and Orange Free State republics which wore light green uniforms.

Moving rapidly across the veldt, the Boers drove the British Natal Field Force into Ladysmith. Other British forces were besieged in Kimberley and Mafeking. The sieges of these places tied down a considerable proportion of the Boer forces. It was a mistake. The great advantage which the Boer troops had over the conventional British soldiers was their speed and manoeuvrability over terrain they knew intimately. By tying down their men in protracted, stagnant sieges the Boers threw away those advantages. Their opportunity to gain a quick victory was lost and gave Britain a second chance.

Nevertheless, when a 47,000-strong British Expeditionary Force reached South Africa it suffered a series of reverses at the hands of the Boers. The British commander, Sir Redvers Buller, divided his army into three columns.

One, under the command of Lord Methuen, was sent to relieve Kimberley, a second under General Gatacre being despatched to the north of Cape Colony, whilst Buller himself marched against the Boers that had invaded Natal. Methuen was repulsed at Magersfontein, Gatacre was beaten at Stormberg and Buller was defeated at Colenso. Buller renewed his offensive but his attacks at Spion Kop and Vaal Krantz were repulsed.

The defeats were a great embarrassment to Britain, and its response was to assemble an overwhelming force to crush the Boers. Britain's top generals, Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener, were placed in charge of what eventually amounted to over 200,000 regulars and 200,000 militia and irregulars. The full resources of the British Empire were employed with 16,000 volunteers coming from Australia, 6,500 from New Zealand, and others from Canada.

Even with this great deployment of force, the Boers defeated Kitchener at Paardeberg. But eventually the weight of numbers told. Kimberley and Ladysmith were relieved. The Boers at Paardeberg were surrounded and forced to surrender. The Transvaal and the Orange Free State were annexed to the British Crown.

This did not bring an end to the war, but it did alter the nature of the fighting. Unable to stand against the British in open battle, the Boers resorted to guerrilla warfare. They split up into small columns or "Commandos" of about 1,000 men which attacked detached British units or railways.

Kitchener responded by dividing up the country into sections with 3,700 miles of barbed-wire and 8,000 blockhouses. Having isolated each area in this way, the British troops systematically cleared each section of guerrillas. This prevented the fighting Boers from simply melting back into the farming communities only to re-emerge when the British troops had left their sector, the farms were burned and the women and children were herded into concentration camps. Gradually Kitchener's ruthless approach wore the Boers down and on 31 May 1902, the Boers accepted Britain's peace terms.

\* \* \*

The despatches collected in this volume cover the major engagements of the Second Boer War. The First Boer War has not been included. Due to restrictions of space it has not been possible to include all the casualty lists, though where it has been practical this has been done. Lists of individuals considered to be worthy of mentioning by their superior officers have also not been included in every instance for the same reason.

Unlike the despatches of Lord Raglan and his successors in the previous major war of the Victorian era, the Crimean War, the despatches of Redvers Buller, Roberts, Kitchener and their subordinates are highly detailed and

comprehensive. This is perhaps most notable with regards to the Siege of Mafeking.

The place was considered to be of considerable strategic importance and Major General Baden-Powell undertook to personally conduct its defence. Mafeking withstood a siege of 217 days and its relief prompted unprecedented scenes of rejoicing across Britain. In his despatch, Baden-Powell provides not only an exciting narrative of the siege but he also details the number of soldiers and civilians in Mafeking, and their composition; the weapons available; the prices paid to native runners to deliver messages (which were high due to the likelihood of them being caught and killed!) and even the quantity of the rations doled out to the various military units.

There are also raw and dramatic accounts from the various officers which draw the reader instantly into the war. After the capture of Spion Kop, the British dug in and thought that their position was secure. Then as we read Lieutenant General Sir Charles Warren's report, a message is received from Colonel Crofton of the Royal Lancaster Regiment: "Reinforce at once or all lost. General dead."

Warren replied immediately, "I am sending two battalions, and the Imperial Light Infantry are on their way up. You must hold on to the last. No surrender." Colonel Thorneycroft, given command on Spion Kop, responded by declaring that unless the enemy artillery could be silenced, his men could not stand another day's shelling. The position was abandoned and Warren demanded, in a public document that would be read by millions, that an inquiry into Thorneycroft's "unauthorized evacuation" of the Kop should be conducted. It is remarkable stuff and, predictably, led to criticism of Warren himself as the senior officer present.

The despatches are reproduced here in the same form as when they were originally published in the UK, though from the time of the action in the heart of Africa to the printing press in London many weeks, or even months, had passed. They have not been modified or interpreted in any way and are therefore the unedited and unique words of the commanding officers as they saw things at the time. The result of this is a variety of styles and in some reports a decided degree of Victorian eccentricity.

