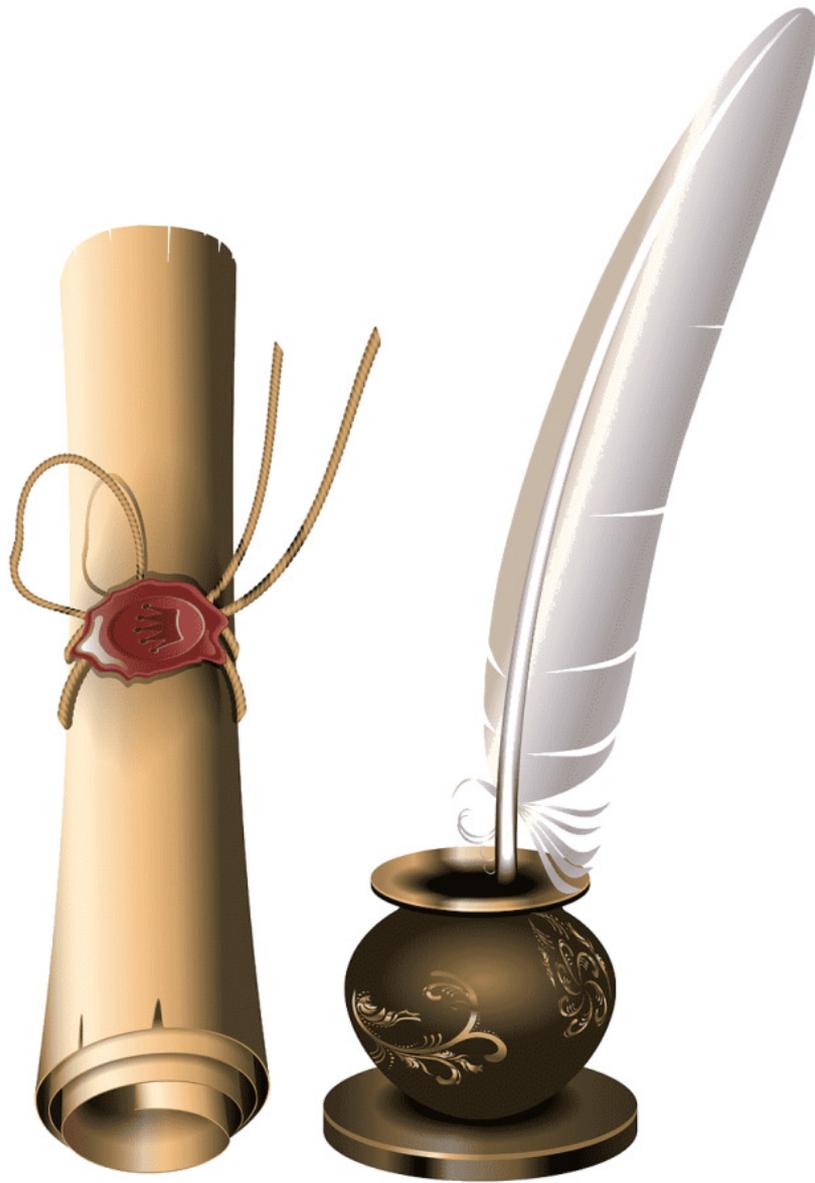


THE ESSAYS



**TURNING THE TIDE
OF WAR**

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In every war there comes a critical period when the tide turns. This is triggered sometimes by the outcome of a particular battle; sometimes by the unknowing and often uncaring intervention of ignorant politicians; sometimes by the life and death decisions of generals. In our conflict with the Boer, this period came early, just three months from the outset, and was primarily characterised by the arrival of General Sir Redvers Buller as supreme commander. His early successes in the field were soon followed by three crushing defeats, with many hundreds of men lost, killed and captured. My notes below show how this led to Buller's ultimate subordination and demotion. In a matter of just a few weeks, he had lost the loyalty and respect of his men and then, his reputation gone, he was replaced as Commander-in-Chief by Lord Roberts.



