



South Australians at war – transcript – PRG 122/1

Diary of P. M. Wells

Diary describing voyage to South Africa and war service in the Boer War in 1901

Transcription of full document

Transcribed by Susie van der Sluys, April 2002

Thursday April 4th Started. 4.30. Anchored at Largs.

Friday — 5th ~~Passed Althorpes 10~~ am

Sailed 2 a.m.

12 noon. Lat. 35°30' Long 136°27'

Dist 109 miles (Heavy swell on)

Saturday April 6th 12 noon Lat. 35°25's. Long. 131°11'E.

Dist. 259 (total 368 miles)

Weather clear but heavy swell still on Nearly all hands sea-sick. Called up to poison sea sick horse c Ac Hydrocy

Sunday April 7th Burial of horse at sea. Ham & eggs for breakfast. Splendid food

12 noon. Lat. 35°14'S. Long. 125°50'E.

Distance 264. total. 632

Monday April 8th. Lat. 35°26' Long. 120°28'

12 noon Dist 281 miles total ~~545~~ 913

Reached Albany 10.30 PM. Dist 1023 miles.

Tuesday April 9th Left Albany ~~4.30~~ 4.10 P.M.

very slow place peopled mostly by foreigners. All goods at enormous prices. Arrests of Halls, Wauchope, Evans & Wadham on charge of being absent without leave.

Wednesday April 10th Noon. 226 miles.

Latitude 34°14'S. Long 113°26' (total from Adelaide 1249)

Thursday April 11th Noon. 271 miles (total 1520)

Latitude 33°09'S. Longitude 108°40'E.

Concert given by men on poop deck. Flying fish to be seen alongside ship.

Friday April 12th Noon. 273 miles (total 1793)

Latitude 32°14'S. Longitude. 103°21'E.



Another horse died & thrown overboard. very rough weather during night men on deck rolling into scuppers etc.

Saturday April 13th Noon 282 miles (total 2095)

Latitude 31°11'S Longitude 97°57'

A flying fish came aboard. About 12 inches long wings 8 inches. Ambulance instruction given daily to troops on poop deck.

Sunday 14th Noon. 268 total. 2343 miles

Latitude 30°24'S. Longitude 92°50'E.

Notice a man is especially kept here to do all the shouting, cursing & swearing in this establishment A dog is also kept to do all the barking. Our fighting man has won 75 prize medals & acts here as "chucker out" An undertaker attends every morning for orders. By order a church service was conducted by the two Captains. Men in full dress, pulpit of Union Jack. Ceremony very impressive. Heavy sea during night. Shipped lot of water.

Monday 15th Noon 236 total 2579

Latitude 29°48'S. Longitude 88°20'E.

Shoals of flying fish seen. 2 came aboard

Tuesday 16th 265 total 2844

Latitude 29°59'S. Long. 83°14'E. Lieut Nunnelly taken bad & hospital staff increased by four men. Sea very rough.

Wednesday 17th Noon. 268 total 3112

Latitude 30°13'S Longitude 78°05'E.

Storm blew up during evening.

Thursday 18th Noon 185 total 3297

Latitude 29°26' Longitude 74°44'E.

Storm so bad had to reduce speed to 3 knots an hour.

Friday 19th Noon 223 miles (total 3520)

Latitude 26°44'S Longit. 72°48'E.

Saturday 20th Noon 270 miles (total 3790)

Latitude 26°46'S. Longitude 67°45'E

Sunday 21st Noon 261 miles (total 4051)

Latitude 26°59'S. Longitude 62°53'E.

Another horse died. 1000 tons of lead in hold shifted.

Monday 22nd Noon 272 miles (total 4323)



Latitude 27°11'S Longitude 57°48'E

Tuesday 23rd Noon 263 miles (total 4586)

Latitude 27°26'S. Long 52°53'E.

Wednesday 24th Noon 261 (total 4847)

Latitude 27°39'S Longit 47°58'E.

Thursday 25th 275 miles (total 5122)

Latitude 28°14'S Longitude 42°50'E.

Friday 26th 275 miles (total 5397)

Latitude 28°51'S Long. 37°39'E.

