



National Boer War Memorial Association

Patron

Air Chief Marshal Mark Binskin AC

Chief of the Defence Force

BOER WAR DESPATCHES MARCH 2016 - VIC & TAS

VICTORIAN EDITOR PO Box 2006, Blackburn South 3130

Phone (03) 9890 2465



POW ESCAPE FROM BOER CAPTIVITY

It was rare for men to escape from captivity. The account by Trooper George Whittington of the New South Wales Lancers of his escape with a mate from Waterval Prison, outside Pretoria, in April 1900, ranks with Winston Churchill's escape for its level of excitement. [Source: *The Mercury*, Hobart, 28th July 1900]

There were hard times, but there's not much use barracking about that now, is there? Pretty soon after we got to Waterval [prisoner of war camp] Milverton Ford and I began to make our plans for escape. Everybody did that; there wasn't a Tommy in a hundred that didn't put in a good lump of his time fixing up a way of getting out. Let me explain how we were situated. The barracks were in a space 100 yards by 500 - four rows of tents, and between each row lines of electric lamps, burning brightly all night. A small gate led from this square into an exercise paddock about a mile square. The barrack square and the paddock were enclosed in a close-tangled wire fence. We were allowed the run of the exercise paddock all day. At dusk, a troop of Boers came in at the far end and marched slowly along the paddock, covering the whole breadth of it. Watching every inch of ground they chivvied us into and

barracks. Then the small gate leading into the barrack square was shut, and the sentries were posted. Well, the chaps used to scrape out holes in the paddock, and crouch in them, hoping that the Boers would not notice them in the dusk, but the Boers were one too many for them and spotted them all the time. Well, Ford I laid our heads together and improved on this.

Before the paddock was fenced in, a rough road had run right across it. We selected the most sheltered spot we could get on this road, and dug our hole bit by bit.

The hole did not attract attention - there were many about, but the hole by itself was no good, and the most ticklish part of the thing remained. We sneaked some old boards and things and one day managed to get the hole covered...Then we heaped the gravel of the road on it so that the boards didn't show, and on the afternoon of the 22nd April 1900 we crept under and lay low.

The Boers came along at dusk - and passed us unnoticed. We kept to cover till it was dark, and then made a start. First of all we had to get through the barbed wire fence. It was the deuce of a job and took us a long time, but we got through somehow. Then we started across

country due east. Winston Churchill [in his escape] had kept to the railway line; we kept away from it. They gave us hard biscuits some time at the camp, when they got short of sour bread, and we'd saved up some of these, and that was all the food we had. Our clothes were old at starting before we wormed through the mesh of barbed wire, and our boots were anything but new.