1st December: General Hildyard moves camp to Frere and oversees superb effort to rebuild bridges destroyed by the Boer so that General Clery can advance

2nd December: General Buller arrives in Natal to personally lead major operations in the area and establishes his HQ at Pietermaritzburg; General Clery arrives at Frere and assumes command south of the Tugela in preparation for the immediate relief of Ladysmith; General Hildyard joins forces with Lord Dundonald and chases the fleeing Boer to within two miles of Colenso before withdrawing

3rd December: The railway line is now fully restored to Frere and trains are arriving rapidly at the front with troops, ammunition and stores

4th December: No General or correspondent can understand why the Boer retreats so readily in the face of our forces as they are still building

4th December: Scouts from Ladysmith report that despite constant shelling through November, losses have thankfully been relatively small. Reinforcements arriving daily by train at Frere are mobilised to forward positions to prepare for the advance in force to Ladysmith

5th December: Today, I ride out with Major Elliot (RE) to sketch the Boer positions beyond the Tugela - he risks his life daily gathering this reconnaissance

6th December: Sir Redvers Buller arrives at Frere in the early hours - hundreds of eager troops turn out in the dark to welcome their Commander-in-Chief. His first duty is to officiate at the funeral of the 47 heroes who died in the armoured train disaster - 2000 officers and comrades are in attendance. Just hours after the funeral, General Buller joins Lord Dundonald's cavalry to reconnoitre the Boer positions on the Tugela - our attack is being formulated.

7th December: After many failed attempts Captain Cayzer of the Dragoons has established heliograph communication with General White at Ladysmith

7th December: Signals from Ladysmith confirm that casualties are light but lack of food and water poisoned by the Boer are the real killers ... and yet a strange air of mirth and jollity pervades our preparations for battle at the news that today is General Buller's 60th birthday

8th December: High morale today at the news that a sortie from Ladysmith last night under General Hunter spiked the Long Tom at Lombard's Kop

9th December: A second Long Tom atop Surprise Hill destroyed by a 250 strong sortie under Lieutenant Jones but at a cost of 60 killed and 28 captured

9th December: General French outflanks the Boer with his horse artillery to attack and hold the vital railway at Naarport Junction

10th December: The Boer is under heavy attack on all fronts: General Gatacre is closing on Stormberg and Lord Methuen is moving against Magersfontein. My brief is still to be with General Gatacre so I am leaving today with a supply column to join him outside Stormberg

11th December: General Gatacre is crushed by the Boer at Stormberg with 135 battle casualties and more than 600 captured in the field after retreat. Lord Methuen attacks the Boer at Magersfontein but after a day long battle is forced to withdraw, losing 800 killed and wounded. Relief

for Kimberley and Mafeking is now delayed because of the repulses today of Lord Methuen and General Gatacre - a critical time

12th December: On hearing of the losses at Stormberg and Magersfontein, General Buller changes his plan and decides to attack Colenso directly. General Clery has readied 22000 men and 44 guns for Buller's attack on Botha's forces at Colenso, opening the road to Ladysmith

12th December: General Barton's Fusiliers set a battery of 6 naval guns to dominate the Boer entrenchments menacing the bridges over the Tugela and, despite the defeats of Gatacre and Methuen, the Ladysmith relief force of 22000 men under General Clery is now fully prepared

13th December: After the devastating losses at Stormberg, General Gatacre has withdrawn to Molteno. I can not reach him so I stay with General Buller. Failing to reach General Gatacre, I have been re-assigned to General Hildyard's brigade for the forthcoming attack and the onward press with the relief force

13th December: General Barton opens the assault on Colenso with a massive bombardment but there is no reply from the Boer - have they withdrawn? General Barton's guns are re-sited at Chieveley and again pound the entrenched enemy positions but, again, the Boer remains silent.

