

Worcester Hill Battle of Worcester Hill

(11th - 12th February 1900)

Between the 26th and 29th January 1900 General French was summoned to Cape Town by Lord Roberts and ordered to go to Modder River to take over the task of relieving Kimberley.

Gen French returned to Rensberg on the 31st January 1900 and immediately began dispatching his original force, consisting of most of the Household Cavalry, O and R Batteries RHA and the New Zealand Mounted Infantry under Maddocks. He replaced them with a squadron of Inniskilling Dragoons under Lieut. N W Haig and about 200 West Australian Mounted Infantry under Capt. Moor. This left a considerably smaller, less mobile force, made up of only a few mounted troops, an incomplete brigade of infantry and half a battalion of the Royal Berkshire Regiment to hold a front that extended for about 48 kilometres.

The Slingsfontein Camp was reduced to 4 guns from J Battery RH whilst 2 Howitzers from the 37th Battery, under Lieut. Smith, remained for a time on the west side of Colesberg with the 4th Battery RFA.

Clements, who up until then, had been in command of Slingsfontein, was sent to Rensberg to replace French and Lieut. Colonel G. W. Hacket Pain of the Worcester Regiment took over command of Slingsfontein. This gave the Boers the chance they had been looking for and a series of forward movements were put into operation aimed at pushing the British back as far as possible. The plan was to split the forces into three and simultaneously attack the British along their entire front line.

De la Rey was on the eastern front with Schoeman on his right, just to the east of Colesberg. De Wet was to attack the British centre around Rensberg.

Celliers and Olivier were to work around the rear of Slingsfontein, while Grobler was to attack the British left on the north west side of Colesberg.

On the 8th January two Boer prisoners, brought into camp after they surrendered to Col. Hacket Pain on the Worcester koppies, claimed that the Boers intended attacking the camp between the 10th and 12th January. The British were now aware that their position was under threat but did not know from what direction it would come.

On the 10th January, in an effort to halt the Boers forward drive, Clements launched an attack from the Rensberg side. Smiths' 2 Howitzers were moved from the Coleskop side to Rensberg disguised as ox-wagons covered by tarpaulins and pulled by oxen with detachments close at hand ready to rescue the guns if need be. The plan worked well and the howitzers reached Rensberg after having passed within range of the Boer guns. Below is an account from a soldier's diary, written from the camp at Slingsfontein, which the Boers had been shelling for several days.

“About, 2.30 p.m. convoy came in with two lyddite howitzers disguised as bullock wagons; were not shot at, though the major in command tried his best to muck things by going out to shoot buck as the escorts took over. Later, “Long Tom” opened on Maddox Hill; guns all round us and hardly a safe place to get into; there's nothing that I can see can be done by us”.

De la Rey's main objective was; first the hill which later became known as the Worcester Hill, and then Slingsfontein Camp. The main attack on the Worcester's position was planned for 2 a.m. on the 10th February, but the advantage of surprise was lost, when General Schoeman and his troops failed to arrive until 11 am and the attack had to be postponed till Monday 12th – no attacks took place on a Sunday. Schoeman was greeted sarcastically by De la Rey with the words "Generaal kompt die zon by jou om elfuur op?" (General – does the sun rise for you at 11 am?) - from the manuscript of Kommandant G M J van Dam ZAR Polisie - Pretoria Museum. There is a similar story of Schoeman's late arrival destroying the advantage of surprise before a planned attack on the Yorkshires on 15th January 1900 - can he have done this twice???

With a strong force of Johannesburg Police (ZARPS) and Free Staters, De la Rey planned to attack the eastern sides of Burnt Hill.

Worcester Koppie consisted of 3 koppies extending for about 3 kilometres along rocky and difficult terrain. By 6 p.m. on Sunday 11th February the Worcesters had completed their defence line. This was formed by breaking up the men into sections and placing detached bodies of 4-8 men in strategic positions behind hastily constructed sangars.



Sangar on Signal Hill looking NE towards Twiswater (now Yardley Farm)

Positions of E Company - Lieutenant H J Bartholomew with No 1 section was on the N E point of Pinnacle Hill and 4 - 6 men in each of the three sangars on the east of Pinnacle Hill and Burnt Hill.

A possible attack on Observation Hill was covered by Major Stubbs with No. 2 section positioned in sangars on the south end of Observation Hill and the head of the ravine. No. 3 section was positioned on the north side of this hill.

Lieutenant Carr and No. 4 section were positioned to the north of the whole. Captain Hovell commanding "A" and "C" companies occupied a ridge on the centre section of the koppie to the left of "E" companies positions.

Piquets were posted at 8 p.m. and visited regularly by their officers during the night. There were 3 guns, a maxim and a machine gun positioned on the hills - Two gun sites were positioned by Captain H Corbyn of J Battery. Sergeant Wood placed a Maxim gun between Nos. 3 & 4 sections. A and E companies constructed a cover for a machine gun.

At dawn it was seen that a Boer gun had been positioned at Holle River Farm and another was being moved to some koppies on the north east. De la Rey reported later that the British positions on the hills made it difficult for them to use their big guns.

12th February, Monday:

The battle began at 3 a.m. with the sound of rifle fire and the rattle of arms being prepared all along the British lines as men rushed to their posts. Reports came in that the Boers were advancing from the north and the eastern sides of Burnt and Observation (Signal) Hills.