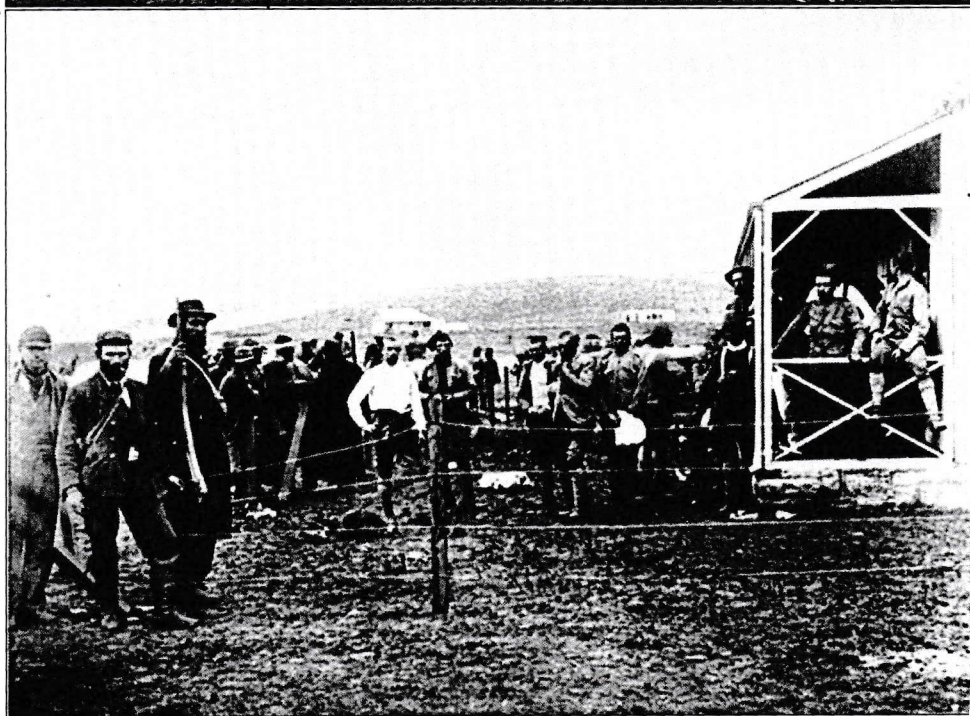
Well, we kept on for twelve days and nights, creeping on a mile [when] all the time was clear, across some fearful country. It was rough where it was flat; where it was hilly you might still call it rough - because you couldn't get another decent word to express it. Of course, we daren't go near a farm, for the Boer women are a darn sight more vindictive than the Boer men, and we wanted to go to Delagoa. But we got into the cultivated patches now and then, and fed upon green mealies and water-melons; not very fattening but we didn't care so long as we felt full. After twelve days our boots gave right out and we had to strike the railway at Waterval Onder. By good luck we found a truck loaded with wool and labeled for Lorenzo Marques.

We crept under the tarpaulins and lay still, and after a while the train started. That was on a 3 o'clock on a Friday morning. All went well until we got to the frontier at Komatipoort, and here a Boer guard searched the train. We climbed up on top of the wool packages, and lay in the middle of them right under the tarpaulin. It would have been hard luck going back then, and I am willing to admit that I was shivering and shaking like a man with the ague. But our luck held on for the Boers only lifted the tarpaulin all around the truck and never discovered us, so that we got right through to Lorenzo Marques. Awful objects we were, I promise you! A [local African] wouldn't have spoken to us, and a white man in South Africa is pretty low down when an [African] won't

look at him. We were so lame that we could just hobble along. But we went straight to the British Consul, Captain Fitz-Crowe, and by him and the Vice-Consul, a Mr. Ross, we were as well received as though we had come in frock coats and spats.

They put us up in the best hotel and rigged us out, and they sent us down to Cape Town by the first steamer. What with fever and one thing and another, I was pretty bad at Cape Town, but a kinder man and a smarter officer than Captain Bailey of Queensland, who is invalided, and who has charge of the Australian Depot at Maitland camp there, I never met - nor anybody else. Just you ask any of the boys, a thorough gentleman he was, every inch of him...."

**BELOW: POW Camp at Waterval,
North of Pretoria**



ANZAC DAY MARCH

VICTORIA Read carefully Arrangements have changed

For this year the RSL wants to have ALL the banners together at the front of the March. We will arrange bearers to carry our two banners which will be starting off at Princes Bridge.

All our descendants and supporters will meet in Collins Street next to the Town Hall on the east side of Swanston Street.

We move off at 12.05pm for the Shrine, turn left into Swanston Street and proceed down Swanston Street, over Princes Bridge and along St Kilda Road.

Marchers should wear their own medals on the left side and family medals on the right side.

BOER WAR DAY MELBOURNE

PLACE: SHRINE OF REMEMBRANCE

DATE: SUNDAY 29 MAY 2016

TIME: 12 NOON MARCH OFF

**REMEMBER
SUNDAY 29 MAY
12 noon at the lower end
of the Shrine forecourt
SHOW THAT WE CARE**

TASMANIA

Reg Watson, Tasmanian historian and author will be providing the ANZAC Address to two services at Her Majesty's Gaol, Risdon Tasmania. commencing at 10am on 25 April.