14th December: General Buller orders a full advance to a position beyond Chieveley in preparation for an attack in force on Colenso tomorrow

14th December: There is much celebration in General Hildyard's camp tonight at the news that Churchill has escaped from the prison camp at Pretoria

15th December: Camp at Chieveley was struck at 8 am and General Buller's entire force of 22000 men moved forward towards the Tugela and Colenso. We passed over empty trenches and thought the Boer had fled, but then burst a thunder as if all the fiends of hell were loosed. As the clock ticked to 9.15 am, from every ridge and trench in front of us, a terrible small arms fire burst in our faces, an assault soon joined by batteries of Maxims from across the river and the surrounding hills

15th December: Within four hours of launching our attack, we were pinned down by the Boer on all sides and trapped in a cauldron of slaughter. As his men and officers fall around him, General Buller orders a retreat - but hundreds are still trapped and can not escape

16th December: An early morning armistice reveals 145 of General Buller's men killed and 1200 missing or wounded, with only 40 Boer casualties. We carry our 300 wounded back to Chieveley but leave more than 800 of our comrades in the hands of Botha and his Boers.

17th December: How quickly disaffection spreads - the men who loved their leader yesterday now speak of him, not as Redvers but as Reverse

18th December: After our recent defeats, the drive for victory has faltered and this war is reduced to a hotch-potch of minor skirmishes. It is now beyond all doubt. General Buller's reputation is in tatters, he has lost the respect of his men and he must be replaced

19th December: Our scouts report that General Joubert, now recovered, has returned to the front ... will he attack us as we regroup at Frere?

20th December: Morale is once again lifted at the news that Lord Roberts is just days from Durban to take overall command from General Buller

21st December: The news of Lord Roberts' imminent arrival has whetted the men's appetite for fighting and stiffened their resolve for victory

22nd December: It seems from our field scout reports that the Boer is expecting us to desist and retreat after the defeat at Colenso - fools!

23rd December: Confirmation received that Lord Roberts has left Southampton today on board the Dunottar Castle and is expected by mid January

24th December: We remain locked at Chieveley with the Boer still barring any progress to Colenso or onwards - stagnation of men and

minds. The Boer has us trapped - so why are they now setting their limber and removing their guns, leaving the road to Colenso open?

25th December: A truce on the Tugela fields today, but a fearful bombardment from the Boer robbed Ladysmith of any goodwill or peace on earth

25th December: Our stores from home are delayed but a handful of Hussars march in with a dozen oxen stolen from the Boer .. dinner is served!

26th December: The distant thunder of an artillery storm over Ladysmith tells us now why the Boer removed their heavy guns from Colenso

26th December: We are joined at Chieveley by seven units of Australians - ill-trained as regular soldiers, but highly effective against the Boer

27th December: We hear today of a society event for the ladies of Cape Town - a day trip by train to see and touch the Long Toms at Ladysmith. Then Bennett Burleigh arrives with four cartloads of cake, cigarettes and beer - men die while our war becomes stranger by the day

28th December: Churchill returns and is greeted as a hero - he tells us of the excitement in Durban about Lord Robert's imminent arrival

29th December: General Buller orders reconnaissance sorties to assess the strength of the Boer at Colenso, Fort Wylie and along the Tugela

29th December: The incessant thunder of the shelling at Ladysmith increases by the hour. We must move there soon or slaughter will surely follow

30th December: The Tugela is in flood after massive overnight storms - hundreds of Boer on the Chieveley side are stranded and captured

30th December: General Hildyard requests an attack on the Boer stronghold at Hlangwane after floods sweep away the bridge that they have built. General Buller accepts General Hildyard's plan but orders that the attack must be meticulously planned in order to ensure success

31st December: The Boer celebrates the century's end with a murderous shelling of the garrison and hospital at Ladysmith ... Happy New Year!

