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- 6 Malcolm Riall, Diary, 21 January 1900, notes that Captain Ryall (no relation) and five men were killed and that 2/Lt Barlow and 37 men were wounded. Ryall's was G Company, which suffered the heaviest casualties.
- 7 The Battalion Digest of service records that only one company was sent to Heidelberg, escorting some guns, and it returned that evening. The following day the entire battalion entrained and travelled to Krugersdorp and then on to Blaaubank where they came under General Smith-Dorrien's command and took part in the De Wet hunts in the eastern Transvaal.
- 8 Royal Archive, P 16/80. Major W. Fry to Prince Christian Victor.
9. Details of the acts leading to the award of a DCM to C/Sgt Kingsley are contained in Sir Charles Warren's Despatch after the battle of Spion Kop, dated 1 February 1900 and

published 8 February 1900 in the *London Gazette*, para. 14, p.950. Kingsley's DCM was gazetted on 19 April 1901.
 10. I am indebted to Henk Loots of Pretoria, South Africa, for much of the information concerning Kingsley.

Nicholas Riall

Nicholas Riall is an historian and archaeologist whose usual area of study is medieval England. He inherited from his grandfather a mass of papers and photographs dealing with the Anglo-Boer War which he is preparing for a publication

Fight at the South Rand Mine

December 26th, 1900, Eastern Transvaal

by Meurig G.M.Jones

Introduction

This action took place at the beginning of the guerrilla phase of the war and the broad outline of what happened was to become familiar over the next eighteen months. Although the British won this encounter with the Boers, and others, subsequent history shows that the possible lessons from this action were not fully learnt by the British. The Marquess of Anglesey details a number of

such actions where the Boers heavily defeated the columns sent to capture them. The British failure "nearly always due to poor scouting", led to disasters at Nooitgedacht (13-12-1900), Vlaktefontein (30-05-1901), Tweefontein (25-12-1901) and Bakenlaagte (30-10-1901) amongst others¹. What is also clear is that the British Army never quite got the hang of mobile warfare. The columns sent to round up the 'bittereinders' were greatly slowed by infantry, supply wagons and to an extent



Limbering up



Vickers-Maxim (pom-pom) in action

artillery. If not so encumbered then they were almost always outfought by the Boers.

The South Rand Mine was in the Eastern Transvaal about ten to twelve miles south of Vlakfontein. The action is also known as Grootvlei or Oceana Mine.