Later he will be attending the 75th anniversary service of the siege of Tobruk. Reg has been working with the Polish ex servicemen's Association in Hobart and the service will be held at the Tobruk Memorial, Polish Club, New Town, Tasmania. The service will be at 2:30pm. Reg will be giving a brief address during the luncheon prior to the service.

BOER WAR DAY SERVICES

Hobart:

Sunday 5th June 12 noon.

Venue: Boer War Memorial,
Queen's Domain, Hobart.

Launceston:

Sunday 19th June. 12 noon.

Venue: Boer War Memorial,
City Park, Launceston.

Inquiries: Reg Watson.



Boer War 1899 - 1902

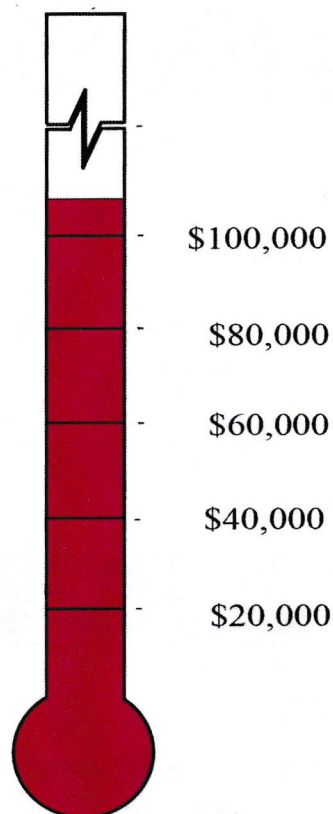
MAFEKING
KIMBERLEY
LADYSMITH
ELANDS RIVER
CAPE COLONY
RHODESIA
RHENOSTER KOP



PINK HILL
TRANSVAAL
ONVERWACHT
KOSTER RIVER
WILMANSRUST
WITTEBERGEN
PIETERSBURG

6 VICTORIA CROSSES TO AUSTRALIANS

VICTORIA OUR PROGRESS



PRESENTATIONS

to
**YOUR CLUB or
COMMUNITY GROUP**

The Association can provide a most interesting presentation for your social group. This covers Boer War history, where to find information on family veterans who served, details of the new memorial etc.

If you belong to Rotary, Lions, RSL, sporting club etc. and would like to have a presentation (speaker, DVD etc) at one of your meetings please contact us at the address or phone number on the front of this newsletter or 9802 0926

MEMORIAL

and

FUND RAISING

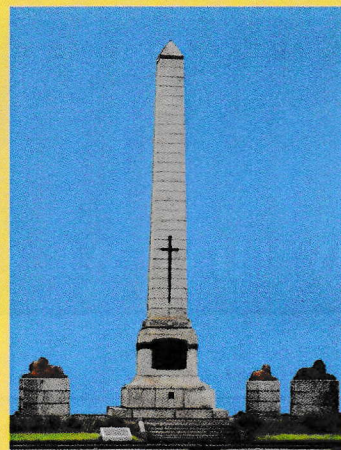
A couple of months back our efforts were recognised by the Federal Government with a grant of 1.45 million dollars. This has given us a big boost and added to what we have already raised brings us to within \$500,000 of our nearly 5 million target.

We are certainly not there yet and half a million dollars is a tidy sum to raise so we must appeal to you once again for help. Please be generous and get the Memorial Fund over this last hurdle.

If you have any suggestions which might help the cause to honour our Boer War servicemen and women, please call us and share your ideas,

The enclosed National Committee leaflet gives you a more detailed idea of the wider situation which you will agree is very positive. If you have a Boer War veteran in your family tree we strongly recommend that Memorial Medallion. It really is something you and your family will be proud to own and hand down to later generations.