Before Dawn Capt. Hovell and his section on the centre hill received a message that Burnt Hill had fallen. Hovell and his men were not under attack at this stage but from the constant sound of rifle fire coming from the direction of the other positions, they were aware that their comrades were under heavy fire. All they could do was keep up a steady fire on Boers they spotted on Burnt Hill. Hovell managed to communicate by heliograph from Signal Hill to the Slingersfontein Camp and they in turn informed Clements at Rensberg of the attack.

About 5.30 am Lieutenant Ruxton managed to reach Lieutenant Carr's position at the north end of the whole, but not without most of his men being either killed or wounded. Ruxton was also severely wounded and Carr slightly.

On Pinnacle Hill, Lieut. Bartholomew joined a group of 6 men and an N.C.O who were pinned down by heavy fire from Boers on Burnt Hill. After an hour Bartholomew received a message from Major Stubbs ordering him to re-take Burnt Hill.

Under cover of darkness Bartholomew and 8 men managed to get within 12 metres of the top before they were pinned down by heavy fire. Unable to move forward, they retreated at dawn across the south end of the plateau by Pinnacle Hill - three men were hit. As soon as it was light both sides began to fire their guns.

British guns shelled the Boers on Burnt and Signal Hills. Capt Thomas and C Company, on No 3 section, were ordered by Captain Hovell to go to the aid of E Company who were also under heavy fire. Shortly after taking up his position Major Thomas was hit by a bullet which paralysed him - he died on the 20th February in the Portland Hospital, Rondebosch, Cape Town.



Burnt Hill looking from the Memorial

At the same time Lieut. H A Lang and Major Stubbs with their men formed a defence line on the edge of the plateau. At 6.30 am Major Stubbs ordered Bartholomew and his section to take up positions on Pinnacle Hill and hold it to the last.



Pinnacle Hill from the North with the Memorial in the foreground

Bartholomew later reported looking back as he moved off and seeing Major Stubbs looking through his glasses at the Boers barely 400 metres away from his position. With men falling all about him, Stubbs then rallied 7 men around him and charged the Boer position on Burnt Hill.

Colour Sergeant Handley, the only survivor of the charge, reported as follows:

“About 9 am on the 12th, Major Stubbs came to me and told me that Burnt Hill had to be retaken. I asked him what men were to do it, and he replied - "the men on either side of us" -We were then lying down under the crest line west of the plateau. I then asked him how many men were at hand, and he replied "about half a dozen." He then told me to pass the word to fix bayonets, and that when he gave the word, they were all to rush forward.

The Major then commenced to crawl forwards, and when he reached the crest line, sprang to his feet shouting: "Come on lads." He was then 20 or 30 yards in advance of any one. The men were extended 10 paces or so, covering about 80 yards in all. We sprang up and rushed forward, when a terrific fire was opened on us from the left front at about 100 yards range. The Major was hit and fell almost immediately, the man on his left falling at the same time. I shouted to the remainder to drop, as I could see we could not possibly reach the foot of Burnt Hill alive, much less take it. The Major was, I believe shot dead, but it was impossible to reach him to ascertain. The names of the men who charged with us were Privates Fielder, Kettle and Deverill; Hayes, Dowdeswell and Field".

Lieutenant-Colonel Coningham was sent to take charge, but he was shot through the heart when he tried to see what was going on after he joined Lieut. Bartholomew who was holding Pinnacle Hill. Bartholomew's position was only about 500 yards from the enemy and although he had a bullet in his helmet and several in his kit and clothing he was unharmed. Lieutenant Bartholomew was awarded the D.S.O. for his gallantry that day.

By noon the persistent fire from the British guns had pushed the Boers back from the faces of Signal and Burnt Hills but it was a losing battle for E company. They had no food and little water that day. The firing was so heavy that they could not get to the wounded. More complications arose as the lyddite shells from the howitzer set bushes on Signal Hill alight.

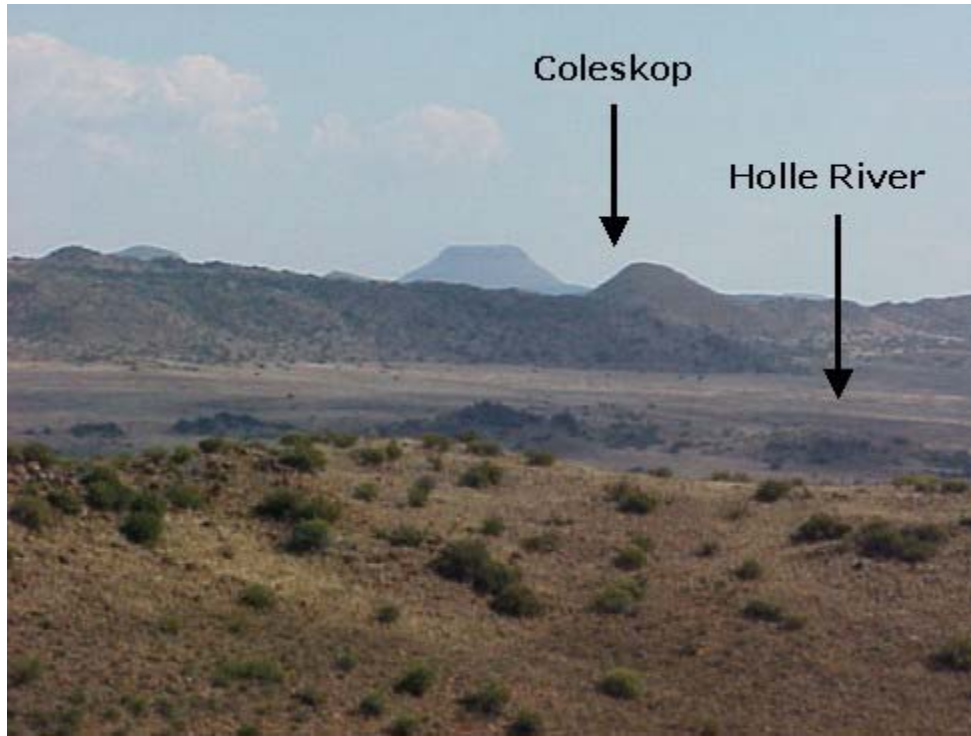
By 6 p.m. the Worcesters could no longer hold out and the order came to retire and count their losses. E company's losses were severe - out of 95 men, 15 were killed, 23 wounded and 8 prisoners were taken. The Boers reported 9 men killed and 2 wounded.