1st January: No New Year celebrations but morale is high at the news that Lord Kitchener has joined Lord Roberts - arriving in a few days. Churchill confides to me and Burleigh that he will stand for Parliament in the next election - but first there is a war to win

2nd January: General Buller must know that his time as commander is limited but he orders General Hildyard to prepare for another attack on Colenso

3rd January: The floods on the Tugela are receding and the opportunity to exploit General Hildyard's plan to attack Hlangwane is now lost. Reports are filtering in that the Boer is building a dam on the Klip so that the river will overflow and flood Ladysmith

4th January: The recent Boer victories have led them to prepare a ludicrous plan for peace including the surrender of Mafeking and Ladysmith

5th January: Our scouts report that the Boer is withdrawing from Colenso in preparation for an all-out assault on the garrison at Ladysmith. General Buller decides that we cannot follow the Boer because, although the flood is receding, the Tugela still blocks our route

6th January: At 2.00 am the Boer crept up against the Ladysmith defences, climbed Wagon Hill and attacked 'Caesar's Camp' south of the town. A day of skirmishes followed this dawn attack but never did the Boer make a greater mistake than to attack in the open

7th January: Seldom will history record a more prolonged or desperate duel between two bodies of resolute men than at Caesars Camp yesterday

8th January: Over 360 of General White's officers and men died in the battle for Caesar's Camp - but the Boer suffered even more heavily. Disheartened and angry, the Boer returns to Colenso and Joubert immediately redeploys his forces along the banks of the Tugela

9th January: Unable to engage in battle, this has become a war of the mind - of feint and subterfuge - neither side can gain any advantage. On the chess-board of Natal the skilled players, General Buller and General Joubert, are now able to anticipate each move of the other

9th January: Still blocked by the Tugela floods, officers with tiny escorts risked death by day and by night to sketch the Boer positions. General Buller issues orders that we are to forge a crossing of the Tugela at Potgeiter's Drift, which lies twenty-two miles west of Frere

10th January: High spirits and a mood of excitement sweeps camp at the news that Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener have landed at Cape Town

11th January: After what seems like an eternity of inaction, we are on the move, making rapid progress with General Buller's traction engines. Lord Dundonald signals that he has seized the bridge over the little Tugela and is proceeding under forced march to Swartz Kop

12th January: An entire army moved more than twenty miles across difficult country in less than 24 hours - an incredible achievement

13th January: Before nightfall General Clery has cleared the Boer from an area of two miles around Springfield and bivouacked outside the town. General Warren has pressed into the township of Springfield and taken up a strong position overlooking the Little Tugela Bridge

14th January: General Hildyard is now camped at Pretorius Farm within easy reach of Deel's Drift and the fords at Tugela junction. General Warren moves his division westward against the Boer's extreme right flank, to cover Hildyard's crossing of the Tugela

14th January: With the first gleam of the morning sun a heliograph on Swartz Kop blinked the welcome news that Dundonald has held the ferry

15th January: General Buller establishes camp at Spearman's Farm, awaiting the final positioning of his divisions before launching his attack. General Barton gains more time with a feint at Colenso, keeping the Boer occupied and allowing General Warren to advance further west

16th January: General Warren is ready to cross the Tugela at Trigaard's Drift, while Major Lyttleton's Rifles await orders at Potgeiter's Drift

16th January: General Buller orders the advance but excessive caution seems to have gripped our band of Generals - is Colenso to be repeated?