VICTORIAN BOER WAR MEMORIAL UPDATE

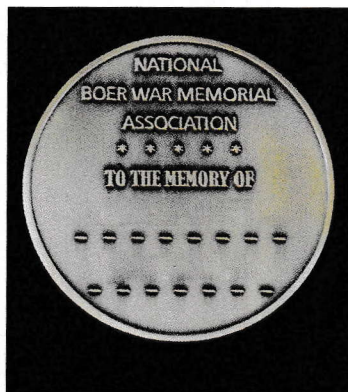


The feedback we have received regarding the relocation of our Victorian Memorial has been most encouraging. It is obvious that Victorians see this memorial as a most precious public show of our history. There is obviously considerable concern about its future home and the respect it receives as the very cornerstone of our military history.

We are continuing our efforts to ensure that it is relocated to the most appropriate place and is not relegated to a coffee meeting venue. It is far too important, especially to the families and descendants of the men and women we sent to serve us.

Merchandise

WHEN ORDERING PLEASE USE FORM ON NEXT PAGE
AND COMPLETE ALL DETAILS



ABOVE: Reverse of Medallion with provision to have the name and unit of your Boer War Veteran ancestor engraved.

This magnificent Memorial Medallion comes ready to have the particulars of your ancestor engraved on it to create a most worthy memorial to your family's Boer War heritage. A great birthday present.

The beautifully enamelled Medallions are a full 50mm diameter X 4mm thick and are available in a fitted jewel case. The front face has the Queen's and King's South Africa campaign ribbons faithfully enamelled on the lower circumference.

PRICE: \$46 in jewel case. \$38 uncased



Quality Pens

Burgundy & Gold
\$10 each



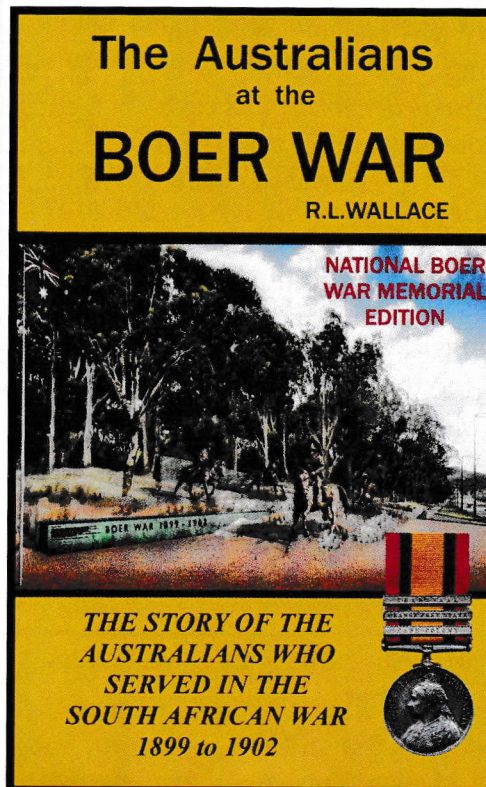
New Association badge \$8



\$8



Boer War Day Badge \$8



465
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\$48

See
back
page



QUALITY CAPS in Boer War khaki fabric with the Badge of the National Boer War Memorial Association nicely embossed on the front.
PRICE—\$25

PLEASE USE ORDER FORM OVERLEAF

Merchandise Order

Pens - Maroon & Gold @ \$10 each	\$.....
Enamel BW Day badge \$8 each	\$.....
New BWMA badge \$8 each	\$.....
Key Ring \$8 each	\$.....
Book (<i>use order form</i>) \$48 each	\$.....
Memorial Medallion (cased) \$46	\$.....
(uncased) \$38	\$.....

POSTAGE

Pens (up to 2) \$2.50
 Badges (up to 4) \$2.50
 Key Rings \$2.50
 BOOK (up to 2) \$12
 Mem Medallion (cased) \$8
 (uncased) \$2
 (if purchasing multiple items contact
 03 98902465 for P&P savings)
 Sub-total \$.....

