

“Vlakfontein”

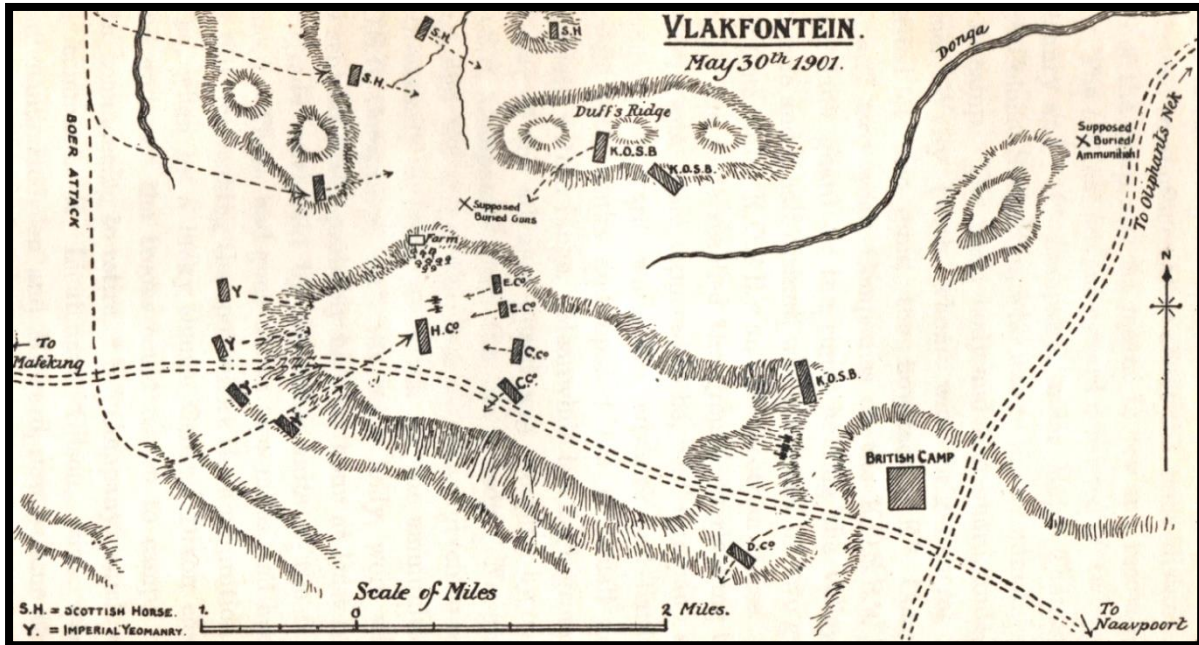
A Disaster for the Derbyshire Regiment



BATTLE OF VLAKFONTEIN

The War Office issued, on August 15th (according to the "Morning Post") the report by Brigadier-General Dixon on the operations at Vlakfontein on May 29th last. In a covering note to the Secretary of State for War, dated Pretoria Residency, July 10th Lord Kitchener says, I have the honour to forward a report from Brigadier-General Dixon on his action at Vlakfontein, describing how the rear guard was surprised at close range by preponderating Boer force. Brigadier-General Dixon at once supported his rear guard from main body and drove off the enemy. I regret to report the heavy loss incurred by Brigadier-General Dixon's rear guard.

Rumours having been circulated regarding the shooting of some of our wounded on the field by the enemy, inquiries have been made, and from affidavits obtained there seems to be no doubt that five or six cases did occur.



General Dixon says that his force arrived at Vlakfontein on May 28th. On the 29th having left sufficient to guard the camp, which was in a good defensive position, the force marched to Waterval at 8 a.m. to search for two guns supposed to be buried there. The left party went west along the high ground to a position about 2000 yards to the east of a very large and deep valley, which runs roughly north and south. The centre, which General Dixon accompanied, went to the farms at Waterval, while the right went along the line of kopjes parallel to the left. The place where the guns were supposed to have been buried was found, but the guns themselves had been removed.