Slingersfontein Farm view to the SW from Burnt Hill

De la Rey, determined to follow up their advantage, planned to attack Slingersfontein Camp the next day, and moved a 40-pounder into position in readiness. When dawn broke the disappointed Boers discovered the British had abandoned camp that night. It was not only E Company that were in action on that day, (12th February). On a koppie near **Worcester Hill** the Bedfordshires and the Royal Irish could not hold off the Boers and were forced to retreat back on Slingersfontein.

General Piet De Wet concentrated his forces on the British left wing and centre.



Coleskop as viewed from Burnt Hill with Holle River in the valley

Celliers attacked 3 sections of one company of Worcesters on Platberg and Major Edwards' Company of Worcesters on Stubbs' Hill. There were also successful attacks by Schoeman on three companies of Royal Irish on New Zealand Hill, and on Madock's Hill, and Royal Irish Hill where two Royal Irish Companies, were stationed on each hill.

Article in FIRM (pages 158 – 159) – July 1934

Written by Lieut.-Colonel H.A. Carr, D.S.O., who commanded the 2nd Battalion from 1919 – 1921, explaining the picture now in the possession of the 2nd Battalion and also recalls a spirited Regimental engagement in the South African War



“The 2nd Battalion picture of the Defence of Worcester Kopjies was painted by Captain Giles, late Indian Cavalry, who travelled out to South Africa with the 2nd Battallion in the “Tintagel Castle” and was attached to us for a short time.

After the war (in 1905) Colonel Hackett Pain, who was then in command, commissioned Captain Giles to paint a picture commemorating the Defence of Worcester Kopjies near Colesberg, [sic] Cape Colony and this is the result.

The picture is on a small scale and the attempt to show as much of the ground as possible led to such difficulties that the result was not considered satisfactory.”

According to Ryno Greenwall in “Artists and Illustrators of the Anglo-Boer War” (published by Fernwood Press in 1992), Godfrey Douglas Giles was sent out to South Africa by The Graphic and The Daily Graphic and attached himself to French’s column. He was present at the capture of Cronje at Paardeberg and at the relief of Kimberley. Greenwall states that he “was probably present at the engagement” but this is highly unlikely as he was with General French who, on 12th February 1900, en-route to Kimberley. General French then relieved Kimberley on 15th February 1900.

To confirm the footnote on the following page that the painting was done from a photograph taken from the north side of the hills (where the Boers were) a photograph, taken from the Slingersfontein side (actually on Holle River Farm), is shown below:



Before going into the details of the picture, I may say that the successful defence of the position prevented the envelopment of General Clements' thinly held line in front of Colesberg [sic] and enabled the General to make a more satisfactory adjustment of his line at a very critical time. The three peaks in the foreground of the picture, 'Pinnacle Hill' on the right, 'Burnt Hill' in the centre and 'Signal Hill' on the left, were held by 'E' Company under the command of Captain (Brevet-Major) Stubbs on the night of 11/12 February 1900.

Another ridge farther to the left, and running at almost right angles, was held by 'A' and 'C' Companies, the whole under command of Captain Hovell.

Before dawn on the 12th of February, a heavy attack was made on 'E' Company's position by picked bodies of the South African Republic (Transvaal) Police about 300 strong under the direction of General Delarg [De la Rey]. The 'ZARPS', as they were called, were the storm troops of the Boer Forces.

This attack, pressed resolutely home, pushed out the small forts in 'sangars' which held the front line, but was never able to reach forward beyond the skyline, and 'Pinnacle Hill' was held by us throughout the day. The remainder of 'E' Company, most gallantly led by Major Stubbs, held on to the lower slopes and assisted by part of 'C' Company and a well directed covering fire from 'A' Company,

It appears that the painting was done from a photograph (probably taken during 1905 when the memorial was built) which was taken from the north of the **Worcester Hills** – between Holle River and Yardley farms – in the area from where the Boers attacked. Carr's naming of the hills is thus the mirror of what they actually are. It is therefore impossible for the supply wagon to have been in the position shown but the artist, not having been present during the action, probably thought that the photograph was taken from the Slingsfontein side of the hills and merely used artistic licence when painting the wagon and other action.

made several counter-attacks, but were not able to drive the Boers from the crests of Signal and Burnt Hills.