A number of words used by the British officers in their despatches will be unfamiliar to present-day readers, though perfectly understandable to the soldiers used to colonial warfare of the 19th century. An example of this is the word "donga", which is a dry ravine with steep sides. Others are the term "bheestie", which was a water-carrier, or a "spruit" which is a small stream. Some, though, have been lost to time and can be found in no modern English dictionary.

By contrast some words from that conflict found their way into the English language, and thus at one time as many as fifteen English football clubs had a kop, which in Afrikaans means hill, where their supporters stood. Likewise, the Boer Commandos were the inspiration for elite fighting troops of the Royal Navy and the British Army.

Any grammatical or spelling errors have also been left uncorrected to retain the authenticity of the documents. These include misspellings such as “troughout” for throughout, “negligeable”, “advoid, “harass” and many others. The despatches, then, are presented just as they were when first revealed to the general public more than 100 years ago as the Great Boer War raged.

# Abbreviations

AAG – Assistant Adjutant General.

ADC – Aide-de-Camp.

ASC – Army Service Corps.

BA – British Army.

CB – Companion of The Most Honourable Order of the Bath.

CIE – Companion of The Most Eminent Order of the Indian Empire.

CMG – Companion of The Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George.

CRA – Commander Royal Artillery.

DAAG – Deputy Assistant Adjutant General.

DSO – Distinguished Service Order.

GCB – Knight Grand Cross of The Most Honourable Order of the Bath.

GCIE – Knight Grand Commander of The Most Eminent Order of the Indian Empire.

GCSI – Knight Grand Commander of The Most Exalted Order of the Star of India.

KCB – Knight Commander of The Most Honourable Order of the Bath.

KCMG – Knight Commander of The Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George.

LM – Lee-Metford (rifles).

MH – Martini-Henry (rifles).

MVO – Member of The Royal Victorian Order.

pr. prs. – Prisoner of War.

PVO – Provincial Veterinary Officer

QF – Quick Firing (Guns).

RA – Royal Artillery.

RAMC – Royal Army Medical Corps.

RE – Royal Engineers.

RFA – Royal Field Artillery.

RMLI – Royal Marine Light Infantry.

RN – Royal Navy.

VC – Victoria Cross.

## BATTLES OF TALANA HILL, ELANDSLAAGTE, BELMONT, GRASPAN AND MODDER

FRIDAY, JANUARY 26, 1900.

*War Office, January, 26, 1900.*

THE following Despatches, with their enclosures, have been received from General, the Right Honourable Sir Redvers Buller, G.C.B., South Africa:-

From the General Commanding-in-Chief the Forces in South Africa to the Secretary of State for War, War Office, London, S.W.

*Cape Town,  
November 9, 1899.*

SIR,

I HAVE the honour to forward herewith a report from Lieutenant-General Sir George White, V.C., &c., dated 2nd November, on his operations in Natal, which was handed to me yesterday by Lieutenant-General French on his arrival from Durban. It does not seem to call for any remarks from me.

I have, &c.,  
REDVERS BULLER,  
General Officer Commanding.

From Lieutenant-General Sir George S. White, V.C., G.C.B., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., to the Secretary of State, War Office, London, S.W.

*Ladysmith, Natal,  
November 2, 1899.*

SIR,

I HAVE the honour to forward the following report on the military operations in Natal since the date of my arrival in that colony:-

2. I reached Durban and assumed command of the forces in that colony on 7th October, 1899, proceeding direct to Maritzburg. I found the troops, Imperial and Colonial, then in the colony, distributed as under:-

At Pietermaritzburg – 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, and Mounted Infantry Company, 2nd Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps.

At Estcourt – Detachment Natal Naval Volunteers, Natal Royal Rifles.

At Colenso – Durban Light Infantry.

## 2 *War Despatches: The Boer War, 1899–1902*

At Ladysmith – 5th Lancers, Detachment 19th Hussars, Brigade Division, Royal Artillery; 10th Mountain Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery; 23rd Company, Royal Engineers; 1st Battalion Devonshire Regiment; 1st Battalion Liverpool Regiment, and Mounted Infantry Company; 26th (two sections) British Field Hospital, and Colonial troops.

At Glencoe – 18th Hussars; Brigade Division, Royal Artillery; 1st Battalion Leicestershire Regiment, and Mounted Infantry Company; 1st Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps, and Mounted Infantry Company; 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers, and Mounted Infantry Company; 6th Veterinary Field Hospital.

With 1 Company, 1st Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps at Eshowe, and a detachment of the Umvoti Mounted Rifles at Helpmakaar.

3. The information available regarding the positions occupied by the armies of the two Dutch Republics showed the great bulk of the forces of the Orange Free State were massed near the passes of the Drakensberg mountains, west of Ladysmith. The troops of the South African Republic were concentrated at various points west, north, and east of the northern angle of Natal. On 10th October His Excellency the Governor informed me that Her Majesty's Government had received an ultimatum from that of the South African Republic, and that the outbreak of war on the evening of 11th October might be regarded as certain.