General Dixon then turned about with the centre to look for some ammunition reported to be buried at Vlakhoeck, the original left party covering the movement as a rear guard. On arriving with the centre at about 2 p.m., General Dixon found that to dig up the ammunition would require an extensive movement, for which there was no time that day, so he ordered a general return to camp. He proceeds, a certain amount of firing had been heard for some time from the direction of the rearguard, which became very heavy as the centre party was crossing the valley towards camp. It was also observed that

a large veldt fire was burning on the high ground, on which the rear guard could be seen. About the time the firing was heard to be increasing in volume (2.30p.m.) a messenger arrived from Major Chance saying he was hard pressed. I immediately sent a message to Lieutenant Colonel Duff, who was on the ridge to hurry all his troops to Major Chance's assistance, while I galloped across the valley to the scene of action, catching up the pom-pom on the way, and bringing it along with me. On arriving at the west picquet of the camp, I found that the two guns and Howitzer, which had been with me, were in action west of the picquet, and that these guns, together with the company of the Derbys which had been on picquet and the details which had



been left in camp, were hotly engaged, some of the enemy being within 800 yards of the picquet, and our guns and camp were being shelled by the enemy at about 1600 yards' range. I then realised that the guns with the rear guard had been captured. The flashes of these guns could be seen through the smoke of the veldt fire, and the position was very critical, so I immediately gathered together all the available men, and advanced west along the high ground.

The two guns with Colonel Duff were shelling the enemy, who were advancing along the valley from the Waterval Farm, while the two companies of the King's Own Scottish Borderers with a Maxim, which were also with Colonel Duff came across the valley and secured the general's right. The Boers held on to their position until the general advance, moving by rushes, had got to within 600 yards of them. They then mounted and galloped off, and the British forces recaptured the guns, and occupied the ground over which the enemy had advanced. Having no mounted troops at this point General Dixon was unable to pursue. The British casualties were very heavy, and mostly occurred among the gunners of the captured guns, the Derbyshire Company, and the Imperial Yeomanry. General Dixon adds, we can account for 41 Boers killed, and they must have suffered heavily. From the officer commanding rear guard I gather that as soon

as the retirement from the donga commenced the Boers lighted the grass and under cover of the smoke advanced along the ridge towards the camp. They were seen and shelled, which stopped their direct advance. The guns then retired for about one mile to the infantry company, which was extended on each side of the guns, again came into action, and checked the advancing Boers, the Imperial Yeomanry falling back on to the infantry. The wind was blowing from north to south, and the veldt fire drove back the Yeomanry flank guard on the left of the guns (as facing in action).

The Boers suddenly appeared through the fire on the left of the guns and infantry, shot down the gunners, and inflicted great loss on the infantry and Yeomanry. An attempt was made to fire into them with but the cartridges in the magazine had been set on fire, and before



anything could be done the guns were captured. The drivers attempted to get away both the limbers and waggons, but the horses were shot. Ambulances and stretcher parties were out all the evening and on the morning of the 30th, collecting and bringing in the dead and wounded. General Kemp sent in a flag of truce at 10 a.m. on the 30th with a letter asking if he may be allowed to remove the dead and wounded. "He was permitted to remove the dead."

Shooting the Wounded



Vlakfontein

29th May 1901.

At Vlakfontein it was "H" Company of the Derbyshire Regiment that sustained many of the casualties on the 29th May 1901.

Fifteen Hundred Boers attacked the British Column of Four Hundred, the attack was so swift it caught the British completely by surprise.

The Regimental History states that "H" Company were outnumbered by five or six to one and out of 100 men of "H" Company only 28 came out of the action at the close of the fight.

The 28th Battery Royal Artillery were completely overrun and the guns were taken over by the Boers who then tried to turn them on the approaching Derbyshire's who were given the order to charge and re-take the guns by the point of the bayonet which was duly carried out.