Major Stubbs and Captain Thomas were killed in these attacks and Lieutenant (now Colonel) Bartholomew was later awarded the D.S.O. for the gallant leading of his men. Lieutenant-Colonel Coningham, commanding the Battalion, was shot in the head while directing operations

from the top of Pinnacle Hill.

The defence was much assisted by the fire of four guns of "J" Battery R.H.A. and one howitzer, which kept all the lost ground under a heavy fire, ultimately setting fire to the scrub on Burnt Hill which enveloped the position in clouds of smoke.

After an all day fight the Boers retired, leaving the whole position in our hands. Our losses were three Officers and 22 Men killed, 3 Officers and 47 Men wounded. No unwounded prisoners were lost.

The picture attempts to depict the scene about 11.00a.m. Boers are holding Signal Hill (on left) and Burnt Hill, obscured by smoke in the centre.

"E" and portions of "C" Company are holding the lower slopes, shelled by Boer guns from N.W. Two shell bursts can be seen in our positions.

The burst of one of our howitzer shells, with its lyddite fumes, can be seen just to the left of Pinnacle Hill.

In the centre foreground can be seen "E" Company, who had come up with rations before dawn, and which remained throughout the fight, the mules peacefully grazing, undisturbed by shell or rifle fire.

In the right foreground can be seen men of "E" Company, who had come up in support, moving forward towards the position.

The successful defence was largely due to the high standard of musketry in the Battalion. Boers who took part in the attack and were subsequently taken prisoners stated that they had never before been met by such accurate and well directed fire from British troops.

The ranks of the Battalion were filled by men of from 2 to 7 years service, no reservists, and no very young soldiers. As ever they were true to their motto "FIRM."

In 1905, while the Battalion was stationed at Bloemfontein, a fine memorial was erected over the graves of those who lost their lives. The memorial stands on the slope immediately below Pinnacle Hill."



Inscription on the Memorial

Some Operations about Slinger's Fontein, February, 1900
In a letter written by Major-General F.W. Stubbs, late R.A.

"I have been requested by the Editor of the UNITED SERVICE MAGAZINE to record some of the operations of Major-General Clements' Brigade on the south-east side of Colesberg, in the fighting which took place there after Lieut.-General French left for the Modder River to assist in the relief of Kimberley. This I am enabled to do by means of letters addressed to me and information received direct from officers of the second battalion of the Worcestershire Regiment, who have permitted me to make known their experiences; and partly also, from printed reports. The following account therefore deals principally with the work done by that regiment.

Lieut.-General French, as Lord Roberts explains in his report to the Secretary of State for War, dated 23rd February, 1900, had by his marked ability and judgement, driven the enemy from position after position. Threatening, first one flank and then another, he had established himself astride of the railway leading to the Orange Free State, of which the Rensberg Station was the tactical centre. His right was at and about Slinger's Fontein Farm; subsequently, but only for a time extended to Pot Fontein Farm, about six miles further on. West of the railway, positions were occupied at Maeder's Farm, Porter's and McCracken's Hills, Kloof Camp and Cole's Kop. On the summit of the last named hill, the flat top of which is 800 feet above the plain, with very steep sides, Major Butcher, commanding the 4th Battery R.F.A., had, with great skill and incredible labour, placed two guns, one on the 11th, and another on the 16th January. These guns dominated the whole of the enemy's positions in the neighbourhood. Cole's Kop is visible for miles round, and is a regular landmark.

On the 14th January, the second battalion of the Worcestershire Regiment arrived from Capetown [sic], Major-General P.A.P. Clements, D.S.O., commanding the 12th Brigade arrived next day with the 1st Royal Irish and 2nd Wiltshire Regiments."

The following extract is taken from a letter written by Brevet-Major A.K. Stubbs:

"We left Rensberg at 1.30 P.M. and a very hot, trying march it was, for the men were not fit, as they now are, and the want of water was terribly felt. The march was only about thirteen miles, but it was 9 P.M. before we piled arms in camp, and laid down beside them, quite done up. Next morning, we shook off our sleep, and rose at 3 A.M. My company (E) had done rearguard on the previous day's march. The kopjes that we were placed on were only two miles distant, but pretty high, and gave us a stiff climb. We took over from the New Zealand Contingent (Mounted Rifles), a very fine, capable and thoroughly nice set of soldiers. The three officers relieved put me up to the various dodges of getting to the different posts without drawing the enemy's fire and finished by supplying my inner man with an exceedingly grateful chota hazri." Two days before this (January 15th, General French's despatch) the Boers had surprised a Yorkshire piquet, which was saved by the prompt behaviour of Captain Madocks and some of the New Zealanders, who "behaved most pluckily."

Major-General Clements was placed in command of the troops at Slinger's Fontein and a company of infantry was posted at Pot Fontein, a little over six miles east by south of the camp at the former place.

The Royal Irish occupied Madocks' Hill with two companies, and they strengthened it so well that though daily shelled by a large Boer gun there were no casualties. They had three companies on the New Zealand Hill, a long three-peaked mountain rising above Slinger's Farm. The Worcestershire Regiment occupied with three companies, the hill known by their name three miles north of camp – rough rocky

Lieut.-Colonel Bowles, commanding the 1st Yorkshire Regiment, points out in a letter to the Editor U.S.M. (Nov.) that the Boers had been sniping at the piquet for an hour before, so that the attack was not a "surprise."