17th January: We are in position to attack but our Generals insist that we await a thorough build-up of logistics, supplies and reserves. The Boer sits exposed on the ridges before us, awaiting developments but we are doing nothing, offering them no challenge

18th January: General Buller's plan is for General Weller to force a way through the Boer lines and strike across the open country towards Ladysmith. If General Weller's assault is quickly pressed, it will almost certainly be assured of success

19th January: Lord Dundonald reaches the extreme flank of the Boer lines with a clear run to Ladysmith but is recalled to guard supplies. General Clery has made no progress at Tabanyama in three days, and Major Lyttleton is still awaiting orders at Potgeiter's Drift

19th January: Cable from General Warren to HQ is received explaining the reason for delaying his attack on the Boer lines ... it makes little sense

20th January: The first hard blow is struck - with General Hildyard we leave Deel's Drift in a swift advance to support General Warren's right flank. Churchill is with Lt Colonel Byng's South African Light Horse as they storm a high Kopje under fire to reinforce General Warren's left

21st January: Under a massive bombardment from the rear, we charge across the intervening valley and take the line of kopjes below Spion Kop. Corporal Tobin, an American with the Light Horse, climbs alone to the summit - and announces to all that the hill is his

22nd January: Signal from Lord Roberts HQ relieves General Buller as Commander in Chief but he temporarily retains control of current operations

22nd January: Our guns blast the Boer positions from dawn to dusk but fail to make any impact and we remain entrenched for the entire day.

23rd January: After nine hours hard climbing, General Woodgate and Lt Colonel Thorneycroft's Infantry advanced in the dusk to gain the treacherous summit of Spion Kop in complete surprise, the Boer fleeing in confusion. We held the Kop summit but despair, the final weapon that sometimes achieves victory, stimulated the Boers to heroic exertion

23rd January: General Buller arrives to survey our positions and, dismayed at the men's exposed conditions, he advises General Warren to retire

24th January: By dawn a vicious rifle fire was opened on our position by a handful of Boer marksmen, who had crept up unseen in the fog. In two hours the Boer fired over a thousand shells from Tabanyama against the exposed summit held by our thin line of khaki. Behind the cover of rocks and outcrops, the Boer crept to within yards of our position and opened a fire of slaughter upon us. Major Lyttleton's brigade mounts a frontal attack, obtaining a ledge on the north spur, which they hold tenaciously under fire. General Woodgate is shot through the head and dies before us - most of the officers are fallen and at least half of the men dead. General Coke arrives with reinforcements but finds the ground littered with dying and dead and turns back to General Warren's HQ

24th January: With the men battered and shot at until few had escaped injury, Colonel Thorneycroft is now in command and orders a withdrawal. Carrying all our wounded but leaving our dead on the field, Colonel Thorneycroft leads us down quietly, evacuating in the darkness

25th January: Last night's withdrawal was accomplished without the loss of a man, but many wounded were not able to be moved and died today. Our retirement was a heart-breaking experience and it now seems that each of those precious lives has been uselessly expended. General Buller orders our forces to fall back across the Tugela for rest and recuperation - has all of this then been for nought? With hopes dashed once more, the hapless Ladysmith must settle again in despair to further fight their starvation and disease

26th January: Only this morning did we discover that after our retreat the Boer had also withdrawn and, had we stayed, the battle was won

26th January: We re-unite with Churchill who tells us that, as a courier for HQ, he carried the signal promoting Colonel Thorneycroft to General

27th January: Three thousand reinforcements from Chieveley, together with a horse battery and more cavalry, arrived opportunely today

27th January: The reports and analysis after Spion Kop identified a catalogue of poor decisions, command errors and communication failures. General Buller blames General Warren: General Warren blames General Coke: General Coke blames General Warren: it seems that all are at fault. Lord Roberts is now only days away and, despite his orders, General Buller decides to launch another attack to re-take Spion Kop

28th January: Our final casualty count reveals 243 men killed and 1250 wounded or captured: the Boer has 335 casualties of which 68 are dead

29th January: General Buller orders our heavy guns to be positioned atop Swartz Kop from where the Boer on Spion Kop will be within our range. He is ignoring the recriminations of the Spion Kop disaster and orders preparations for a further assault on Vaal Krantz

30th January: Signal received from HQ to inform General Buller that Lord Roberts' forces are now positioned at Orange River and will advance to Kimberley