The casualties of the Royal Artillery were 7 killed and 12 wounded whilst the 7th Battalion Imperial Yeomanry had 5 men killed and 26 wounded. The 1st Derbyshire's had 18 men K.I.A. with 58 wounded and 5 missing

Re-taking the Guns



**A Selection of Medals
From my Collection
To The
Derbyshire Regiment
5035 Pte Arthur Blood
(Severely Wounded)**

Arthur Blood was a 3rd Militia Reservist before transferring at Derby into the 1st Battalion in 1893, he was severely wounded at Vlakfontein on the 29th May 1901. He was born in the market town of Ashbourne in 1871 and later moved to the mining village at Pye Bridge on the Nottinghamshire/Derbyshire border. He worked as a Coal Miner at the Pinxton Collieries and on the outbreak of the Great War he re-enlisted back into the Sherwood Foresters with number 22598 on the 25th January 1915. He joined the 3rd (Special Reserve) Battalion serving with "G" Coy and engagement was for the duration. Due to ill health he was soon to be discharged at Sunderland as being no longer physically fit for service on the 23rd September 1915. He never served overseas and was issued the SWB (48208).



3963 L/Cpl George Booth

(Wounded)

Served with 2nd Battalion in Tirah Expedition of 1897 and served in the Boer War of 1899-1902. Was with "A" Coy. Wounded 29/5/1901 at Vlakfontein, South Africa and invalided. Brig-Gen H.G. Dixon clearing farms along the line of march arrived at the farm on 28th May 1901 and on the following day found a cache of ammunition on the neighbouring farm Elandsfontein. As it was too late to deal with this discovery, Dixon ordered the column to return to Vlakfontein in the early afternoon and as he did so a party of burghers fired the dry grass to the west of the ridge which blew into the faces of a detachment under Major H. Chance, RA, acting as rearguard. Under this cover, some 500 burghers under the command of General J.C.G. Kemp attacked and overwhelmed the men of the 7th Imperial Yeomanry and 'H' company of the 1st The Sherwood Foresters (Derbyshire) regiment. Two guns were captured and turned on another British detachment. The Medal Roll shows he was awarded the QSA with clasps, Johannesburg, Diamond Hill, Cape Colony, Orange Free State. and shown in medal roll as invalided.(Full Service Papers).



3973 Pte Joseph Caveney

(Wounded)

Served with the 2nd Bn in the Tirah Campaign 1897. Shown in I'm 95 (Battalion Journal) May 1899 as good conduct pay of 1d restored 19.1.1899 (with 1st Bn). Shown I'm 95 August 1889 as appointed Lance Corporal 26.5.1899. and in I'm 95 Nov/Dec 1899 as being appointed a paid lance corporal 15.12.1899. He was posted to the 1st Battalion "H" Coy on return from duty with Base Coy at East London 2/6/1900. Joseph was taken prisoner at Vlakfontein 29th May 1901 and was exonerated of any blame by a court of enquiry held on the 13th October 1901. For some reason he was deprived of Lance Corporals stripe on the 29th August 1901. Slightly Wounded in the back, 30/9/1901, at Moedwil, South Africa. His name was forwarded to GOC 2/10/1901 as being worthy of recognition during action at Moedwil 30/9/1901, MID 8th October 1901 (Lord Kitchener), and promoted to Corporal for gallantry at this VC action. Medal Roll shows, awarded QSA with clasps, Diamond Hill, Cape Colony, Orange Free State. QSA 3 bars Medal Roll shows KSA bars SA01, SA02, was returned to Woolwich. Died of natural causes on the 1st April 1903. (Full Service Papers).



4258 Pte William Henry Shaw

(Severely Wounded)

William was born and lived in Nottingham enlisting at Derby on the 24th August 1893. His trade on entry is stated as a General Labourer. William Shaw served with 2nd Battalion during the Tirah Campaign of 1897-98. He was tried by Court Martial on the 28th December 1900 and found guilty of being drunk in camp. He was sentenced to 42 Days Field Imprisonment No2. He was wounded in the right collar bone 29th May 1901 at Vlakfontein.

Copy II
Martial

4. Field General Court Martial
will assemble in the Orderly Room
at 10 am tomorrow for the trial
of 2758 Pte Lovatt & 4258 Pte Shaw &
and such other persons as
may be brought before it.
President: Captain G. R. S. F.
Members: Lieut Jamieson & Lieut Mayall

By Order
Mrs Webb Lieut
Act. Adj. Gen. V. H. G.

Detachment Order by Capt. M. A. Keels
Commanding
Battalion 8/12 Co.