During early morning 2 A.M. the first ship since Albany was sighted & passed A beautiful comet was seen at same time.

Saturday 27th 263 miles (total 5660)

Latitude 29°22 S. Long. 32°41 E.

Arrived at Durban 7.30 P.M. (5747 miles)

Anchored outside among many other ships.

Sunday 28th Came into harbour & tied up alongside the NSW troopships Ranee & British Princess.

Monday 29th Unshipped horses. Kaffirs very amusing. Cry Yah-goo as they work. Spent all day "doing" the city—riding in richshas.

Tuesday 30th Entrained for (?) Rations for day 1 slice bread & butter Natal scenery is beautiful copjes rise on copjes in magnificent succession while interspersed are beautiful waterfalls covered with moss grown rocks & towering ferns All along the line are signs of devastation Remains of broken fences, blown up bridges & trenches are thickly distributed. Camps of guards & pickets are posted all along & on the distant hilltops sentries may be seen outlined against the sky. Banana & Pineapple fields are very numerous (?) near Durban but their place is taken up by (?) etc inland.

Wednesday May 1st We had our first meal—consisting of bread & coffee at Ladysmith at 6 a.m. Weighed here 12 St 8_ lb stripped. Expected attack on line. Two guards mounted on every compartment. All hands armed with 50 pounds of ammunition. 2.30 PM Sighted Majuba Hill. Forts every mile or two along the road. Men killed here yesterday passing Majuba. It is a black hill shaped so. The railways turn & twist on one another in a marvelous (?) & one train 3 or 4 miles ahead will pass within 30 yds of the other.



Enormous quantities of (?) goosberries found. Bwonaced for night at the foot of Majuba Hill at town called Charleston

Thursday May 2nd Reached our destination Standerton without attack at 11 a.m. Ten minutes after were ordered to entrain again for Elands Fontein. Passed ambulance trains coming back—heavy fighting in front. Line thickly strewn by skeletons, carcasses of horses etc. Fort every mile along the route. Country very flat as now on the veldt. Great amusement caused by making niggers scramble for little bits of biscuit etc

Friday May 3rd Reached Elands Fontein Large mining district but very scattered town. Lit by Electricity & thoroughly up to date. 600 boer prisoner

Saturday May 4th Left for Standerton on the way saw English column burning & destroying farms. Passed overturned armoured train, derailed by explosion while escorting food supplies. Bwonaced on veldt

Sunday May 5th Encamped in self made kipsies & did general camp work. During morning passed over the place where the Boers were surrounded here & saw the ground covered in sickening profusion with rotten & worm eaten carcasses While here we can have a wash by walking 6 miles. 2 M. S. Glover again broke his leg

Monday May 6th Pitched our camp at Standerton. overlooked pitched battle in vicinity but did not join in although bullets passed over us.

Tuesday. May. 7th Inspected N.S.W. Ambulance Corps Stores.—Fitted with cases of pills for medicine.

Wednesday 8th Picked out my horse Grey remount. Washing day.

Thursday 9th }

Friday 10th } in camp

Saturday 11th }

Sunday 12th Set out with column on expedition. House destroyed & sheep etc commandeered in large quantity travelled 18 miles.

Monday 13 proceeded to 5th Conting camp & joined them. Surrounded by 2000 boers in a hollow between several kopjes.

Tuesday 14th Remained in camp pickets constantly fired on

Wednesday 15th On march again started 9 a.m. firing started 9.30 big guns at 10.15 boers driven ahead of us. Explosive bullets fired on us. Looted a farm & had poultry etc in abundance A find of clothing crockery & fancy goods was discovered half a mile from the



farm. During the afternoon our outposts were fired on & on returning the fire several Boers were killed.

Thursday 16th Advanced about 20 miles looting farmhouses & capturing 3000 sheep 500 horses 400 cattle & numberless geese fowls etc.