4. Since my arrival in the colony I had been much impressed by the exposed situation of the garrison of Glencoe, and on the evening of 10th October I had an interview on the subject with his Excellency the Governor, at which I laid before him my reasons for considering it expedient, from a military point of view, to withdraw that garrison, and to concentrate all my available troops at Ladysmith. After full discussion his Excellency 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. I proceeded in person to Ladysmith on 11th October, sending on Lieutenant-General Sir William Penn Symons to take command at Glencoe.

5. The Boers crossed the frontier both on the north and west on 12th October, and next day the Transvaal flag was hoisted at Charlestown. My great inferiority in numbers necessarily confined me strategically to the defensive, but tactically my intention was and is to strike vigorously whenever opportunity offers. Up to 19th October the enemy from the north were engaged in moving down on the Biggarsberg – Dundee line in three columns. The main column, under General Joubert, occupied Newcastle, and marched south by

the road leading thence on Glencoe Junction. A second column, under Viljoen, crossed Botha's Pass, and moved south over the Biggarsberg, cutting the railway from Glencoe Junction to Ladysmith on 19th October at Elands Laagte, where they took up a position. A third column, under Lucas Meyer, crossed the Buffalo River, marching west on Dundee, and arrived within striking distance of that place on the night of 19th October. Meanwhile the Free State forces west of Ladysmith contented themselves with occupying the country at the foot of the Drakensberg Range, without approaching within striking distance of Ladysmith, and, though the mounted patrols of both sides were constantly in touch, up to the evening of 19th October, nothing of importance took place in this direction.

6. On the morning of 20th October, at 3.20 A.M., the Mounted Infantry picquet, east of Dundee at the junction of the roads from Landmann's and Vants Drifts, was fired on and compelled to retire. Two companies, 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers, were sent out in support of it by Lieutenant-General Sir W.P. Symons, and at 4.30 A.M. a report was received that the enemy had halted and established themselves at Fort Jones. By 5 A.M. all Sir W.P. Symons' troops were under arms.

7. At 5.50 A.M. the enemy's guns opened fire, from Talana Hill on our camp, at a range of 5,000 yards. Though well directed this fire had but little effect, as the shells, fired with percussion fuzes, buried themselves in the soft earth. Our guns at once returned the fire, but, finding the range too great, the 13th and 69th Field Batteries were moved, at 6 A.M., to a fresh position south of the town of Dundee, with the Mounted Infantry Company of the 1st Battalion King's Royal Rifles as escort. The 67th Field Battery and the 1st Battalion Leicestershire Regiment were detailed to remain in and protect the camp. The 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers and the 1st Battalion Royal Irish Fusiliers were sent through the town to Sand Spruit, the 1st Battalion King's Royal Rifles taking up a position under cover to the east of the town. These preliminary movements were completed by 6.30 A.M.

8. At 7.30 A.M. the Infantry advanced to a small patch of wood, about 1,000 yards beyond Sand Spruit. They moved, in extended order, over open level grass land, the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers leading, followed in succession by the 1st Battalion King's Royal Rifles and the 1st Battalion Royal Irish Fusiliers. Notwithstanding the open nature of the ground this movement was, owing to the accurate fire of our artillery, completed with but slight loss. Sir W.P. Symons' intention was to make a direct attack on the enemy's position under cover of the wood above mentioned, and of some buildings known as Smith's Farm.

9. At 8 A.M. the batteries were brought forward to a range of 2,300 yards, whence the 69th Battery opened fire on Talana Hill, and the 13th Battery on the hill (marked 4,700) south of the road which was also held by the enemy, the guns and escort being under fire from both hills. At the same time Sir W.P. Symons moved the Infantry through the wood to its front edge, on which a very accurate direct fire was opened from the top of Talana Hill, and also from a stone wall which extended half way up and along the side of that hill. The Infantry here were also exposed to an enfilading fire from the hill marked 4,700.

10. At 8.50 A.M. the Infantry Brigade were ordered to advance. The ground was open and intersected by nullahs, which running generally perpendicular to the enemy's position gave very little cover. At 9 A.M. Sir W.P. Symons ordered up his reserves, and advanced with them through the wood at 9.15 A.M. At 9.30 A.M. the Lieutenant-General was, I regret to report, mortally wounded in the stomach, and the command devolved upon Brigadier-General Yule, who directed the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers on the left, and the 1st Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps on the right. The latter battalion reached the wall, to which two companies of the 1st Battalion Royal Irish Fusiliers were also brought up, the other six companies being held in reserve. The 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers, however, less favoured by the ground were unable, for some time, to make any progress.