Copy V
Martial

No. 4258 Pte J. Shaw was
tried and convicted by a F. G. C. M. at
Barrack on 28th Dec. 1900 for "When on
Active Service drunk in camp about 9 pm."
and sentenced to 42 days field Imp. No. 2.
Nos 2484 Pte G. Heas & 5782 Pte J. Hunt
of A Coy were tried and convicted by a F. G. C. M.
at Barrack on the 29th Dec. 1900 for "When on
Active Service leaving his post without
order from his superior officer, and when on
Active Service being taken prisoner through
doobedee's orders, and sentenced to
56 days field Imp. No. 2.

Medal Roll shows he was awarded the QSA with clasps, Johannesburg, Diamond Hill, Cape Colony, Orange Free State, KSA clasps, SA01, SA02. He is listed in the Nottingham War Veterans dinner book, Empress Rink, Nottingham held on Tuesday June 20th 1911. (Full Service Papers)



2722 Pte Charles Bradbury

(Sentenced to Death)

Served with 2nd Battalion in Tirah Expedition of 1897 IGS 2 clasps, Tirah 1897-98, Punjab Frontier 1897-98. On the 7th May 1900 he received 14 days imprisonment for using insubordinate language to an NCO on the 5th May 1900. He was reported missing on the 30th September 1901 after the attack by the Boers on the camp at Moedwil, he rejoined 1st October 1901. Tried and convicted by Field Court Martial on 6th October 1901. **Sentenced to Death for Cowardice reduced to 5 years Penal Servitude. Whilst still in prison he was discharged on 5th April 1902 having all service forfeited in relation to pensions and QSA, KSA forfeited.**

He was allowed to keep the IGS Medal. Medal Roll shows was awarded QSA with clasps, Johannesburg, Diamond Hill, Cape Colony, Orange Free State. FORFIETED.

(Full Service Papers)



4115 Corporal Alfred Fell

(Killed in Action)

Alfred was born in Mansfield, Nottinghamshire in 1874 and enlisted on the 5th April 1893 into the 2nd Battalion and served in the Tirah Campaign of 1897-98, medal with clasps Tirah 1897-98, Punjab Frontier 1897-98. He was posted to "F" Coy in the reorganisation of the Battalion on the formation of the 2nd Mounted Infantry Company on the 1st March 1900. On the 16th May 1900 at Kralspruit he was awarded 14 days Confined to Camp and to forfeit 1 Good Conduct Badge. QSA with clasps, Johannesburg, Diamond Hill, Cape Colony, Orange Free State. Buried in Vlakfontein (584) Cemetery, Transvaal, South Africa. In 1966 the body was exhumed and remains re-buried in Old Krugersdorp Cemetery by S/A War Grave Board.

Mentioned on the Memorial of All Saints plaque St Mary's Church in Nottingham.

(Full Water Damaged Service Papers)



4778 Pte Christopher Ralph Maddison

(Killed in Action)

Christopher lived at Partney Hall in Lincolnshire, he enlisted at Derby on the 15th August 1894 aged 21 years “being under the standard chest measurement but described



as a very desirable recruit”. He served with 2nd Battalion in the Tirah Campaign of 1897-98, Medal and clasps Tirah 1897-98, Punjab Frontier 1897-98. Served with 1st Battalion during the Boer War with letter "H" company. Battalion Orders dated the 27th August 1901, his name was forwarded on recommendation of his company officer to the attention of the GOC in accordance with paragraph five, orders dated 1st June 1901. **MID, 8.10.1902. Lord Kitchener. “For great gallantry and good example at Vlakfontein”**. Medal Roll shows was awarded QSA with clasps, Johannesburg, Diamond Hill, Cape Colony, Orange Free State.

(M.I.D.) dated 1st June 1901, M.I.D. Posthumous Award.

Buried Vlakfontein (584) Cemetery, Transvaal, South Africa, in 1966 the body was exhumed and remains re-buried in Old Krugersdorp Cemetery by S/A War Grave Board. (Full Water Damaged Service Papers).



5674 Corporal Charles William. Kingston

(Taken Prisoner)

Served in the Boer War of 1899-1902 and was with 'A' Coy and previously wounded during the attack on the Boers at Diamond Hill, South of Pretoria, South Africa 12th June 1900.