Friday 17th Captured 11 Boer girls & women in farmhouses. Flocks of cattle etc & waggon added to transport

Saturday 18th

Passed Botha's Pass

Sunday 19th

Looted very extensive station (?) tons of fodder etc. Beautiful farm implements destroyed

Monday 20th Passed border of Swaziland & saw many of the natives & huts. During afternoon passed through miles of ~~serub~~ burning scrub 10 & 12 ft high set alight by the Boers retreating before us. We were assisted by ~~Broad~~ Broadwoods column

Tuesday 21st Saw Lowe's Column attacking Boers under We Wet & joined in result 2 horses killed & one man wounded (in our column)

Wednesday 22nd On march.

Thursday 23rd Arrived at Harrismith 2 men wounded & 1 captured. Harrismith is a pretty little compact town situated on the bank of a river between picturesque copjes. The town is prettily laid out & has a great number of trees in it.

Friday 25th (~~Celebrated here as 24th~~)

Harrismith visited. Chemists hours here. 9 till 1 & 2 till 5. Sunday 10-1. Town attacked while here 1 killed 3 wounded

Saturday 26th Transferred to troop. Attempt to burn out camp unsuccessful although tent, baggage & miles of grass country burned. Big gun (15H) fired 19 shots. All unsuccessful except N^o16. which injured 14 boers

Sunday 26th Turned out 2.30 AM to ~~attaek~~ surround boers. Engagement lasted nearly all day. Unfortunately were misled by ~~su~~ guide & on going to the wrong bridge were mistaken for Boers & fired on by the 5th contingent. Result Trooper Bennier killed. Heavy firing all day.

Monday 27th My baptism of fire & first cossack post. Bennier buried. Very impressive ceremony conducted by Major Shea assisted by Captain Cornish

Tuesday 28th On march all day



Wednesday 29th Arrived at Vrede. Town absolutely deserted. Not even an animal left.
Camped in houses for night.

Thursday 30th Inspected town. Beautiful houses full of splendid furniture. Stores very extensive. Jeweller shops Churches Hotels, & Jail which would be a credit to any city.
Convoy expected from Standerton

Friday 31st May Compelled to leave Brede owing to its being untenable the position being too scattered. Our advance guard was allowed to advance to within 500 yds of a copje & then a hail of shot was poured on them. The shot was so thick that it looked like a hail storm

Saturday June 1st Big engagement 80 rounds — 500 boers — 7 killed Ammunition P. Pom. 425 Rifle (F) 1170 rounds besides Big Gun & C D E & englishmen

Sunday 2nd Record March 1 mile 1000 sheep slaughtered. During the afternoon did my first outpost on top a copje—Bitterly cold wind

Monday 3rd Ice thick enough to walk on on the dams etc set out to meet convoy & am now perched up on top of a high copje as outpost myself & Lance Corp & 2 men The boom of big guns approaching accompanied by the rattle of musketry Unfortunately the column was delayed so 40 men were sent out for the mail (the first we have received)

Unfortunately I was not one of the favored one's

Tuesday 4th Convoy arrived & was joined to ours. There was great excitement at the meeting each enquiring where friends were, some dead, wounded sick etc. Am on outpost again.

Wednesday 5th Captured 8 waggons & 1 c cart Travelled hard all day & arrived late

Thursday 6th Captured immense convoy

13. Thanks be to God we have arrived in Kronstadt

After our capture our column did not come up to our support & we were attacked by overwhelming numbers. Our prisoners (?) & so we were between two fires. Our column should have met us at 12 oclock We took the convoy at 8 am Attacked at 5 past 1 PM Relief at 4.15. 17 killed 18 wounded. Spent 7 days on bullock waggons. 3 died on the way.

Saturday 15. 1st mail 10 letters 11 papers.

Thursday 20th Visit (?) to Kronstad.

Wednesday 26th Dr Holmes replaced by Dr Stevens. 2nd mail 2 letters 3 papers.