11. About 11.30 A.M., the enemy's guns were silenced, and the Artillery moved into a range of 1,400 yards and opened a very rapid fire on the ridge over the heads of our Infantry. This temporarily brought under the enemy's rifle fire, and enabled our infantry to push on. The ground in places was so steep and difficult that the men had to climb it on hands and knees, but by 1 A.M., the crest was reached, and the enemy, not waiting to come to close quarters, retired in the directions of Landmann's and Vants' drifts. Brigadier-General Yule then ordered the Artillery to the neck on the Dundee – Vants' drift road, on arrival at which point the retreating enemy was seen streaming away in clumps of 50 and 100 men, on which guns could have inflicted great loss. The enemy, however, displayed a white flag, although they do not appear to have had any intention of surrendering, and in consequence the Officer Commanding Royal Artillery refrained from firing.

12. Turning now to our Cavalry, the 18th Hussars received orders at 5.40 A.M. to get round the enemy's right flank and be ready to cut off his retreat. They were accompanied by a portion of the Mounted Infantry and a machine gun. Making a wide turning movement they gained the eastern side

of Talana Hill. Here Lieutenant-Colonel Möller halted with one squadron, 18th Hussars, the machine gun and the Mounted Infantry, sending his other two squadrons further to the east. These two latter squadrons took part in the pursuit of the enemy, who retreated eastward, but Lieutenant-Colonel Möller and the troops with him appear, so far as can be ascertained, to have pursued in a northerly direction, to have come in contact with superior forces not previously engaged, and to have been surrounded and forced to surrender, while endeavouring to return to camp, round the north of the Impati Mountain.

13. The Boer force engaged in this action is computed at 4,000 men, of whom about 500 were killed or wounded. Three of their guns were left dismounted on Talana Hill, but there was no opportunity of bringing them away.

14. Our own losses were severe, amounting to 10 Officers and 31 Non-commissioned officers and men killed, 20 Officers and 165 Non-commissioned officers and men wounded, and 9 Officers and 211 Non-commissioned officers and men missing. The Divisional Staff suffered severely, Lieutenant-General Sir W.P. Symons, K.C.B., being mortally wounded, and both Colonel C.E. Beckett, C.B. A.A.G., and Major Hammersley, D.A.A.G., being severely wounded. Of the Brigade Staff, Lieutenant-Colonel John Sherston, D.S.O., Brigade Major, was killed, and Captain F.L. Adam, Scots Guards, Aide-de-Camp to Brigadier-General Yule, was severely wounded. Lieutenant-Colonel R. Gunning, commanding 1st Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps, was killed within a few yards of the crest of the position.

15. Meanwhile, on 20th October, I had pushed a Cavalry reconnaissance to Elands Laagte, and had obtained definite information that a Boer force was in position there, but apparently in no considerable strength. I therefore ordered Major-General French, commanding the Cavalry of the Natal Force, to move out by road at 4 A.M. with five squadrons of Imperial Light Horse and the Natal Field Battery, followed at 6 A.M. by half battalion 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, with railway and telegraph construction companies by rail. Major-General French's orders were to clear the neighbourhood of Elands Laagte of the enemy, and to cover the construction of the railway and telegraph lines.

16. On arrival near Elands Laagte, the station buildings were found to be in possession of the enemy. Our Artillery opened fire on them, while a squadron of the Imperial Light Horse, under Major Sampson, moved round to the north of them. The enemy at once replied with artillery, and thus disclosed his main position on a commanding group of hills, about one mile south-east of the railway station. This position proving too strong and too strongly held to be dealt with by the force then at Major-General French's disposal, he

retired his troops out of fire, and reported to me by telephone. I sent out to him reinforcements, consisting of one squadron 5th Dragoon Guards, one squadron 5th Lancers, and the 21st and 42nd Batteries Royal Field Artillery, all of which moved by road, and of the 1st Battalion Devonshire Regiment, and five companies Gordon Highlanders, which moved by rail. I also sent out Colonel Ian Hamilton, C.B., D.S.O., to take command of the Infantry portion of the force.

17. As the reinforcements gradually reached him, Major-General French pushed forward again, throwing out one squadron 5th Lancers and four squadrons Imperial Light Horse, under Colonel Chisholme, to the right to clear a ridge of high ground parallel to the enemy's position, from which he considered that an attack could best be developed. This movement was well carried out, the enemy's advanced troops being driven back, and the ridge gained.

18. One squadron 5th Dragoon Guards, one squadron 5th Lancers, and one squadron Natal Mounted Rifles, under Major Gore, 5th Dragoon Guards, were sent forward from our left with orders to turn the enemy's right flank, harass his rear, and be ready to take up the pursuit. At 3.30 P.M. I arrived on the ground in person, but left the executive command of the troops engaged still in the hands of Major-General French.