Study of this incident is recommended to those who assert that the bayonet is obsolete – Ed. U.S.M.

kopjes, about two miles long, shown on the accompanying plan. About this time, a section of the 37th (Howitzer) Battery, R.F.A., under Lieutenant H.R.W.M. Smith, arrived from De Aar. On the 24th and 25th January, reconnaissances on both flanks were made. West of the railway, cavalry and battery of R.H.A. under Major-General J.P. Brabazon, C.B., with infantry and a field battery under Colonel T.E. Stephenson, concentrated at Bastard's Nek five and a half miles N.N.W. of Colesberg, and advanced towards Rietfontein where the enemy were found in force. On the eastern flank, Major-General Clements, with two squadrons of 6th Dragoon Guards, J Battery R.H.A., Major M.F. Rimington's Guides, and three companies of the Worcestershire Regiment went forward in the direction of Achteertang Station. The enemy were shelled out of a strong position on Klein Toren Hill; after which the force returned to camp. The companies did good service on the left, covering the retirement.

General French, who had gone to Capetown [sic] to see the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief, returned on the 31st to Rensberg.

On the 1st February, O and R Batteries R.H.A., most of the cavalry, the New Zealand Mounted Infantry, who under their leader Captain W.R.N. Madocks, R.A., had greatly distinguished themselves, and all of General French's original force left for the Modder River, and were replaced by a squadron of Inniskilling Dragoons under Lieutenant N.W. Haig, and about 200 West Australian Mounted Infantry under Captain H.G. Moor, R.A.; the 4th Battery R.F.A. (on the west side of Colesberg), and Lieutenant Smith's two howitzers of the 37th Battery.

General French visited the camp for the last time on the 5th, and on his departure, General Clements went to Rensberg, leaving Lieut.-Colonel G.W. Hackett Pain of the Worcestershire Regiment in command at Slinger's Fontein. The latter, like General Clements, spent the day at Signal Hill immediately above the camp of his battalion, with which all the detached posts were in communication.

It must be recollected that General Clements had at his disposal only an incomplete brigade of Infantry and half a battalion of the Royal Berkshire Regiment, with the guns above mentioned and a few mounted troops, to hold the same front, over thirty miles in extent, that General French had held with a much larger and more mobile force. The Boers at Colesberg were being reinforced and drawn out of Lord Roberts' way. This situation was not reached fortuitously but resulted chiefly from a bogus telegram published by Reuter to the effect that an overwhelming mass of infantry was being concentrated at De Aar and Naaupoort for the capture of Norval's Pont. In the next fortnight General Clements maintained his position against greatly superior forces of the enemy simply by "bluff."

On the 6th, two 15-pounders with West Australian and Inniskillings went out to Pot Fontein, to

shell the farm, as we had heard that since Colonel Porter had retired from it, and left with General French, it had been occupied by the enemy. Two guns had occasionally gone out

Also for a time on the west side.

between Pot Fontein and Klein Toren but only once elicited any response. On this occasion, after some rounds, considerable numbers of Boers appeared on either flank, a pom-pom was brought up, and the guns ran some danger of being cut off. Fortunately Platzberg had two days before been occupied by a company of Worcesters, and the guns got safely past under its protection. The same afternoon the enemy was seen moving round south of Pot Fontein. That night, at 9 P.M., a lamp message came to Colonel Pain, saying that the enemy, at dusk, were about a farmhouse on the east end of a hill south of the camp and the foot of which was a little more than a mile from it. This hill is about 500 feet high, with a broad plateau on the top one and a half miles by one in extent. Major Stubbs was sent with his company of the Worcestershire Regiment to occupy the hill and forestall the Boers. The movement was made luckily in good time.

Next day, the 7th, two companies of the Worcesters, four R.H.A. guns and two howitzers with mounted troops moved out again towards Pot Fontein, but for some reason the guns did not cross the Oorlog Poort River. As the artillery retired Major Stubbs perceived a party of Boers endeavouring to seize a part of the hill from which they might have inflicted loss on them, and moving over the southern end so frustrated the attempt. This hill was in future officially termed "Stubbs' Hill."

The 8th was a quiet day, the howitzers merely shelling the enemy's positions north of Madocks' Hill. On this day two prisoners were brought in from the Worcestershire kopjes, who had ridden up and surrendered. One was an intelligent English-speaking youth; the other more of the Dutch type; they were closely examined separately by Colonel Pain, and their stories agreed. They said that Pretoria had been wired to, and permission given to attack us on Monday next.

On the 9th Major Stubbs with E Company of his regiment, went out to their outpost and occupied the right section of it. Patrols sent out [at] the same time south and east of the camp, came in contact with a strong force of Boers, some five or six thousand yards from it in a southerly direction. This was the first intimation that the position at Slinger's Fontein was being turned and the rear threatened. A party of about twenty-three West Australians had occupied a small hillock opposite a long ridge of higher ground, afterwards called the Australian Hill, and which proved to be held in great force by the Boers, who ascended it from the reverse side. The Australians kept their ponies picketed under cover of the small hill, and here Captain Moor maintained his position throughout the day by sheer pluck and determination, in spite of the Boers getting within twenty yards of them. No help could be afforded from the infantry in the camp, but two guns of J Battery R.H.A., followed by two more, afforded valuable aid, and prevented this small party from being completely

Major Stubbs was not only a very gallant officer, but one who had thought and read much. He had a well-earned reputation as a thoroughly sound soldier, and his death was a great loss to the Army – Ed. U.S.M.