Wednesday 3rd July — 1 letter

Monday 8th 7 letters — 1 paper



Friday 12th prepared for operation to thigh but was put off till

Saturday 13th — Chlorof Result 2 pieces of Bullet Diet — Eggs chicken & Champag

Friday 19th Mail 7 letters Two dated April others June 11

Sunday 21st

Sister Steenson replaced by Sister Marshall

July

Tuesday 23rd Recd Pay £5

Sunday 28 Beaton left for England

Wednesday 31st Sat up 10 min

August, Tuesday 6th Rose 30 min

Wednesday 7th Removed from Scottish to N^o 3 Hospital

Thursday 8th Wrote letter of thanks as follows to Sisters Marshall & Steenson

Dear Sisters — We the late patients of the Scottish Hospital thank you heartily for your kindness to us while under your care & supervision. We fully recognise & appreciate the skillful & cheerful way in which you carried out your duties in the ward. We can truthfully assure you that your names will ever be a happy remembrance to us in our different walks of life in far distant lands in connection with our painful but happy spell in Hut 2 & we deeply regret the compulsory change to our present location & pitiful surroundings We have the honor to be.

Vallence Segt. 3rd Dragoons

Gidney G. Trumpeter 3rd Dragoons

Bames Trooper (?)

Shephard Crpl. 9th Dragoons

Dutton T Private 2nd North Lanes

Poor old quiger

Wells P M Corpl SAIRC.

Thursday 13th Visited by Sister Marshall

Wrote following poem in her book by request.

Farewell.

Over the land & over the sea

Loving Wishes will follow thee,

Wishes as warm as a summer day,

Which no chill winter may chase away



Wishes of happiness, true & strong
Happiness full as the skylark's song
Wishes of welcome over the sea
From parents & friends so thankful to thee
New hands to clasp thee new friends to greet
New hearts to love thee, new joys to meet.
Old friends are faithful & hold thee still
In the same heart niche thou wert wont to fill
Friday 16th False alarm re going home
Gidney. Trumpeter. 13 Yates Avenue Lisburn Road. Belfast. Ireland. or Curragh. Camp. 3rd
Dragoon
Friday 23rd Recd. 15 letters. 9 papers
Monday 26th " 9 " 1 "
Thursday 29th Remembrance
There is a ~~lady~~ sister sweet & kind
Whose winsome face so pleased our mind
We did but see her (?) ~~while~~ passing by,
Yet we shall love her till we die
Her gestures motions & her smile
Her wit & voice our heart begile
Beguile our hearts we know not why
Yet we shall love her till we die.
In other lands we'll love (?) (?)
Fair will be her budding fame.
And though she has but passed us by,
Yet we shall love her till we die.
September Wednesday 4th
Left Kroonstad by N^o 2 hospital train
single marques
Thursday 5th Arrived at N^o 9 Bloemfonten & detrained. Hospital situated at foot of Kopje—
beautiful view of town & houses. Country very bare with occasional copjes missing here &
there. N^o 2 train beautifully fitted up & good attention staff of Drs & Sisters on board, a trip
altogether enjoyable. Bag of Pyjamas, Shirt, etc presented.



Friday 13th Set out for Winberg N^o 1 by the Boer Ambulance. Consists of 2 trucks of lying in patients & several saloon carriages but did not have the attendance as on N^o 2. No sisters on board. Food—chicken again. Set out at 12.30 P.M.

Sunday Arrived at 11.15 P. M.

Monday Detrained & travelled by ambulances to hospital N^o 1 which is situated on the foot slope of table mountain. Consists of wooden houses holding 24 patients. Surrounded by pine trees. Country between ~~Kronstad~~ Bloemfonten & here varies between Bloem & We Aar (400 miles) very poor & rocky country which continues about 200 miles & then mountains which are of indescribable grandeur & size the tops covered with snow some consist solely of rock while the others are mostly covered by huge rocks looking like falling. The way the train travells down hill is astounding & fairly startling

Oct 2nd Left for Green Point camp. Situated on sea shore near Cape Town While here visited Cape Town frequently.

Oct. 13th Set sail per SS. "Aberdeen"

Oct. 15th Sighted fight between thresher & whale on portside

Nov. 3rd Arrived Melbourne 10 oclock a.m. Church at C of E Cathedral—afternoon at Zoo.

Nov. 4th Champagne dinner. 12 oclock. In afternoon ~~arrived~~ set out for Adelaide

Nov. 5th Arrived home.

March 26th Sent to Adelaide Hospital

March 29th Operation to side

July 31st Discharge from Contingent

Aug 30th Recd. £50 towards trip to N. Zealand.