(Circle one) Mr Mrs Dr Ms Miss
Other

Given Names:

Surname: ..

Address: .

Suburb:State :.....

Postcode: H Phone:

Mobile:

Email:

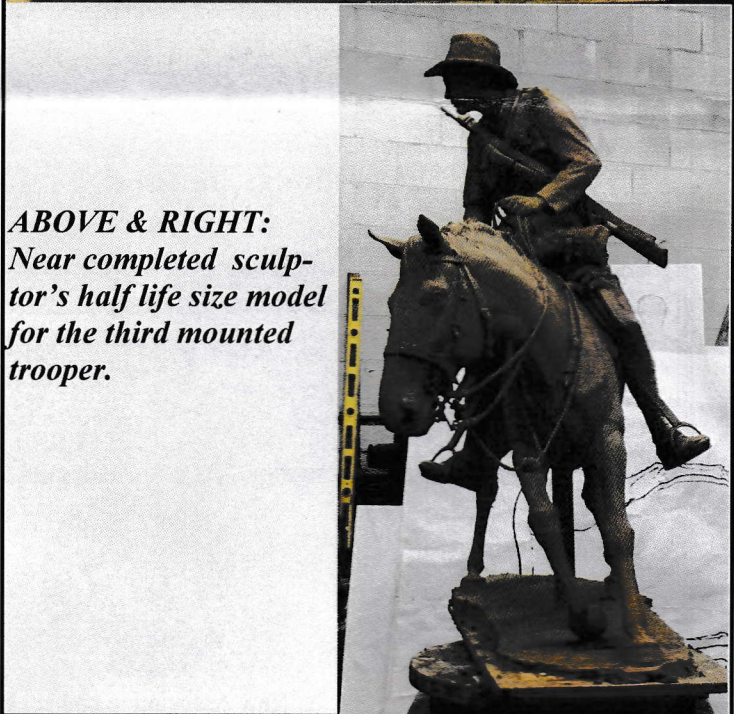
I enclose a cheque/PO for \$

Payable to:

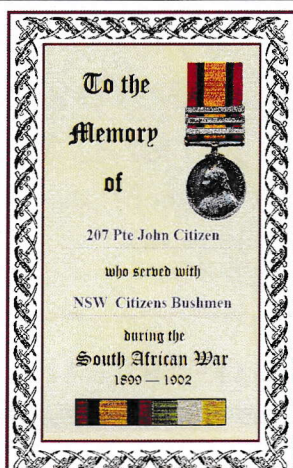
National Boer War Memorial Association- Vic,
P O Box 2066, Blackburn South, 3130.

NATIONAL MEMORIAL UPDATE

The second bronze mounted trooper is currently in the hands of the Foundry and the sculptor has almost completed the half size model of the third bronze. We believe we are on track for an opening of the Canberra Memorial on 31 May 2017.



ABOVE & RIGHT:
*Near completed scul-
tor's half life size model
for the third mounted
trooper.*



■ To NBWMA(Vic), PO Box 2006, Blackburn South, VIC. 3130

■ Please send me a copy of **'The Australians at the Boer War'** Enclosed is a
■ cheque / postal order for \$60 for the book and postage. My postal address is:

■ Name..... Street.....

■ Town / Suburb.....State.....Postcode.....

■ I will require the Memorial Certificate:

■ Name of ancestor.....

■ Unit served in.....