19. At this hour the ground selected as the first Artillery position having been cleared of the enemy, the Field batteries advanced and opened fire at 4 P.M., at a range of 4,400 yards. After a few minutes the enemy's guns ceased to reply, and our guns were turned on a party of the enemy who were annoying our artillerymen with rifle fire from our right flank at a range of 2,000 yards. This fire quickly drove back the Boers, and the infantry advance commenced.

20. The Infantry had been brought up in preparatory battle formation of small columns covered by scouts. The 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment led with a frontage of 500 yards; the 1st Battalion Devonshire Regiment and the 2nd Battalion Gordon Highlanders followed in succession. Finding the line of advance was leading too much to the south, Colonel Hamilton, C.B., D.S.O. commanding the Infantry Brigade, diverted the Devons more towards the north, while the Gordons remained in reserve between the other two battalions. At 3.30 P.M. the 1st Battalion Devonshire Regiment crested a ridge from which the enemy's position could be clearly seen. The general position of our infantry was then as follows:-

The 1st Battalion Devonshire Regiment, with a frontage of 500 yards, and a depth of 1,300 yards, were halted on the western extremity of a horseshoe

shaped ridge, the opposite end of this horse shoe being very rough and broken, and held by the enemy in force. The 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment had struck the ridge fully 1,000 yards to the south-east, just at the point where it begins to bend round northwards. The 2nd Battalion Gordon Highlanders were one mile in rear.

21. The 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment received orders that as soon as the enemy's guns were silenced, they were to work along the crest of the horse shoe and turn the left flank of the enemy. The 2nd Battalion Gordon Highlanders were to support them, and the 1st Battalion Devonshire Regiment were directed to move right across the open grass plain separating them from the enemy, and to hold him in his position as much as possible by their fire. As soon as the 1st Battalion Devonshire Regiment began to move forward, the enemy reopened their artillery fire on them, but owing to the very open formation adopted, the loss at this period was slight. The 1st Battalion Devonshire Regiment pressed on to about 900 yards from the position, opened fire and maintained themselves there, holding the enemy in front of them till 6 P.M.

22. Meanwhile the batteries advanced to a range of 3,200 yards, and again silenced temporarily the Boer guns, while the 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment and the 2nd Battalion Gordon Highlanders, working along the ridge, had a sharp encounter at the point where the horse shoe bends round to the Boer position. The enemy were forced slowly back along the ridge, fighting as they retired.

23. The Manchesters and Gordons, with the Imperial Light Horse on their right, continued to press forward, losing but few men until a point was reached about 1,200 yards from the enemy's camp. Here the ridge became, for 200 yards, flat and bare of stones, while to the north; where the Boers were posted, it was very rocky and afforded excellent cover. Our men, well led by their Officers, and strengthened by their reserves, crossed this open neck of land in brilliant style, but the losses here were heavy, the reserves were all used up and the units were completely mixed. Moreover, the enemy's camp, which was evidently his final position, was still 1,000 yards distant. At this moment the enemy's German contingent, who had been out on the west of the railway trying to capture our trains, reinforced the Boers and Hollanders along the ridge. The enemy became much encouraged, and from this point up to the extreme end of the horse-shoe ridge, where it overlooks the enemy's camp, the struggle was bitter and protracted. Our men worked forward in short rushes of about 50 yards. Many of the Boers remained lying down, shooting from behind stones until our men were within 20 or 30 yards of

them, and then sometimes ran for it and sometimes stood up and surrendered. These latter individuals were never harmed, although just previous to surrendering they had probably shot down several of our Officers and men.

24. At length the guns were reached and captured, and the end of the ridge was gained, from which the whole of the enemy's camp, full of tents, horses, and men, was fully exposed to view at fixed sight range. A white flag was shown from the centre of the camp, and Colonel Hamilton ordered the "cease fire" to be sounded. The men obeyed, and some of them moved a short distance down the hill towards the camp. For a few moments there was a complete lull in the action, and then a shot was heard, which was followed by a deadly fire from the small conical kopje to the east of the camp, and by a determined charge up hill by some 30 or 40 Boers, who effected a lodgment near the crest line within 15 or 20 paces of our men, who fell back for a moment before the fierce suddenness of this attack. Only for a moment, however, for our fire was at once reopened, and, reinforced by a timely detachment of the 1st Battalion Devonshire Regiment, they charged back, cheering, to the crest line, when the remnant of the Boer force fled in confusion towards the north.

25. Meanwhile, the 1st Battalion Devonshire Regiment, who, as already mentioned, had been holding the enemy in front during the first part of the Infantry action, had pushed steadily in as the flank attack began to press on. Our Artillery also had moved in to about 2,200 yards range, whence they kept under the enemy's guns and fired on his infantry position. The 1st Battalion Devonshire Regiment pushed on to 350 yards from the enemy, lay down to recover breath, and then charged with fixed bayonets. Five companies assaulted the detached hill on our left, and three companies the hill on the right, and it was from these latter companies that the detachment referred to in the preceding paragraph joined and assisted the flank attack in the final struggle.