This gallant Artillery officer was afterwards killed in action at Palmiet Fontein on the 18th July, 1900.

surrounded. Three men at different times, mounting their horses, galloped under a very heavy fire back to camp to report the situation, and at dusk, Captain Moor, seeing the position hopeless, got the rest of his men down, leaving behind him one man killed, and two wounded. The party mounted, and keeping close together, so that the dust might in some measure screen them, they got safely back to camp under a redoubled fire. This gallant action was witnessed from camp, and is deserving of record.

The guns of J Battery were continuously shelling the enemy, and expended 514 shells this day. The Boers, getting still further round to our rear, opened with rifle-fire on detachments marching on the Rensberg road, and from the south of our guns. In the afternoon they dropped some shells into our camp, and two companies of the Royal Irish Regiment were sent to occupy a high kopje, about four miles south-west of the camp to secure communication with Rensberg [sic]. Two more companies were placed to return the fire, which they did for two days when a howitzer was taken forward under cover of darkness to a previously selected position in advance of the two 15-pounders which had been engaged with the Boer gun.

The latter reopened fire on the 12th, but was finally silenced by the third lyddite shell from the howitzer.

Owing to the very extended front covered by the outposts, and the necessity for being prepared to move troops to any threatened point, as far as their very limited number allowed, mule-waggons [sic] were kept ready to start with infantry at a moment's notice.

On Saturday the 10th General Clements moved with a mixed force against the enemy who were thus threatening his communications. In the afternoon Lieutenant Smith's two howitzers which had been on the Coleskop side, came round by Rensberg disguised as ox-waggons [sic] – each gun and limber covered with a tarpaulin and the detachments riding close at hand ready to substitute the teams for the oxen should need arise. They thus passed within range of the Boer guns.

The **Worcester Hill**, on which the severest part of the fighting on the eastern side of Colesberg presently fell, was a group of three distinct kopjes, the form of which will be best understood by referring to the accompanying plan. The right kopje, or No. 1 section, is the highest. It has an extent of 1600 yards, with a mean width, not including Burnt Hill, of about 400 yards. The centre hill, or No. 2 section, is 1400 yards along the ridge. The left, No. 3, broader and lower, is 1200 yards long. Like most of these hills, they are very rocky and broken, and the distances do not give much idea of the time required to traverse them. No. 1 rose into three peaks, from 200 to 300 feet high, which were respectively named by us as Pinnacle Hill, the most southerly; Burnt Hill, the highest and most easterly; and Observation or Signal Hill to the north. The central portion of the summit, west of and between their peaks, was fairly level and free from large rocks, forming a kind of plateau. The country all around for some distance is tolerably level except towards the east, where some low bush-covered kopjes approached nearer than on any other side. Major Stubbs had noted these as likely to afford cover to an enemy. He and Major Edwards proposed to take out a party and endeavour to cut off a Boer piquet, but the Brigadier (Colonel Hackett Pain) did not consent.

Sunday, February 11th, Captain Hovell with A Company of the Worcestershire Regiment relieved Major Edwards on the central section, and the latter went to occupy Stubbs' Hill. The subalterns of A Company were Lieutenants Ruxton and Davidge. Just before leaving camp at 2.30 A.M. Captain Hovell noted the time of moonsetting; an important matter. Several things were discovered this morning; a Boer gun had been placed in position at Hollier [sic] River Farm, and another was being dragged to some kopjes on the north-east. A large sangar was