31st January: Lord Roberts and Lord Methuen have now combined their forces of more than 40000 under the overall command of Major-General French

1st February: The forced crowding and inactivity after our withdrawal has led to outbreaks of sickness and many of the men are suffering with dysentery

2nd February: The medical staff at Chieveley are working miracles to keep us free from the enteric fever that is sweeping Lord Roberts troops

3rd February: After two days of difficult hauling our heavy artillery is now in place on Swartz Kop and the Boer positions are within range. General Buller prepares to assault Vaal Krantz in his third attempt to break through the Boer lines blocking the road to Ladysmith. I join

Churchill with Major Lyttleton's Light Brigade and we move down the Tugela overnight to Mungers Drift opposite Vaal Krantz

4th February: General Buller outlines his plan to capture Vaal Krantz, move east from Brakfontein and drive a wedge through from ridge to ridge. If Buller succeeds with his Vaal Krantz plan the way will be open for a full frontal attack that will crumble the Boer defences. As evening falls, the Engineers prepare their equipment for bridging the Tugela at Munger's Drift under cover of darkness

5th February: Our attack is launched at first light with Colonel Murdoch, Lord Dundonald and Colonel Wynne leading a 3-pronged assault on Vaal Krantz. Guided by the war balloon above, a thunderous barrage from our field guns ravaged the Boer trenches and silenced their fire. Covered by our artillery, the Engineers bridge the Tugela and half of Major Lyttleton's force is across before the Boer realises

6th February: Vaal Krantz was ours but this was a victory destined not to last; by dusk the Boer had a Maxim in place raking our lines. Lacking cover on the veldt, Major Lyttleton's Light Brigade suffered terrible privations and at sunset was forced to withdraw. General Hildyard replaced Major Lyttleton and, with fresh troops in the field, routed the Boer and held the position at Vaal Krantz

7th February: We had no advantage from Vaal Krantz and could not re-take Spion Kop - at dusk, General Buller calls his staff to a council of war. In military terms, Buller's plan was a success. Topographically, though, we were beaten and could not press our advantage

8th February: Nobody can believe that the decision of our generals is that we are to retreat again - just what has everybody died for? Major-General Hart is incensed at the decision to withdraw and demands that he is allowed another attempt to take Spion Kop

9th February: Hart's protestations are to no avail and by midday we are again south of the Tugela wending our miserable way back to Chieveley

10th February: After regrouping at Chieveley and supervising necessary command changes General Buller, shunning sleep, leaves for a reconnaissance of the Hlangwane foothills, while Lord Roberts launches his main attack planning to outflank the Boer at Magersfontein

10th February: What sadness must the hapless souls of Ladysmith be feeling as they hear of yet another British defeat and withdrawal

11th February: General Buller calls a conference to announce that he is putting everything into his fourth attempt to break through to Ladysmith. His plan is to capture Hlangwane and hold this position at all costs to render all the surrounding hills untenable. General Hildyard reports that we have a superiority of ten-to-one in artillery and four-to-one in troop numbers. We are massing a huge force and, to our advantage, many Boer families have joined their menfolk in the laagers, fatally encumbering Botha's army

11th February: I join Lieutenant Colonel Byng on a reconnaissance trip to Huzzar Hill, south-east of Hlangwane, overlooking Colenso and the route to Ladysmith. From our report General Buller decides that Huzzar Hill, Mt Cingolo and Monte Cristo must be taken before Hlangwane

12th February: Scouts report that Lord Roberts has outflanked the Boer at Magersfontein and Major-General French is preparing to attack Kimberley

12th February: Lord Roberts signals General Buller to confirm battle plans - both forces will strike within days, leaving the Boer nowhere to run. New field guns arrive as General Buller prepares the advance to Huzzar Hill and Hlangwane, now referred to as the Tugela Heights. News of our imminent attack has raised morale and re-ignited the mens' fire and General Buller is a man walking as a giant again

13th February: Signal from HQ confirms that Major-General French has advanced 70 miles in three days and is now over the Modder with Kimberley in sight. Lord Kitchener has joined Major-General French and they have taken control of the Modder river crossings at Rondeval and Klip Drift

13th February: General Buller prepares for final push to Ladysmith and Major-General French for Kimberley. Coincidence, or a signal that the end is near?