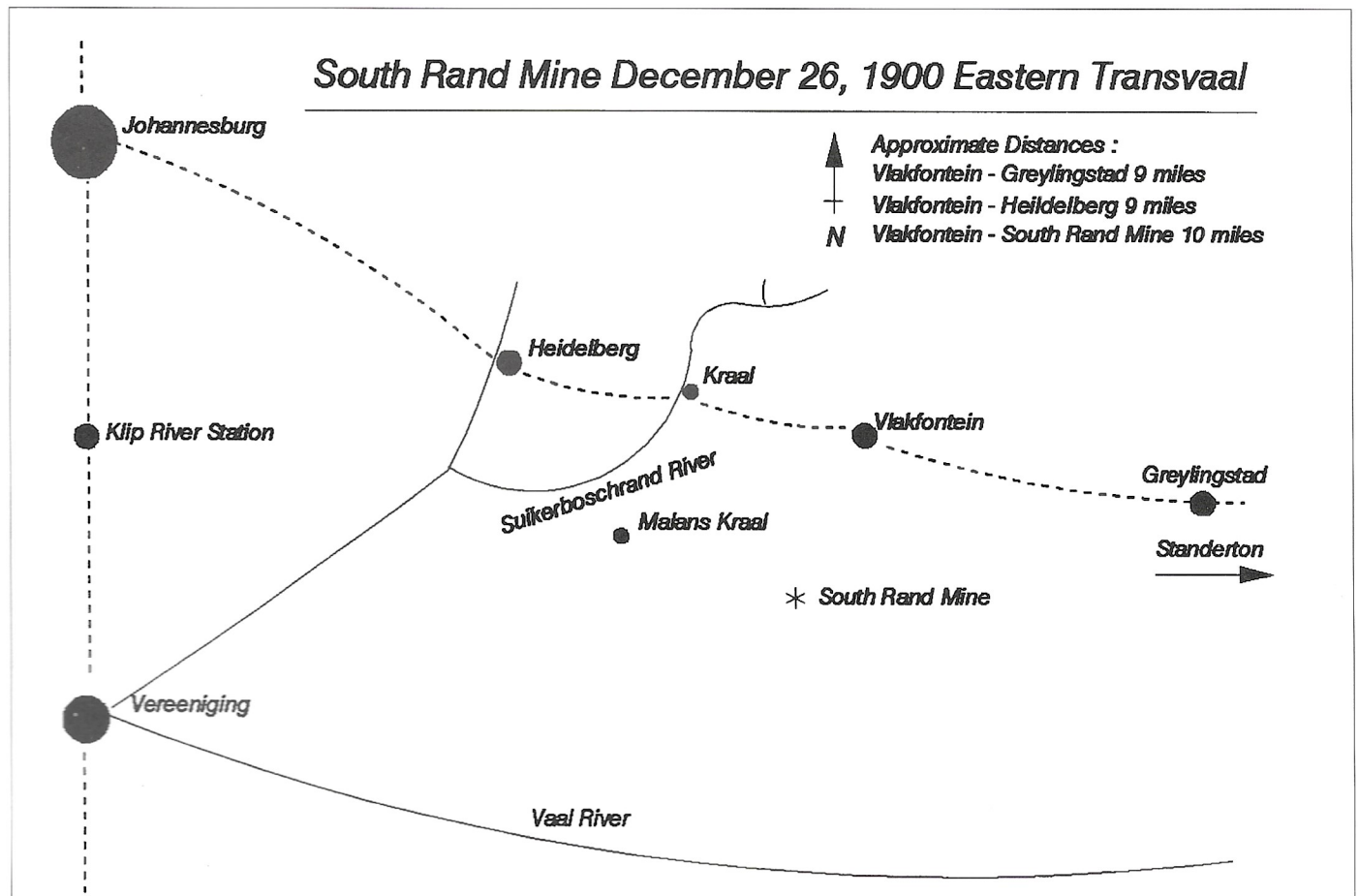
Prelude To The Fight

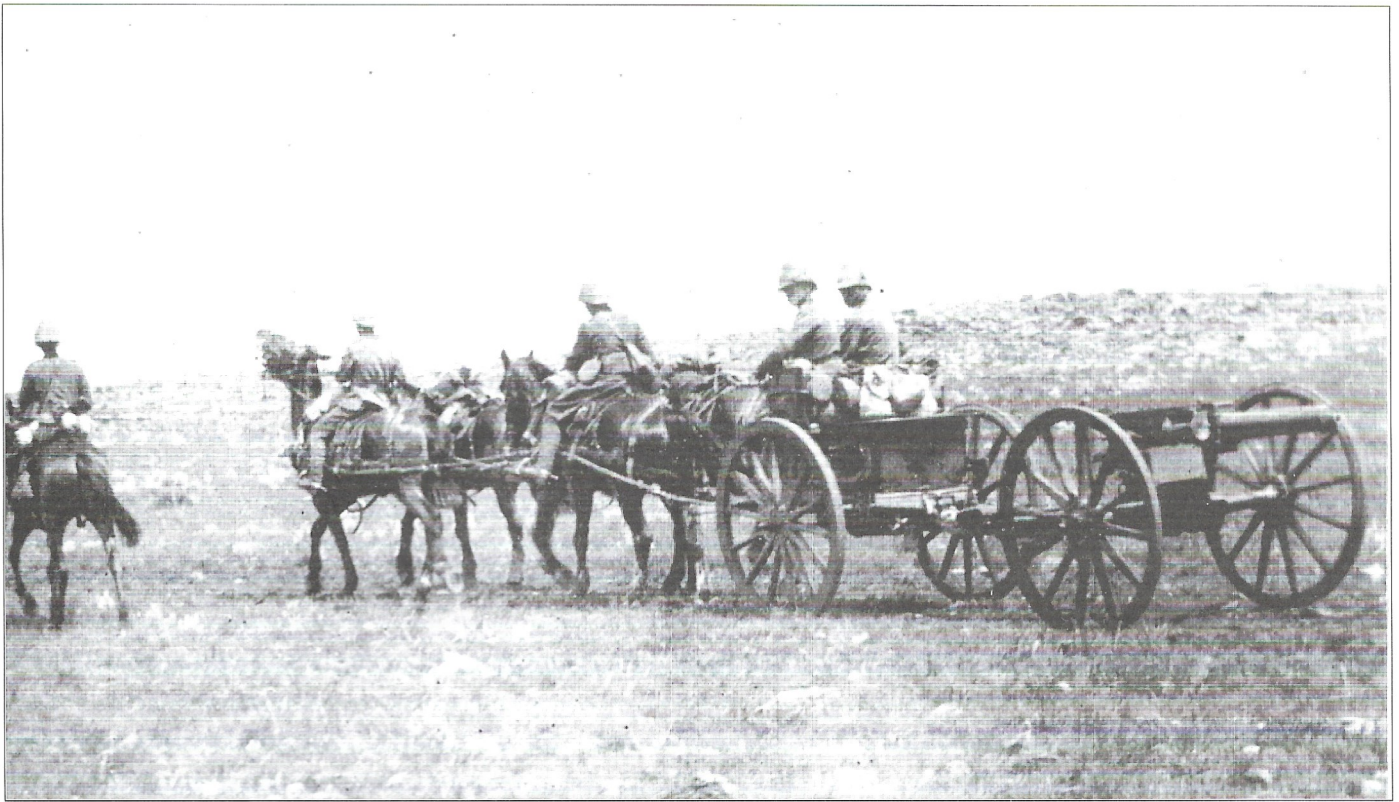
At the end of November 1900 Lieutenant-Colonel

A.E.W. Colville (Rifle Brigade) was given command of a 'mobile' column at Heidelberg. He took over from Lieutenant-Colonel Bewicke-Copley (King's Royal Rifle Corps) who had unsuccessfully tried to stop the Boers, led by Commandant S.B. Buys, destroying the railway and attacking the garrisons. Surprisingly, in the light of Bewicke-Copley's failure Colville was given fewer not more men. Bewick-Copley had 1656 men², mostly infantry, Colville had less than 1000, but still mostly infantry.

Initially Colville's column was composed of seven companies of the 1st Rifle Brigade, three guns (63rd Battery RFA, Major C.H. de Rougemont), two Vickers-Maxim guns (pom-poms, 0 Section, Captain F.R. Patch), 200 Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry and various corps troops³. Colville's task was to clear the area south of the railway and north of the Vaal between Heidelberg and Standerton. For two weeks the column destroyed farms south of Heidelberg and west to Klip River Station on the railway south of Johannesburg. During this time he met with little opposition, although Boers were invariably present. As Colville prepared to move east towards Standerton he lost his mounted men. The 200 men of Thorneycroft's were replaced by just 30 men from C Squadron, 13th Hussars commanded by Lieutenant E.W. Jarvis.

British forces suffered a chronic shortage of efficient mounted troops. Thorneycroft's had been ordered to the Free State to help capture Christian De Wet. De Wet was a much bigger prize than Buys so Colville had to make do with only 30 mounted men. Also one of the two pom-poms had left. The loss of 200 colonials of Thorneycroft's was most serious. Mounted men were the most important part of any column because only they





Vickers-Maxim (pom-pom) on the march

could scout and provide all round protection to sufficiently reduce the risk of ambush or surprise attack, favoured Boer tactics.