Taken prisoner by the Boers at Vlakfontein on the 29th May 1901.

Battalion Orders dated 28th August 1901 show Court of Enquiry as exonerated of those taken POW from any blame as to their capture.

Appointed Lance Corporal 31st October 1901 and promoted to Corporal 10th September 1902. Shown in Daily Orders 11th October 1902 as a Prisoner and on 13th October 1902 he was tried by Court Martial for Drunkenness, guilty, reduced to the ranks and forfeits 1d per deim good conduct pay. Medal Roll shows he was awarded QSA with clasps, Johannesburg, Diamond Hill, Cape Colony, Orange Free State, KSA clasps SA01, SA02.

Wounded slightly at Diamond Hill, 12th June 1900.



4780 Pte E Spink

(Killed in Action 29th May 1901)

Not much information is known about Pte Spink, he served in the Boer War of 1899-1902 and was posted to "H" Company in the reorganisation of the Battalion on the formation of the 2nd Mounted Infantry Company, 1st March 1900.

Medal Roll shows awarded QSA with clasps, Johannesburg, Diamond Hill, Cape Colony, Orange Free State.

Killed in Action by the Boers at Vlakfontein on the 29th May 1901.

Buried Vlakfontein (584) Cemetery, Transvaal, South Africa. In 1966 the body was exhumed and his remains re-buried in Old Krugersdorp Cemetery by South African War Grave Board.

Medal Roll shows QSA clasp or clasps were returned to Woolwich as killed.



3863 Pte Albert Edward Waterhouse

(Wounded at Vlakfontein 29th May 1901)

Born in the town of Glossop in Derbyshire. Served with 2nd Battalion during the Tirah Campaign of 1897-98, medal and clasps, Tirah 1897-98, Punjab Frontier 1897-98. He joined on the 4th November 1892 at Glossop.

Shown in the Battalion Journal "I'm 95" in February 1899 as granted good conduct pay of 2d dated the 4th November 1898.

Served with 1st Battalion in Boer War of 1899-1902 and was wounded during the Boer attack at Vlakfontein 29th May 1901.

He died of Tuberculosis of the Lungs at Rustenburg, South Africa, when taking part in the Boer War on the 4th April 1902.

Died 4th April 1902 and is buried in Rustenburg Cemetery, Transvaal, South Africa.

Medal Roll shows awarded QSA with clasps, Cape Colony, Orange Free State, Transvaal. KSA, bars SA01, SA02,



3752 Pte Thomas Worthington MM*

M.I.D. Vlakfontein

Thomas was born and bred in the City of Nottingham and was quite a character according to his Service Papers. He enlisted on the 14th July 1897 and served with the 1st Mounted infantry unit of the 1st Battalion during the Boer War. Not surprisingly he was Court Martialed twice for desertion, but proved himself to be a formidable soldier in front of the enemy. He was promoted to Corporal for gallantry in the field at Vlakfontein on 29th May 1901 being awarded the MID for this action. He reverted to Private at his own request on the 18th July 1902. He was wounded during the VC action at Moedwil on the 30th September 1901, discharged 24th August 1909 and re-enlisted 28th January 1910 into 3rd and 4th Battalions of the Foresters. Mobilised 7th August 1914 serving with the 2nd/17th Battalions in the Great War gaining the MM, was also with Essex Regiment with whom he won the bar to his MM. Discharged 22.6.1919. He is mentioned in the War Veterans Dinner Book, Empress Rink Nottingham, Tuesday June 20th 1911. Despatches. 8/7/1901. M.M., LG, 26/3/1917. Bar to MM LG. (Full Service Papers)



The Nottingham War Veterans Coronation Dinner Book 1911



The three images show the Coronation Dinner Book, the Stewards Medal, Boys Brigade and Boy Scouts Medal and the dinner Menu Card

There were 1,600 veterans, with 2,475 medals between them on the parade from the Market Square to the Empress Rink. The oldest veteran was 90-year-old 1762 Pte Edward Pratt of the 17th Foot, who lost eight toes to frostbite in the Crimea.

Each veteran was given a copy of the book as a souvenir, with Stewards being given silver medals and Captain Morrison, as he was then, being given a gold and enamel jewel.