14th February: An entire army is now on the move eastward to mount a three-pronged attack on the Boer positions on Huzzar Hill

14th February: Our field guns blast the Boer but, as at Colenso, they repeat their tactic of silence allowing us to advance without hindrance. After three hours against only a handful of sniper shots, Lord Dundonald's mounted brigade is in position to lead the final charge. Late afternoon and hell is unleashed as the Boer open fire with everything they have - but too late, and by dusk the Hill is ours

14th February: No news of Major-General French but we hear he has promised Lord Roberts that if he is still alive he would be in Kimberley by 15th

15th February: After last night's capture, Huzzar Hill has today become a fortress with the full might of our artillery blasting the Boer. While still heavily defended by the Boer, the Tugela Heights are now open before us and Hlangwane then Colenso must shortly fall. Signal received that Major-General French has broken through and Kimberley is relieved - a thunderous cheer splits the sky

16th February: We hear that the people of Kimberley suffered terribly during their ordeal, spurring us even more towards freeing Ladysmith

17th February: General Buller's entire force sweeps from ridge to ridge towards Mount Cingolo, forcing the Boer to retreat to Monte Christo. By sunset, Mount Cingolo is cleared of the enemy, our guns are in position and Monte Christo and Hlangwane are under fire

17th February: With no rest from his actions at Kimberley, Major-General French is in hot pursuit of Cronje's forces now fleeing for Bloemfontein

18th February: All day our guns have pounded the Tugela ridges and now the infantry is subduing all resistance on the flanks of Monte Christo. Hlangwane cannot be long defended and after just a few hours rest Colonel Thorneycroft's troops sweep in

18th February: Major-General French catches up with the fleeing Boer, trapping Cronje and 5000 troops in a laager at Paadeberg on the Modder River. Major-General French and Lieutenant-General Kelly-Kenny propose bombarding the Boer into submission but Lord Kitchener orders a frontal assault, leading to another day of disaster. Kitchener's insistence

on frontal assault leaves some 80 officers and 1000 men killed or wounded

19th February: Storming across the ridges towards Hlangwane, Colonel Thorneycroft's brigade disturbs the Boers preparing their breakfast. The Boers flee before us, leaving behind their entire camp equipment, tons of ammunition and the Transvaal flag hanging limp. As the Boer abandons Hlangwane and the entire south of the Tugela, General Hildyard calls up our heavy artillery to bear on Colenso

19th February: Lord Roberts arrives at Paadeberg and, surprisingly, refuses Cronje's request for a cease-fire to recover and bury the dead. Lord Kitchener still calls for more frontal assaults but, after a day of staff meetings, it is agreed that bombardment is better

20th February: Unable to withstand the increasingly heavy bombardment at Paadeberg, De Wet withdraws his commandos and abandons Cronje. Signal received today from Lord Roberts HQ that we must press ahead with all haste or they will defeat the Boer before we do

20th February: Boer positions are falling like dominoes and our infantry have now occupied Colenso and advanced the front to Colenso station. With the Tugela still muddied by the fleeing Boer, our Engineers are already throwing pontoons across the river behind them The Dublin Fusiliers press forward to the river under sporadic shelling from a Boer brigade that has regrouped on the north bank. Botha is forced to abandon Fort Wylie, his last defended position south of the Tugela - the Boer line must now give way

21st February: Under heavy fire General Coke leads three brigades across the Tugela, forcing the Boer to withdraw from the ground before Colenso. Major-General Wynne's 11th Brigade follow General Coke's troops across the river and capture the key Boer position at Horse-shoe Hill. Confidence is now surging through all of us but we must remember the cost: almost 3000 killed and missing in the past month