detected on a wooded kopje about 2500 yards to the east. An order was sent out for the construction of two gun epaulements, and Captain H. Corbyn of J Battery R.H.A. came out to select their position. These, as well as cover for a machine-gun, were constructed by A and E Companies and finished by 6 P.M. Captain Hovell, as senior officer, commanded the outpost. Although the two men who surrendered had said that an attack was intended, it was by no means certain on what part of our extensive position it would be directed, but there were signs in the vicinity of **Worcester Hill** that could not be mistaken. Captain Hovell went up to No. 1 Section. Major Stubbs, he said, was fully prepared for attack. In the afternoon he inspected Captain Thomas's hill on the left. Before dark, he fell in each of his own sections, disposed along the centre hill, told them an attack was expected next morning, and ordered them to fill water-bottles and to be ready to scatter into a firing-line as soon as dawn began to [break]. The disposition of E Company was as follows : Lieutenant H.J. Bartholomew with No. 1 section was on the north-east point of Pinnacle Hill, with three sangars containing from four to six men each on the east of it and of Burnt Hill.; Major Stubbs with No. 2 section at the south end of Observation Hill, with sangars covering that part of it and the head of the ravine by which attack might come; No. 3 section under a sergeant north of Observation Hill; Second Lieutenant M.R. Carr with the remaining section at the north end of the whole; Sergeant Wood with a Maxim gun between Nos. 3 and 4. At 8 P.M. piquets were posted by the officers, and visited during the night. It will thus be seen that a front of over three-quarters of a mile, over most difficult ground which a whole battalion would scarcely have been sufficient for, had to be defended by a single company broken up into small detached bodies of four to eight men. At about half-past three A.M. on Monday, the 12th February, a shot was heard followed by a rattle all along our lines, which continued in the darkness; but before long it became evident that the enemy were in considerable force on the eastern faces of Observation and Burnt Hills, and along the northern side. They had driven up bodies of Kaffirs in front of them. We now know from evidence, fully corroborated, that they were over 2000 in number, including 400 of the Johannesburg Police and 700 Free Staters. Lieutenant Bartholomew, on hearing the first shot, seized his rifle and made for the sangar where his most important group of one N.C.O. and six men were stationed. A hot fire from Burnt Hill was poured upon them, which they returned. An hour after the first alarm, a message from Major Stubbs came to Lieutenant Bartholomew saying that he had sent three men to occupy the sangar on Pinnacle Hill, and ordered him to retake Burnt Hill. He had only eight men with him, all told, but with these he got up to within about ten yards of the top, only to be met with a deadly rifle-fire. It was still quite dark, so fortunately only three men were hit. Advance, however, was impossible, so they retired to their sangar, till the light of dawn showed their position to be hopeless, and he retired across the south end of the plateau by Pinnacle Hill. Captain Hovell, as soon as he ascertained the principal direction of the attack, had ordered Captain Thomas, who with C Company occupied the left or No. 3 section to reinforce E Company. That officer with half his men, leaving Lieutenant H.A. Lang in command of the left hill, came along the southern margin of the hills and joined Major Stubbs, with whom he lined the edge of the plateau, whence they kept up a heavy fire. Like the 1st Battalion of the Worcestershire Regiment, the 2nd had a considerable number of marksmen in its ranks; their record in the inter-regimental competitions was always good, and, as will be seen, they were more than able to hold their ground, though at a heavy loss.

The following is extracted from the Times, June 2, 1900:-"Bivouac" writes from Bloemfontein

under date April 21-

“The Times of February 14 contained a letter reflecting on the bad shooting of our men in South Africa, so I should like to relate an experience to the opposite effect, and to suggest that the shooting of our men in this campaign probably depends on the musketry training they have previously received. On February 12 my company, who, with a strength of over 120, have happily for the past two years averaged over marksman’s points in the annual musketry course, was one of three which occupied kopjes in the shape of a letter T. One company occupied the top of the T, which rose into peaks commanding the stem; the position of mine was the upper part of the stem, the third company held the lower half. Before dawn the enemy attacked the top of the T in overwhelming numbers, driving our men to the right end of it; from corroborative statements from the Free Staters who have now laid down their arms, over 2000 took part in the fight. On day breaking, they opened fire on the upper end of the stem, a range of 550 yards. By this time the men who were here were dotted about in ones and twos under cover of rocks and bushes all along the top and sides of the ridge, those behind on higher ground than those in front, the company occupying a depth of 600 yards. These positions were maintained till evening with a few changes to meet any movements of the enemy. The ranges were taken with the mekometer. Two of my section-commanders had each a limb of a Zeiss stereoscopic telescope, which proved invaluable, as they were enabled to keep these strong glasses fixed on the enemy’s position, with their heads safe under cover of the rocks and watch for any enemy to show himself behind bushes or between rocks; then they would warn their men where to fire. My men fired 4000 rounds. The enemy’s fire was incessant throughout the day, but badly directed, by far the greater proportion of their shots being directed overhead....On visiting these kopjes a month later, and going carefully over our and the enemy’s positions, I was strongly reminded of Cater’s “Story of the Transvaal War”, describing the battle of Ingogo in 1881: “The boulders which sheltered our men were whitened with lead, but from the bullet-marks on the rocks behind which

About 5.30, Major Stubbs ordered Lieutenant Bartholomew to take his section and hold Pinnacle Hill to the last. Just then Captain Thomas fell, very badly wounded. As he moved off he saw Major Stubbs for the last time, “standing up, calmly looking through his glasses, within 300 yards of the enemy.”

Shortly after, the Major, who had then but few left near him, determined to make another attempt to drive back the Boers from their position on Burnt Hill, and led them on himself. The party, apparently only eight in number, did not get further than about 100 yards. All were either killed or wounded except Colour-Sergeant Handley, who could not reach his officer, but got back to cover.

the Boers took cover, I cannot ascribe similar good shooting to our side.” In the present case the results were reversed. Empty cartridge-cases showed what had been the position of each man on either side. On our kopje bullet-marks were few and far between, but every rock which had afforded cover to the Boers, shown by empty Mauser-cases, was covered with bullet-marks. On going up one of the peaks, our attention was attracted to a long thick line of bullet-marks extending for several yards. The reason of their appearing there appeared curious, till turning about, one saw that one was just behind a crest-line of a dip in the ground which the enemy occupied, and in line with the positions from which our men fired, so these were bullets that had just skimmed over their heads. Nor had all these bullets which had nearly missed the enemy

been useless. Their incessant splash doubtless had kept back those of the enemy who were not hit from advancing. They retired at dusk altogether. We know now that it had been their intention to have taken all the kopjes of the T” (The foregoing extract has reference to the combat described in the present article – Ed. U.S.M.)