On 17 December Colville's depleted column started out from a camp on the Zuikerboschrand River south of Kraal. The Boers, who knew exactly what was going on, became bolder, increasing their sniping at the column. This was especially difficult for Jarvis's men. On the first day a man fell wounded and was rescued by Private 3352 T. Dempster who was mentioned in dispatches. The following day another Hussar was wounded.

On the 18th the column tried and failed to intercept a Boer convoy. The next day the column had to move back towards the railway in order to re-supply, they camped at the South Rand Mine. However, the supply convoy was not at the rendezvous. Jarvis was sent into Vlakfontein to enquire after the convoy. On arriving there he was told that three companies of infantry were needed to protect the convoy which were not available, so the convoy was not sent. This situation neatly illustrates the dilemma facing Lord Kitchener. The British had to leave the safety of the railway to fight the Boers but re-supply was a problem while there were so many effective Boers in the field. The convoy guard of roughly three hundred men was nearly half the size of Colville's column. For every man on trek many more were required to support him.

Given the situation Colville was left with only one choice, to break the operation and return to Vlakfontein. This they did on the 21st leaving at 5.30am. On the way in the Hussar scouts sprung a Boer ambush close to Vlakfontein. The guns dispersed the Boers who then came in on the flanks. The attack was beaten off with heavy rifle fire and 95 rounds from the guns. The column finally reached Vlakfontein at 2pm, eight and a half hours

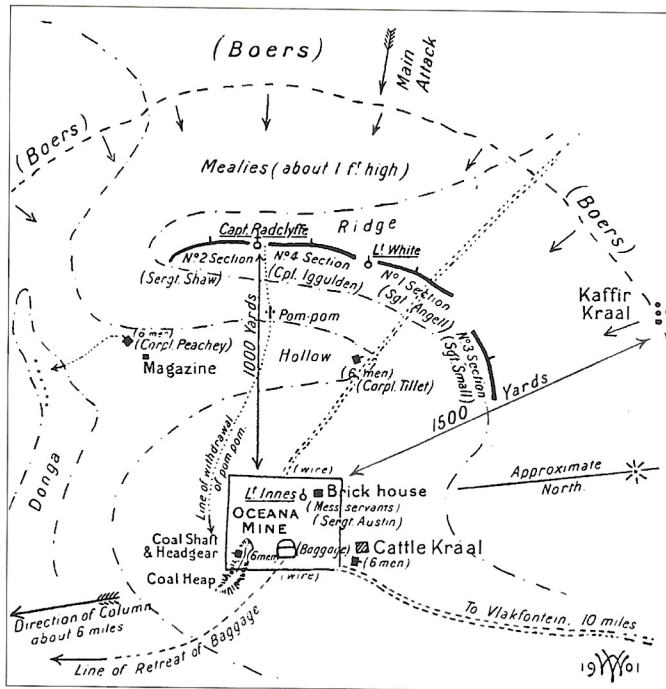
to cover 14 miles. Only three riflemen were wounded. The report on this action stated,

Colonel Colville attributes small loss to excellent shooting of 63rd Battery, and skilful leading of Lieut. Jarvis, 13th Hussars, Captain [FG] Talbot, and 2nd Lieutenant [MB] White, Rifle Brigade⁴.

The column stopped in Vlakfontein long enough to get their supplies and burn a nearby farm. In addition another pom-pom gun commanded by Major H.H. Harvest joined. On the 23rd the column marched back to the South Rand Mine with the intention of attacking the Boers who had ambushed them. Here they were reinforced by Lieutenant Marchant with a troop from A squadron, 13th Hussars. Colville had probably requested extra troops and although he was only given a handful it would be enough to make a difference.