21st February: With De Wet gone, Cronje has 4500 men left at Paadeberg: he has said he will not surrender and they will surely die for nought. Lord Roberts learns that women and children are with Cronje's men but his offer of a safe passage out for them is refused

22nd February: Botha rallies his troops atop Grobler's Kloof and Pieter's Hill but gathering at the foothills are General Coke's three brigades. After eight days and nights of continuous fighting, Botha's resistance is still costing us many lives for every yard gained. The Inniskillings take appalling fire at Pieter's Hill - at roll call just 1 officer and 43 men answer for the 500 that had gone in. Major-General Wynne pushes forward from Horseshoe to a hill-top position north of Colenso and reports that Ladysmith is in sight

23rd February: We are across the Tugela but every step of our way is frustrated by snipers and sharpshooters lurking in the brush and dongas. Every division is now in conflict with the Boer over an area of four square miles between Grobler's Kloof and Pieter's station. It was just an hour before sunset when Colonel Thackeray's brigade crested Grobler's Kloof and won the first advantage of the day

23rd February: A heliograph from Ladysmith tells us that lines of Boer wagons are already racing back to the Drakensberg, but they defend every scrap of ground to the death.

24th February: Without waiting for reinforcements Major-General Hart storms the next hill to the north but his brigade is routed by a Boer rearguard action. The Boer cling doggedly to their hill-top and more than 500 officers and men die in Major-General Hart's valiant but failed action. Pride swells every heart as we watch Lieutenant Inkson carry his wounded comrade over four hundred yards under brutal fire to safety

24th February: As chess pieces, General Buller moves his troops to strategic positions in a bid to outthink and outflank the Boer in the end-game. He orders the Engineers to move the pontoons north where, hidden by a bend in the river, we can form a new bridgehead

25th February: As dawn breaks General Buller sends reinforcements to every forward position but the Boer resistance prevents any further advance. A six hour truce is agreed to recover our wounded but from one bloodied Tugela hillside we recover just 3 survivors and 80 dead

25th February: Report from Lord Roberts HQ tells us that hundreds of our troops are dead but the Boer is being crushed by our rolling bombardment and, from Ladysmith, signals indicate that, behind their

defiant lines of defence, the Boer are abandoning their laagers and retiring

26th February: General Buller orders a massive two-pronged assault - General Warren to attack the Boer left, Major Lyttleton the centre and the right. For once it appears that General Buller has outthought Botha - having failed to anticipate our moves, the Boer retreat gathers pace. Our three goals are Pieter's Hill, the Railway and the hill that has become known as Harts - confidence is high for all of them - but even in retreat, the Boer hotly contests every yard of ground before finally turning and fleeing in the face of our forces

26th February: Lord Roberts and General Buller both intend to force their enemy to defeat tomorrow to remove the festering sore that is Majuba

27th February: Covered by a fearsome barrage, General Barton closes in first, then General Wynne and Col Norton - the Boer is now in full retreat.

27th February: Under cover of darkness, the Royal Canadians advance and entrench within yards of Cronje's positions for a final dawn attack. The Boer awake at dawn to find themselves staring into the muzzles of Canadian rifles - surrender is now their only option. Cronjé surrenders at 6.00am with some 4000 men and 50 women and the slaughter at Paadeberg is at last over - it is Majuba Day

28th February: We watch a great column of Boer horsemen and wagons moving rapidly north from Ladysmith but General Buller orders us not to follow. Cyclists scorched into the city to confirm the news, signal rockets lit the sky and a ragged, shoeless crowd raced to meet us. It is 5pm as two squadrons of British infantry commanded by Major Gough ride into Ladysmith to be greeted by General White

28th February: Within just 24 hours, General Buller has broken through, Cronje has surrendered and Ladysmith is relieved - Majuba Day is avenge