26. The cavalry squadrons on our left, who had been closely watching the progress of events, now charged through and through the retreating enemy, inflicting much loss and capturing many prisoners. The troops bivouacked on the ground, and next morning returned to Ladysmith.

27. The Boer losses were heavy, being estimated at over 100 killed, 108 wounded, and 188 prisoners. Two of their guns were captured, and brought into Ladysmith. Our own losses were also considerable, consisting of 4 Officers and 37 men killed, 31 Officers and 175 men wounded, and 10 men missing. The Imperial Light Horse, and the 2nd Battalion Gordon Highlanders, who

encountered the severest resistance during the progress of the attack, suffered the most severely.

28. Turning now to affairs at Dundee, which I have already described up to the evening of 20th October. On the morning of 21st October, it was ascertained that the enemy had cleared off from the east of that place, but very large bodies were reported to be advancing from the north and north-west. General Yule moved his camp on this day to a more defensible position to the south of the previous camp, but the enemy, bringing up heavy Artillery to the shoulder of the Impati mountain, rendered the site untenable, and another move was made to a site still further south. On 22nd October General Yule decided to effect a junction with the troops at Ladysmith. A reconnaissance in force showed that the Glencoe pass was very strongly held, and that to force it would entail heavy loss. The troops therefore moved off at 9 P.M. by the Helpmakaar – road, reaching Beith on 23rd, and Waschbank Spruit on 24th October, at 9.30 A.M. Knowing of General Yule's approach, I moved out this day to Rietfontein, to cover his flank from attack, and there fought an action, which will be described later. Meanwhile, General Yule, hearing my guns in action, halted his Infantry at Waschbank Spruit, and moved west with his Artillery and mounted troops, in hope of being able to participate in the action. The distance, however, was found to be too great, and he rejoined his Infantry at Waschbank Spruit, halting there for the night. On the morning of 25th October, General Yule's force marched to Sunday's River, whence it reached Ladysmith on 25th October, being joined en route by a force detached by me to meet it. The casualties at Dundee, after 20th October, were very slight, and none whatever were incurred on the march to Ladysmith, where the troops arrived fit and well.

29. Reverting to my action at Rietfontein on 24th October, I may mention in general terms that my object was not to drive the enemy out of any positions, but simply to prevent him crossing the Newcastle road from west to east, and so falling on General Yule's flank. This object was attained with entire success, the enemy suffering severely from our shrapnel fire, which was very successful in searching the reverse slopes of the hills on which he was posted. Our own loss amounted to 1 Officer and 11 men killed; 6 Officers and 97 men wounded, and 2 missing. The details of this action, as well as the various plans and returns, which should accompany a despatch, will be forwarded later; but I am anxious that this report should be sent off at once, as it is very doubtful whether any communications by rail with Pietermaritzburg will remain open after to-day.

30. For the same reason, I have omitted all personal mention of the very many Officers and men who have performed services of the utmost gallantry and

distinction. In a further despatch, I hope to bring those services prominently to your notice.

I have, &c.,  
GEO. S. WHITE, Lieutenant-General,  
Commanding the Forces in Natal.

General Sir Redvers Buller to Secretary of State for War.

*Pietermaritzburg, Natal,*  
*December 2, 1899.*

SIR,

IN forwarding the enclosed copy of a report from Major-General Hildyard of a night operation on the 23rd ultimo, I have the honour to remark that though, owing to the dreadful weather that night, a complete tactical success was not secured, yet the operation resulted in a strategical success of the greatest value.

A force of the enemy exceeding 7,000 men, fully equipped, and led by the Commandant-General in person, which was intended to overrun the Colony of Natal, was so severely handled by Colonel Kitchener's small force, that they returned at once to Colenso in a manner that was more of a rout than a retreat.

General Hildyard, Colonel Kitchener, and all concerned deserve the greatest credit for the manner in which this operation was planned and executed.

I have, &c.,  
REDVERS BULLER,  
General.

To General Officer Commanding 2nd Division.