The Fight

The column, and the Boers, rested on Christmas Day. Hostilities resumed the next day, Boxing Day. Colville split his force into two; F Company, Rifle Brigade (Captain C.E. Radclyffe) and the pom-pom under Major Harvest were left to guard the camp and wagons. The remainder of the force marched out to find the enemy. It did not take long; Buys with 200 men engaged Colville, retiring before his advance helped along by shells from the artillery. Jarvis and Marchant provided a screen in advance of the infantry who were busy destroying a farm. They reported back to Colville that the retiring Boers were moving off to the flanks. On receiving this information Colville sent word at about 10.30am to warn Radclyffe that he may be attacked.



Acting on this message Captain Radclyffe set about defending the mine. In addition to the men of F company and the gunners there were 50 'employed' men (officers' and mess servants). Lieutenant J.A. Innes was ordered to hold the mine buildings and wagons with the employed men. The mine buildings consisted of "several tin huts and one small brick building... surrounded by a wire fence"⁵. The men of F company were arranged in a defensive shield along a small ridge "without a vestige of cover"⁶ about a thousand yards to the west and north-west of the mine. To the front of the ridge was a field of mealies about 1 foot high. The pom-pom gun was placed behind the ridge on a small rise. Six men under Corporal Peachey guarded the right flank (south) at the magazine. In position the men waited for the Boers to appear.

After two hours, at about 1pm, approximately 400 men, "mostly Americans and "sundries", odds and ends of various commandos"⁷, under Commandant P.F. Trichardt appeared about 2000 yards to the west of the mine. The men on the ridge opened fire, the Boers dismounted and returned fire continuing to advance. Immediately Radclyffe sent Lieutenant White back to the mine buildings with a message for the baggage to retire in the direction of the main column. On his return to the firing line "White walked calmly, under a withering fire, across the thousand yards from the compound to rejoin the company, and was hit just as he was to lie down."⁸ White had previously been wounded during the Relief of Ladysmith.

As the Boers advanced they spread out to envelope the defenders maintaining a very heavy and accurate fire. Casualties amongst the pom-pom crew and its horses quickly mounted. The gun was wheeled into a hollow. In the hollow they tried to harness the horses still under intense fire. Five horses were killed before Sergeant Clery (or Cleary), RFA hitched his horse and dragged the gun to a coal heap to the south of the mine buildings. In all Captain Harvest, three gunners and four of five rifleman assisting were wounded. The fifth, Rifleman 5867 F. Bone was killed. After the battle Captain Harvest reported

Rifleman 6423 A. Clark for his gallantry in tending to the wounded under fire although he himself was wounded.

Meanwhile Colville continued with his operation. At 1pm the infantry moved to clear a farm during which some men were wounded. The Hussar scouts reported seeing parties of Boers massing to the west of the mine. Colville decided to continue with the attack on the farm and the hills behind it when within half an hour Lieutenant Jarvis brought the message that the camp was under heavy attack. Immediately two guns of Right Section, the pom-pom and the cavalry were sent back to the mine.

Back on the ridge the riflemen were returning the Boers fire with considerable effect. One Boer mounted on a grey horse was shot and fell "just as if he was taking a dive" a rifleman remarked later⁹. However, many were wounded, three of four section commanders were casualties as well as Captain Radclyffe and Lieutenant White. The order was given to all who could to retire to the mine. However, Sergeant W. Angell and No 3 section remained in position until all their ammunition was expended. The Boers advanced and took No 3 section and all the wounded prisoner.