NURSES WRITE HOME

Sister Bernhard Smith went to South Africa as part of a contribution of ten nurses from Victoria. They accompanied the 3rd Victorian Imperial Bushmen on the Euryalus on the 10th March 1900, arriving at Cape Town on the 3rd April. Shortly afterwards the ship left with the Contingent for Beira. While in Cape Town she had an opportunity to visit a Hospital Ship. Her observations are revealing. [Source: *The Argus*, 25th May 1900]

"On Wednesday afternoon [4th April 1900] Sir Thomas Fitzgerald took Sister Tiddy and me to see the hospital ship Avoca, that had just arrived from England that morning. She was all ready to take back another lot of wounded. Last trip she took home some 360 patients and only three nurses to do it. Captain McDonald says there is always a treacherous land breeze about 3.30 p.m. and we got the full benefit of it. The current was very strong it took our coolies all their time to row against it, and when we were against the ship's side we were nearly washed under her. I was in terror every moment lest we capsize. Sir Thomas who had proposed going back when we were half way there, again insisted on our going back. These sentiments were echoed by Sister and me, but Mr. Peart, the third mate, with real British pluck, stuck to it, and though our men could not reach the gangway, another very well set up crew, possibly the Dunottar Castle people, made the gangway first, and we used the grappling hook and eventually reached the gangway. Then came the spring. One moment the boat was in the trough of a wave and the next moment swept past the gangway. Sir Thomas made several attempts. I fully expected him to be plunged into the sea, but fortunately he was only thrown on his back in the bottom of the boat. He made another successful attempt and then Sister Tiddy and I followed. It was "Now's your time. Now spring! No, no, you're too late. Now's your time" till at last it was the right moment, and reached the deck, breathless, blown about and damp with spray, in anything but good trim for making an impression on the English nurses. We were conducted upstairs by one of the ship's officers and Sir Thomas presented his card to Colonel Lake, the head of the medical staff, and then introduced us. He sent for the Sister Superior, Miss F. Ridley Makepeace. They gave us afternoon tea and chatted about the work. There are 18 medical officers and 22 nurses, including the Sister. They can accommodate 380 patients and everything is arranged very much on hospital lines. The officers' ward is off the saloon; the berths are like swinging cots, fastened down to the floor. They can all be made stationary at will, and one can get all round them.

There are none against the wall. Each row of cots has its own electric light, that can be switched on without disturbing the other part of the ward. There are electric fans to cool the air; tanks for lotion, with tubing and tap up to date; bathroom, pantry sinks, table and forms. There is not much difference between the officers' quarters and wards. The wards hold some 40 or 50 patients each. The nurses of the reserve are dressed in navy blue, with red capes; those of the army nursing staff in grey, a little paler than ours, with red capes. The material in their uniform is much better than ours, though they look alike. Some of them are such beautiful women and don't look as if they worked half as hard as the colonial women."

There were problems for the nurses settling in. Sister Smith later wrote to her mother on June 15th 1900, from Umtali, Rhodesia, informing her of what life had been like for her and her companions. [Source: *The Argus*, Thursday 2nd August 1900]

"Sister Dorothy Smith had a nasty accident to her hands. She poured pure carbolic over them, but has not gone off duty at all. The left hand is so deeply burnt that she has a neuralgic pain in it nearly all day and night. Sister Langlands had a touch of fever but worked through it. So far I have been all right but working very hard. There have been between 50 and 60 Yeomanry in the hospital for the last ten days or two weeks. Seven deaths in one week - two coma after malaria, and five dysentery. We have been at our wits end to keep clean towels, or whatever we could get hold of, to change the beds of the patients ill with dysentery. The cases that have been sent out by the Warrnambool, Bendigo and Brighton people have been our salvation. We do want foment flannel and bandaging material badly. The men are lying on stretchers, their own mackintosh, sheet and blankets, and overcoats if further warmth is needed. Fortunately the doctors bought a supply of pillows, and where we are short we use the men's coats folded into pillow cases, the kindly gift of the Umtali ladies."