*Estcourt,*  
*November 24, 1899.*

SIR,

ON the 19th November I found it necessary either to reinforce the mounted troops that were posted at Willow Grange, and so divide the forces at my disposal, or to evacuate Willow Grange, which I did. The following day the enemy occupied a position to the west of Willow Grange Station and about six miles south of Estcourt. About halfway between this place and the enemy's position is situated a high hill, marked Beacon Hill on the map. On the afternoon of the 22nd I occupied the slopes of this hill with half 2nd Battalion Queen's, the 2nd Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, and seven companies 2nd Battalion East Surrey Regiment, and the Durham Light Infantry. A naval 12-pounder gun was placed on the summit of the hill. The 7th Battery Royal Field Artillery was also in position. This force I placed under orders of

Colonel Kitchener, whom I directed to attack the hill during the night of the 22nd–23rd November and seize the enemy's guns and laager. Five companies of the Border Regiment were ordered to march from Estcourt camp in the morning of the 23rd November to assist in the operation. Colonel Kitchener's arrangements for carrying this out were that the 2nd Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment and the seven companies East Surrey Regiment, under his immediate command, should seize the position, and that the rest of the force at his disposal, under Lieutenant-Colonel Hinde, 1st Battalion Border Regiment, should support him as soon as it was daylight.

In taking up the preparatory position on the afternoon of the 22nd November, the exposure of some of the Infantry drew the enemy's artillery fire, which was answered by the Naval gun on Beacon Hill. This led to the enemy being more alert than usual. Early in the night there was a storm of extreme severity, and the men lying out in it amongst the rocks were exposed to its full force.

From the base of the left flank of the enemy's position a wall led right up to the summit, passing over very steep and precipitous ground. On account of the rocky nature of the ground and the absence of beaten tracks the difficulty of assembling the assaulting troops was also very great. These difficulties were eventually surmounted, thanks to the personal energy of Colonel Kitchener, and to the accurate manner in which the column was led by Mr. Chapman, a guide attached to the Staff, who was unfortunately killed.

The position was successfully reached and seized, but some firing occurred on the way up, and when picquets were encountered the enemy's guns (a 12-pounder Creusot and some Hotchkiss quick-firing guns) were not found in position, and it subsequently transpired that they had been withdrawn about 2.30 A.M., the artillery officer in charge of them being uneasy as to their safety.

About 150 Boers were on the hill when it was seized, and these retired precipitately to a second position, on which the bulk of their force was situated, suffering some loss. About 30 horses were captured and the remains of the laager from which the wagons managed to trek. It was not my intention to remain in the position, a course which would have entailed a division of the forces at Estcourt. The rôle of the supporting troops, was, therefore, restricted to covering the withdrawal of the assaulting battalions. Most of the losses occurred during the retirement; they were chiefly in the 2nd Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, which was the last regiment to retire.

The mounted troops as per margin,\* under Lieutenant-Colonel Martyr, were directed to cooperate at daylight by a movement towards Willow Grange Station, and subsequently to patrol towards Highlands. Bethune's Mounted Infantry Regiment was directed to operate on Colonel Kitchener's

right flank. The troops under Lieutenant-Colonel Martyr, after holding a party of some 300 Boers south of Willow Grange, moved to the support of Colonel Kitchener's left flank, where they did valuable service in helping him back and assisting to get the wounded of the 2nd Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment down the hill. It was in doing this that Trooper Fitzpatrick, Imperial Light Horse, was killed. The behaviour of Lieutenant Davies, Mounted Infantry Company, King's Royal Rifles, has been specially brought to notice. When under a heavy fire he dismounted, disentangled the reins of a horse he was driving in front of him, and assisted one of his men who had lost his horse to mount and so get away. His conduct on this occasion was very cool, and I consider his services deserve recognition.

Bethune's Mounted Infantry co-operated to the best of their ability on Colonel Kitchener's right flank.

The conduct of all ranks throughout the force engaged was exemplary. Colonel Kitchener led the assaulting force with energy and judgment, and all ranks of the 2nd Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment behaved admirably. Major Hobbs of that battalion was taken prisoner owing to his remaining too long attending to the wounded. He led the first line of the assault with judgment and good sense. The services of Lieutenant Nicholson, 2nd Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, have been specially brought to my notice for attention to duty and the situation when others were inclined to deal with matters of less importance. I recommend him for special reward. I also recommend Private Montgomery, 2nd Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, for a distinguished conduct medal. After being wounded in one leg he continued fighting in the firing line until again wounded. Lieutenant-Colonel Harris, 2nd Battalion East Surrey Regiment, commanded the second line, and Major Pearse, 2nd Battalion East Surrey Regiment, the third line of the assaulting force. The behaviour of all ranks of the 2nd Battalion East Surrey Regiment when engaged was satisfactory under great difficulties.

Colonel Hinde, 1st Battalion Border Regiment, commanded the supporting force, which he moved forward by my orders to a supporting position shortly after daylight.

Five companies of the Border Regiment, commanded by Major Pelly, were on the right, and those of the 2nd Battalion Queen's, under Lieutenant-Colonel Hamilton, on the left. The Durban Light Infantry, under Lieutenant-Colonel Meeubin, took up a position in reserve further back. Lieutenant James, Royal Navy, of Her Majesty's ship "Tartar," commanded the Naval 12-pr. gun and did good service, though a Creusot gun, which the enemy brought into action, had the range of him.