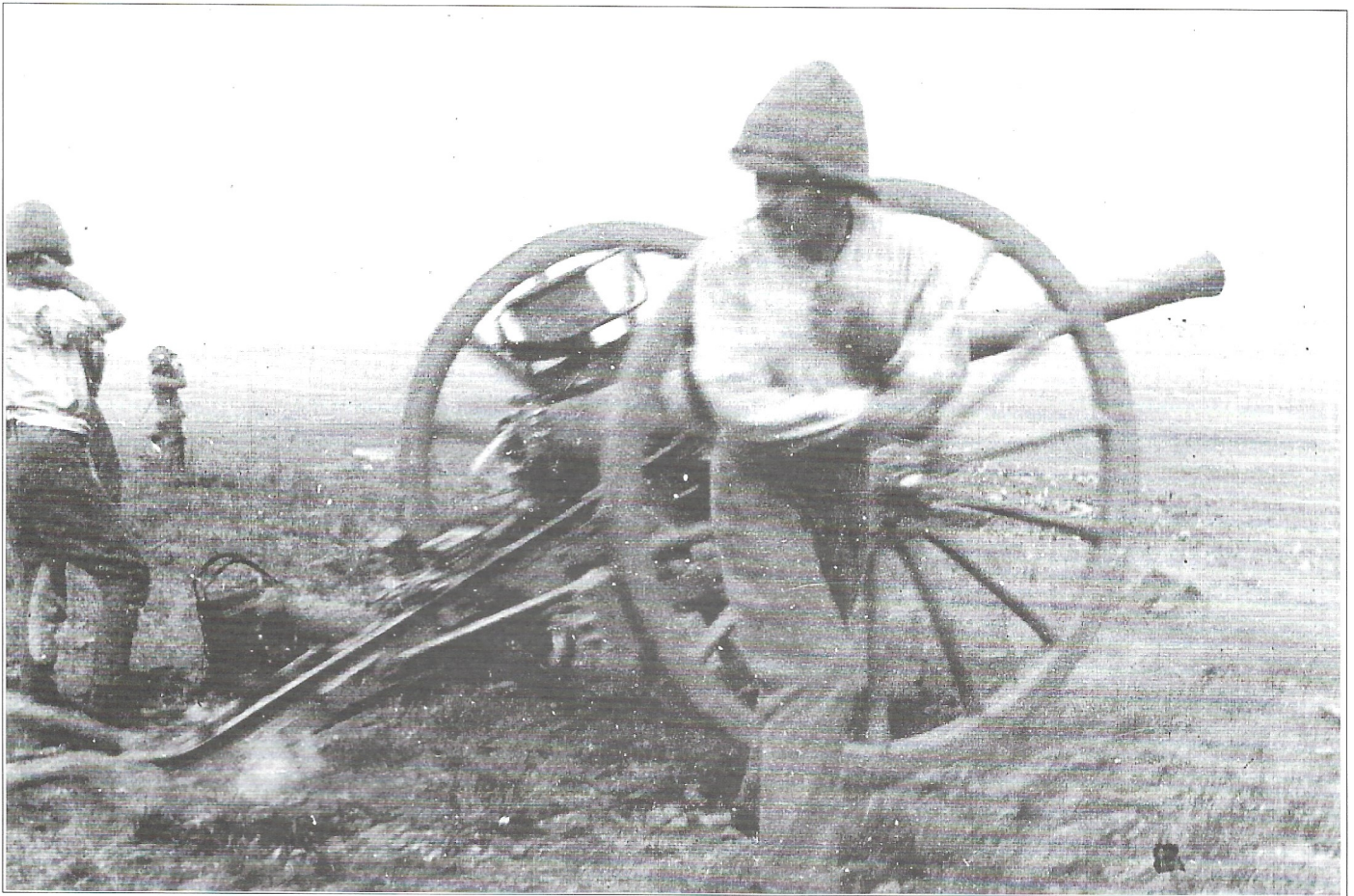
The 'relief force' arrived as the Boers occupied the ridge, "an excellent target being presented. Some 500 Boers all around the W&N side"¹⁰. The guns opened fire on the Boers and their prisoners on the ridge. A number of Boers charged from the hills and opened fire causing further casualties. These were soon put to flight with the arrival of the Left Section under Captain C.C. Robertson. The men at the mine reported hearing a bugle call heralding the Boer retreat. Both sections followed the retreating Boers to ensure they stayed away. During the day the Battery fired 250 shells.