A bullet entering the right side, passed out close to the spine. Paralysis of the lower extremities supervened, borne with great cheerfulness, and he died on the 20th February in the Portland Hospital at Rondebosch.

It is not easy to procure details of this affair. A Boer told one of the prisoners that they called on our men to surrender, but the order was to “stand firm”. My informant, Private Brazier, states that the Boer inquired what the Major meant by using the word “firm”, and on being told that it was the regimental motto replied, “I should think it was, according to our losses.” The private was on Burnt Hill side, too far off to hear himself what was said. He was wounded in four places, and has been discharged, unfit for further service. Colour-Sergeant Handley’s account of the attempt to recapture Burnt Hill was received too late to be inserted instead of the foot-note here. It is as follows:-

“About 9 A.M. on the morning of the 12th of February, Major Stubbs came to me, and told me that Burnt Hill had to be retaken. I asked him what men were to do it, and he replied ‘the men on either side of us’. We were then lying down under the crest line west of the plateau. I then asked him how many men were at hand, and he replied ‘about half a dozen’. He then told me to pass the word to fix bayonets, and that was when he gave the word, they were all to rush forward. The Major then commenced to crawl forwards, and when he reached the crest line, sprang to his feet and shouted ‘Come on lads’. He was then some 20 or 30 yards in advance of any one. The men were extended 10 paces or so, covering about 80 yards in all. We all sprang up and rushed forward, when a terrific fire was opened on us from the left front at about 100 yards range. The Major was hit, and fell almost immediately, the man on his left falling at the same time. I shouted to the remainder to drop, as I could see that we could not possibly reach the foot of Burnt Hill alive, much less take it. The Major was, I believe shot dead, but it was impossible to reach him to ascertain. The names of the men who charged with us were Privates Fielder, Kettle and Deverill; Hayes, ... [cannot read the end]

A body of the enemy attacked the centre hill. As they were heard coming up the slope, Captain Hovell called out “Fix bayonets” (they were already fixed), but the word of command had its effect; the attack was not pressed home. Just as day was breaking, Captain Hovell received a written message: “The enemy have captured Burnt Hill. – A.K.S.” This time, before dawn, he says was the most trying of the whole day. They did not know how soon the attack on their own hill might become critical, and it was dangerous to reduce their numbers, but the detachment from the left hill was ordered up to assist E Company. All along the ridge they kept firing at the enemy on the skyline, and raised an occasional cheer to encourage their comrades, evidently heavily engaged. However, Lieutenant Ruxton did get with a small party, between five and six o’clock, to where Second Lieutenant Carr was, but was himself wounded and most of his men were hurt or killed. Carr also was wounded, but less seriously.

The enemy had now begun to shell. By means of a small sun-flashing heliostat, Captain Hovell opened communication with Signal Hill over the camp. General Clements came out from Rensberg. By seven o’clock two guns were shelling the enemy on Burnt and Observation Hills. Colonel C. Coningham, commanding the battalion, was sent to take charge. No reinforcements could be given. Of the Worcesters, three sections of one company were on Platzberg; Major

Edwards, with his company,

[Page 11 missing]

....camp at midnight. All details of the march had been carefully planned by Colonel Hackett Pain and were carried out by him in a highly satisfactory manner. The route selected for the retirement on Rensberg was not that which had usually been taken by convoys or during movements of troops. This was fortunate. From information received afterwards from a Boer source it appears that 500 of them were on the kopjes overlooking that road, and that the dust of the column moving on the other one was seen by them and taken to be reinforcements coming to Slinger's Fontein.

From Rensberg a further retirement to Arundel was ordered. It was evident our line of communication was seriously threatened. But the advance into the Orange Free State rapidly bore fruit. Within a week afterwards Colenso was reoccupied and Cronje surrendered at Paardeberg. On the 27th February, the same day that Cronje had surrendered, General Clements took up his old position at Rensberg, shortly afterwards to follow the other brigades through the Orange Free State into the Transvaal.

There is but little more to add. A few days afterwards, Major Edwards and a party visited the hill and found the bodies of Major Stubbs and four men lying partially buried near one another. These with the body of Colonel Coningham and ten other non-commissioned officers and men were interred close to where they fell, and on the 12th March, Captain Hovell went to give the dead a fitting burial, read the Burial Service, and with his men erected a large cairn of stones on the most conspicuous part of the centre of the plateau.

‘Yes, this war will cause, as you say, many hearts to ache, still, the sword was the only means of repairing our past political blunders in that country.

And I cannot think the war is a bad event. Like a storm, it clears the air and purifies much that was stagnant before. The patriotism called forth means a truce to selfishness. Everywhere people are putting their hands in their pockets to aid the widow, the orphan and the disabled soldier. The class now stepping forward to relieve distress is not so much the class usually given to charity, but the close-fisted merchant and hard-headed man of business, who, by keeping the places of reserve soldiers, and giving their wives half-pay during their absence, have gone a length rarely seen before.

For the Army, of course, the war is a splendid experience; teaching the highest officers in a practical manner the deadly result of false moves in warfare as now waged. And more important still, teaching the regiments, and also the public, that battles cannot be won without losses, a point only too easily forgotten.

To my mind, the teaching of this war – just exactly as the teaching of the war between the Federals and Confederates in America – for all soldiers and the nation, is summed up in the word ‘Self-sacrifice’.

F.W. STUBB