Major Ricketts commanded the Bearer Company and did good service both at the time and in connection with the removal of the wounded. My Staff

Officers, Major Munro, Brigade Major, and Lieutenant Blair, Aide-de-Camp, were of good value to me.

The services of the guide, Mr. Chapman, who was so unfortunately killed, were of the greatest value. His intimate knowledge of the ground alone made it possible to carry out the operation. I sincerely trust it may be found possible to bestow on his widow, Mrs. Chapman, of Nottingham Road, some mark of recognition of the distinguished service rendered by her late husband.

I have, &c.,  
H. HILDYARD, Major-General,  
Commanding 2nd Brigade.

\* 1 Company King's Royal Rifles Mounted Infantry, 1 Squadron Imperial Light Horse, Colonel Bethune's Mounted Infantry, Detachment Natal Mounted Police.

From General Sir Redvers Buller to the Secretary of State for War.

SIR,  
I HAVE the honour to forward you the enclosed Despatches from Lieutenant-General Lord Methuen, on the operations at Belmont and Enslin.

*Frere Camp,*  
*December 12, 1899.*  
I have, &c.,  
REDVERS BULLER,  
General.

Enclosure 1.

Despatch from Lieutenant-General Lord Methuen as to engagement at Belmont, 23rd November, 1899.

SIR,  
ON the morning of 22nd I reconnoitred so far as possible the extensive and very strong position held by from 2,000 to 2,500 Boers, lately strengthened from Mafeking. I could not leave this force on my flank. I enclose sketch by Major Reade, and sketch by Lieutenant-Colonel Verner.\* The evening of 22nd we had an artillery duel between our guns and the enemy's large gun. We fired well; they aimed well, but had bad fuzes. We had two wounded, they six killed and wounded.

My orders for the 28th were:- At 3 A.M. Guards Brigade to advance from small white house near railway on Gun Kopje, supported by battery on right, plus Naval Brigade; 9th Brigade on west side of Table Mountain; at same hour, bearing already taken, supported by battery on left, 9th Lancers, two squadrons, one company Mounted Infantry, marching north of Belmont

*Enslin,*  
*November 26, 1899.*

Station, keeping one to two miles on left flank and advanced; Rimington's Guides, one squadron Lancers, one company Mounted Infantry from Witte Putt to east of Sugar Loaf; one company Mounted Infantry on right of Naval Brigade, protecting right; the force having got over open ground should arrive at daybreak on enemy; 9th Brigade having secured Table Mountain to swing round left and keep on high ground, and then advance east to west on A†; Guards Brigade conform, being pivot; then Guards advance on east edge of Mount Blanc, guns clearing entire advance with shrapnel; Cavalry to get round rear of enemy, securing horses and laager.

The force marched off silently and correctly; I proceeded to a position in rear of the centre of two brigades. Major-General Sir H. Colville shows the Grenadiers lost direction, and I found myself committed to a frontal attack; sent orders to 9th Brigade to conform to Guards, and having gained first ridge to wait until the guns shrapnelled second line of height. During this assault Lieutenant Fryer was killed leading his men gallantly. The attack was a complete surprise, for they did not know I had moved from Witte Putt to Belmont, and expected an attack in three or four days. It was perfectly timed, and had the Brigadiers allowed daylight to appear before I reached the foot of the position my losses would have been doubled. Lieutenant-Colonel Crabbe was leading with conspicuous courage when he and Lieutenant Blundell were shot by a wounded Boer – the latter Officer has since died. It is not possible to distinguish any officer in khaki, now all badges have been removed, to say nothing of the difficulty of sending a message, the Aides-de-Camp having to bound from boulder to boulder, endeavouring at the same time to keep under cover. I therefore gave the Grenadiers the direction. This was 4.30 A.M., when musketry fire had been opened from the advanced kopjes, and the troops instinctively moved towards the enemy's position. The Scots Guards carried out their instructions to the letter, and gained the heights at the point of the bayonet. The battalion then advanced to the hill east of Mount Blanc, swinging round the left, and advancing up the narrow end. The greatest credit is due to Colonel Paget for the manner in which he carried out his orders, and for the intelligent handling of his battalion when left to his own resources. I note with pleasure the valuable services rendered by Lieutenant-Colonel Pulteney, and the courage displayed by Lieutenant Bulkeley and by Lieutenant Alexander. The 9th Brigade had taken a correct bearing, Lieutenant Festing leading, a duty he performed admirably, and I regret he was wounded. Touch was maintained with Guards. A heavy fire was pouring in from enemy's sangars west of Table Mountain. The Northumberland Fusiliers were ordered to hold their ground whilst the Northampton were pushed on to some high ground on the right to bring a flanking fire on the sangars. This