Colonel Colville with the rest of the column arrived at 3.30pm. During their march back to the mine the column was dogged all the way, the rearguard commanded by Captain Talbot had only five rounds per man.¹¹ Casualties at the mine had been heavy; eight were killed, five died of wounds and thirty wounded. The column suffered sixteen wounded and one killed, all Rifle Brigade. The Boer casualties are not known.

The column returned to Greylingstad the next day unhindered by the Boers. The eleven killed were buried at Greylingstad. Here the column was broken up; 64th Battery replaced the 63rd and Lieutenant Jarvis returned with his men to Heidelberg.

Conclusion

When Radclyffe gave the order to retire from the ridge the situation for the British was desperate. The Boers would probably have captured not only all the men at the mine but the whole force and the baggage. The timely arrival of the artillery saved the men at the mine and the rest of the column. Fortuitous though this event was it was not 'lucky'. Many important factors led to the arrival of the artillery at an opportune moment in the battle. These factors are Colville's abilities as a column commander, the leadership of the subordinate officers, the fighting abilities of all troops involved, notably 'F'



Artillery in action

company on the ridge and the intelligence Colville received.

In General Sir R. Buller's dispatches he wrote of Colville,

a very capable officer, has great zeal in his profession and takes a keen interest in his battalion; having given him a detached command on more than one occasion, I have found him an officer in whom I could place entire confidence¹².

Colville's abilities were amply displayed in this action. Of great importance was the quality of the officers serving under him. Undoubtedly Colville's 'zeal' and 'interest' that Buller wrote of encouraged them. All of them were capable in their own right, as Colville had written following the ambush near Vlakfontein. Most of these officers were mentioned in dispatches and four; Major de Rougemont, Captains Talbot and Radclyffe and Lieutenant Innes were awarded DSOs in November 1900. Captain Patch and Lieutenant Jarvis would be awarded DSOs for distinguished service in World War I.

The men involved had taken part in Buller's Natal campaign and had fought the battles leading to the relief of Ladysmith. They were seasoned, experienced troops whose fighting qualities were shown in this action. Amongst the Rifle Brigade two who were present at the mine, Sergeants 9033 S. Chilvers and 3302 P. Shaw were to receive DCMs in September 1901. Of all the mentions in dispatches and awards officers and men received for their part in the war only Pte Dempster's mention was for this operation.

Ample and accurate information is vital in any

military operation. Where the Marquess of Anglesey cited 'poor scouting' as a reason for failure the 13th Hussars were excellent scouts. The information gathered by the Hussars allowed Radclyffe to prepare his defence robbing the Boers of surprise. If he had been caught unprepared with no comprehensive defensive line the Boers could have charged right into the mine causing havoc. Colville's decision to send back artillery and the cavalry was clearly intended and based on sound information provided by the scouts. Previously the Boer ambush before Vlakfontein failed because the Hussar scouts were alert. The importance of well trained mounted men is clearly demonstrated.

The infantry, especially the riflemen of F Company at the mine, also contributed to the Boers' defeat. The riflemen at the mine lay on the bare veldt with no protection and returned a disciplined fire to delay the Boers advance. The time it took for the Boers to capture the ridge allowed the artillery to get from the column to the mine and drive them off. The accurate fire of the artillery was noted previously by Coville and evidenced in the quick dispersal of the Boers from the ridge.

On the Boer side Commandant Trichardt could be criticised for attacking the mine's strongest defence instead of searching for a weak point. However, Buys had given him fifty minutes to take the mine after which they were to retire¹³. This constraint may have precipitated Trichardt into attacking the mine as soon as he came upon it. Trichardt, a veteran of the First Anglo-Boer War and various campaigns against African policies, "did not have any particular military brilliance or qualities of leadership". Buys on the other hand was a "distinguished Boer

fighter" and as leader had hatched the plan to trap Colville's column¹⁴. Unfortunately for Buys Colville had the better subordinates on the day.