Nurse Rose Shappere, a Melbourne girl, volunteered for service when the war broke out and was in Ladysmith, Natal Colony, for the duration of the four-month siege. She wrote to her family from Intombi Camp, Military Hospital on the 17th March 1900, at this time she herself being a patient with the fever. The letter contains some graphic memories of the siege. [Source: *The Age*, 16th May 1900]

"One night I drank a cup of soup, I was just starving, and had a long day (several operations in my marquee). That day the soup was quite bad, but

I had to drink it as there was nothing else till next morning and then not much, on a weak stomach. I never felt well after that, and gradually had to take to my bed. I was so ill three days before I gave in I could not bear my clothes on, and I had to go into the ward with just my dress (the bodice is all in one) and my apron on, and at night I just rolled over and over with pain. You know, dear, one does not like to give in. The patients were getting tired thinking Buller would never come, and if he had not come when he did there would have been none to relieve, for all the patients were simply dying of starvation. We had run short of medicine, stimulants and all medical comforts. I would have given £1 for a little brandy, and could we have got it, many would have been saved an illness. You could get nothing like that unless you went on the sick list. After all, Providence was good to us, for not one sister died, though several have been very ill, but we kept up till February...

It was an awful Christmas day. One never to be forgotten, blazing hot, and patients dying all round you, and very little comfort could we give them. Oh, one poor Tommy came into my marquee with enteric - very bad - temperature 106, and poor boy, was so uneasy, and kept watching. I told him not to worry, and he would soon get better if he kept quiet. I could see there was something on his mind (I knew he could never pull through), so I gave him a sleeping draught, and asked him about his friends. He was then quieter and in a little [time] called "Sister." I went to him, and poor chap he said, "Will you take my money from me, and send it to my sister in England"; and he made me write the address - £5/14/9. I sent for the orderly officer, and gave the money into his charge, according to regulations. He said, "I am dying. I know," and was so brave about it. He thanked me for all I had done; it nearly broke my heart to see him, and made me think of you all. Poor brave boy, he died the next day. So you see, dear, we are able to do some good, and if I never work again I can say I was able to give some relief to our poor Tommies."

Sister Lydia Mansfield, a Tasmanian, also served in the Military Hospital, Ladysmith. She wrote home on the 10th

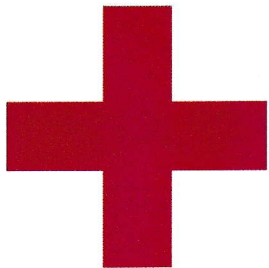
May 1900, giving a graphic account of conditions there. [Source: *The Mercury*, Hobart, 26th June 1900]

"We are very busy in our hospital. Yesterday 286 typhoid cases came in, some very seriously ill. My heart ached for them. One patient's temperature was over 105 degrees, and he had to ride 30 miles, and then walk about 7 more, so you can imagine what he looked like when he arrived in my block - almost dead. Their tongues are simply a sight to see; some are split right down the centre, and are almost in two; they are like leather - so hard and brown. Some of them have not tasted milk in any shape, fresh or tinned for six months, and when I have given them a large feeder full of beautiful fresh iced milk they have cried like children. And they were so grateful to lie down in a nice clean bed. They appreciate hospital comforts, I can tell you.

His men speak so highly of him, and are proud of having the honour of working under him. I have quite a large number of Sir Redvers Buller's men. He often comes round the wards just to see them. Just now he is living very near here, in one of the convents.

I also have several of the gunners who were at that awful battle on Waggon Hill, and none of them even got a scratch. It is quite surprising how many do escape. Some [of my patients] have been in all the fighting, and have never had one wound

The heat here is very trying from about 11 a.m. till 5 p.m. The evenings and mornings on the other hands are bitterly cold - ice on the water, and snow on some of the hills. The climate is very trying indeed. All the English sisters have been very ill with dysentery, and five have died during the last few months and another on Tuesday last. They cannot stand the sudden change in temperature. We three are all well. We are all called Army nursing Sisters, and are treated as such in every way. I have two orderlies, a wardmaster, and several kaffir men under me, but it is very difficult to make them understand how to nurse typhoid. They think nothing of letting the patients sit up, and even get out of bed. It takes me all my time to watch them.."



*A group of Australian
Boer War nurses*