Notes

1. Anglesey, The Marquess of, *A History of the British Cavalry 1816-1919, Vol 4 1899-1913*, Leo Cooper (Secker & Warburg) 1986, p258.
2. Two battalions of infantry, 2nd Devons & 3rd KRRC, 7 guns and 200 men from Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry. *Times History of the War in South Africa, 1899-1902, Vol V*, Sampson Low, Morton & Co. Ltd. 1902, p52.
3. *The Rifle Brigade Chronicle 1900*, p344.
4. *XIII Hussars, South African War*, May & Co Aldershot, p63.
5. Captain C. Radclyffe's Company ("F") At The Oceana Mine On December 26th, 1900, *The Rifle Brigade Chronicle 1900*, p184.
6. *Times History Vol V*, p119.
7. Captain C. Radclyffe's Company ("F")., *The Rifle Brigade Chronicle 1900*, p186.
8. *ibid*, p187.
9. *ibid*, p186.
10. Entry for 26-12-1900, *Record 63rd Battery*, Royal Artillery Historical Trust.
11. Captain C. Radclyffe's Company ("F").', *The Rifle Brigade Chronicle 1900*, p188
12. Dispatch 09-11-1900, *South African War Honours and Awards 1899-1902*, Greenhill Books, 1987 p33.
13. Captain C. Radclyffe's Company ("F").', *The Rifle Brigade Chronicle 1900*, p188.
14. *Dictionary South African Biography*, Volume V, Human

Sciences Research Council, Pretoria and Durban, 1968-1981.

The Illustrations

These pictures were taken by Lt F.W. Jarvis between December 1899 and March 1901. Although it is not known exactly when they were taken they do show troops in action similar to those he served with in Colonel Colville's column.

Acknowledgements

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Other Sources

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"In Front of the Cinematograph"

An anecdote from the Anglo-Boer War

by Gilles Teulié

Some studies have recently been published on the cinematograph and the Boer War. Here is an anecdote which may add to our understanding of this then-new phenomenon which was to become increasingly popular in the years to follow. The story was written by a French journalist, Maurice Normand, for the popular magazine *L'Illustration*, published on 24 February 1900 (issue no 2974). It shows the beginning of the cinema industry, and also depicts the way French public opinion supported the Boers and loathed the mighty British army. Finally it gives an in-depth look at the mentalities of the time, the reactions of people to things which were so new to them and are so common to us, and a delicate flavour of what life in Paris may have been like during the Great Exhibition. The title of the article is "Devant le Cinématographe" (In Front of the Cinematograph). It is translated from French:

"Delia Flaherty, a pretty Irish girl hired as a maid during the Great Exhibition by a grand Parisian hotel, had received from Jerry Kilcourse, her lover, sergeant in the 3rd Royal Irish Fusiliers, a letter which said:

'... We have landed this morning in Durban. As we got out on the pontoon, there was a photographer with a big camera which worked without stopping. It was said that this photographer was taking the portrait of all of us, while we were landing. Lieutenant Burns told me these portraits would be exhibited in music halls in London and Paris, and that all our movements will be reproduced in front of the public as if we were on stage. It seems to me that nobody will be interested in such a vulgar thing, except for our wives and friends we have left in Europe.

As they got in front of the photographer, the soldiers enjoyed making funny poses or comic expressions. Some waved, others were pushing each other and a lot were making comic faces, all were laughing. If you see in Paris, my dear Delia, these living portraits of the battalion, you will hardly recognise my friend Patrick Mahoney. As for Denis O'Harra, he thought funny to cock his snook.

As for myself, as I had been warned by the Lieutenant, I thought you might be able to see this landing of the *Harwarden Castle*, and that it would please you to see me with an expression that shows I still think